

## Essay Questions

**1. Why do you feel called to be a bishop? How does this call relate to your own personal and spiritual journey, and to your life of prayer and study?**

I feel called to provide healthy, creative, collaborative leadership, working in partnership with our people and clergy as we move forward into God's future.

I find great joy in using my leadership skills to support and inspire. Now, I sense God calling me to use my gifts as a bishop.

I did not grow up in a religious family and came to faith at the age of 24. I had a mystical experience in a church in England that was unexpected and life-changing. I knew then and will always know of God's great love for me and for all. Being grounded in such knowledge gives me much joy and allows me to be encouraging, optimistic, cheerful, and steady in times of joy and challenge.

Because I did not grow up in the Church, I bring a certain perspective that can be helpful in connecting with people who do not go to church or are on a different spiritual path.

I hold a Ph.D. in history from the University of Virginia; my love of learning continues. Doing a Ph.D. in my twenties was something of a monastic experience that involved much study, and, once I became a Christian, much prayer. As I moved into parish ministry, I realized my need for focused prayer beyond what can happen in the midst of a busy workday. In 2003, I started attending silent, directed retreats at Jesuit retreat centers. I have done an eight-day retreat every year since, and I did the Ignatian 30-day Spiritual

Exercises when I was on sabbatical in 2011. This school for the spirit has given me much to share with others as we seek to love God and be for God in our world.

**2. After reading our profile, why have you discerned that your gifts, talents, skills, and experiences have led you to sense a call to become the bishop for The Episcopal Church in Vermont?**

I resonate with your call to be the Episcopal Church in Vermont for all people.

I preach passionately about our need to follow God's dream for our world, which calls us to name and, as much as it depends on us, to challenge and change structures and policies that do not respect the dignity of every human being. My preaching and encouragement have supported the social justice initiatives of the parishes I have served. In recent times, we put up a banner outside our church that reads, "No matter where you are from, we are glad you are our neighbor," in English, Spanish, and Arabic. My church received permission from the creator of that sign to change the color and make it into a large banner that also displays our church symbols. I recently led a group from our church half a mile down the street to the Jewish Community Center for a service of prayer and healing following the murder of 11 members of the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. I would bring this sort of leadership to Vermont and support such leadership by our members and clergy.

I am called to support and mentor others. As a spiritual director for many years, I have worked with lay persons, seminarians, and clergy. My training and

experience as a spiritual director could be put to good use as we, as a diocese, discern how God is calling us into the future. You are in the midst of such discernment now and I would work with you to continue the good work that you are doing. I hear your desire for a leader who can be in partnership with you and be open to the Spirit. While some might be discouraged by the challenges you face, I'm inspired and encouraged.

**3. Please tell us about your experience working with small congregations, part-time clergy, and within a mutual ministry framework.**

Before coming back to Richmond, Virginia in 2013, I served a small/medium church in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, a rural area, for nine and half years. I was also the dean of this region, which has small churches with part-time clergy. When I first went to what was for me a very small church in 2003, I talked with a mentor who told me, "Hilary, it is in the small church that conversion happens." In a time when all anyone talked about was church growth, his comment was welcomed and was what I would experience. In the small rural church, I experienced great faith and gifts that created community within the church as well as for the wider community. I've seen what a focus on one doable outreach project can mean for a small church and those they support. I experimented with ways to engage the area, offering Harry Potter Vacation Bible School and doing a Blessing of the Bikes (motorcycles). I was proud and thankful to be the rector of a small scrappy church with little money but lots of heart. I liked to compare our church to a puppy, not big, but full of energy and giving joy to many.

There is nothing wrong with small churches. God is at work in all our communities. God works with us best, in churches of every size, when we engage in mutual ministry, which includes annual reviews in an appreciative inquiry mode. Mutual ministry is the only sort of ministry I understand. As a leader, I have helped others learn about mutual ministry and live into it. By virtue of our baptisms, we are all ministers; our baptismal covenant helps us to understand the general look of such ministry, and then we discern the specific ministry God is calling us to share.

**4. Describe your experience with raising up, training, and working with deacons. How do you envision encouraging, educating, and deploying deacons in Vermont?**

One of the reasons I sense a call to be a bishop in partnership with you is to be a supporter of deacons and to encourage people to embrace the diaconate. I've been ordained 18 years and for the first 13 of those, we did not have an established process to raise up vocational deacons in the Diocese of Virginia. Once we started a program for discerning a call to be a deacon, and now have a deacons' school with the other two dioceses in Virginia, I have found myself in partnership with deacons. A deacon intern served with me as he was finishing deacons' school; Joe became our deacon once ordained. I have taught at the deacons' school, and I have been a spiritual director for six people in the ordination process to be deacons, and I am continuing with some post-ordination. I have had a

number of people in my parish discerning a call to be a deacon; I have assisted with their discernment. I serve on my diocesan Committee on the Diaconate of the Commission on Ministry.

In preaching and teaching, I would support the ministry of all the baptized including deacons. I would like to have retreats for deacons so as to focus on the dynamics of God's call to them. I would need to get to know the situation before having a clear idea of how to deploy deacons, but, again, it is all about God's call to individuals and communities. I can certainly help with that discernment. The educational piece is one I am eager to consider. My experience of having a deacons' school that brings people together from three dioceses gives me one model. I'm sure there are other options. I have the resources to create a curriculum.

**5. Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?**

I lived in Jay, Vermont, from the age of 8 to 13. During these formative years, I learned about town hall meeting day, the green mountain boys, how to wait for a bus in -20-degree weather, and how maple syrup is made, among many other great lessons that I remember well. We were recycling in the 1970s and conserving energy. I attended the Jay School, which had two classrooms (this school has since merged with a school in a neighboring town). To this day, whenever we sing "Morning Has Broken" in church, I'm transported back to the Jay School, where a teacher taught me that song.

I can see myself sitting next to her on the piano bench as she played and sang. My mother was born in Bennington, and when we were not living in Vermont, we spent a month there every summer of my childhood, in Alpine Haven, Montgomery Center. Leaving Vermont to move to Virginia when I was 13 was difficult for me; I missed my mountains and the culture of being a Vermonter. In my prayers now, I often meet Jesus in the woods that surrounded the ski lodge where I lived.