

## Consecration

Sermon preached at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

May 3, 2026

The Rev. Dr. Nina R. Pooley

As promised, a sermon describing the Consecration of our new Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Miguelina Howell, which took place a week ago Saturday, at Christ Church Cathedral in Springfield. With the election and consecration of Bishop Howell, the people of the Episcopal Church in Western Massachusetts have begun a new chapter in the life of our diocese, and perhaps more importantly, we've begun to actively reshape the way we are the church. While appreciating where we've been, we're leaning into who we want to become - a diverse people of faith, inclusive of all people, as we serve God in this place and time.

It was a glorious, chaotic day - which seems just about right! From my perspective as a member of the transition team helping to coordinate the day, there were a lot of moving parts, and I spent the morning shepherding various bishops, priest, deacons, and choir members, helping people find the places they were going - to vest, and to line up, and answering a lot of questions about where the bathrooms were located.

When we were finally vested, and lined up two by two, my partner was a priest from the Dominican Republic, who was thrilled to be celebrating this with us. She was lovely and thankfully spoke English, because I don't speak Spanish (to my shame). While we waited in this long line of international clergy - we sang. It felt like we just had to - because we couldn't contain the joy and excitement of the moment.

The procession was a mess - clergy tend to think they know what they're doing, and are not good at following directions - but we ended up seated somehow.

The congregation was too large for the Cathedral, so there was overflow seating in the Museum with screens showing the service. I've heard from those who were there that it was more comfortable seating and they could see better than those of us just catching glimpses from our seats in the cathedral. (And when it came time for communion, Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe, and retired Presiding Bishop Michael Curry served them communion - so not a bad deal!)

The cathedral was jammed full of people, from all over. A huge group from the Dominican Republic, and another large contingent from Connecticut, and people who came from across the country. Not surprising - Rev. Howell is well known, respected, and loved by many across The Episcopal Church.

When I asked our parishioners who attended for their impressions, they, like me, were overwhelmed by the diversity of people gathered, and the sound of so many voices raised in English and in Spanish. The service was completely bilingual. We heard the Gospel in both English and Spanish. We sang hymns that were in English and in Spanish. We heard the reading

of testimonials in both languages. Our Cathedral Dean, Jose Reyes made the announcements in both languages. It was glorious and seamless.

One member of St. Stephen's commented:

I am still bubbling with the energy of the consecration service and celebration! It was exciting to be a part of something with that scale. It was intoxicating to be in all that energy, thrilling to hear the volume of the responses, and visually exciting to see all the varied vestments gathered together. Especially in this time of how to respond to lower attendance, having a full church filled the heart.

They also noted:

... the number of black and brown people in the room, the number of women involved in the service, and hearing important pieces of the service in Spanish (the gospel!) made me feel gratefully connected to a bigger world (both within the church as well as in my daily life). It was so wonderful to hear people responding to the words they heard in the moment with yes! or amen! and the spontaneous applause to express their delight or consent.

Now that you have a sense for how it felt to be there - let me share a little about the consecration proper.<sup>1</sup> The service began with the presentation of the bishop-elect by the search committee (including Rev. Jenny Gregg, and our own Bill Frazier and Amanda Watroba). They stood before the Presiding Bishop and said:

*Sean*, Bishop in the Church of God, the clergy and people of the Diocese of *Western Massachusetts*, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, have chosen *Miguelina Howell* to be a bishop and chief pastor. We therefore ask you to lay your hands upon *her* and in the power of the Holy Spirit to consecrate *her* a bishop in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

Shortly after the presentation,  
the Presiding Bishop asked the people of our diocese:  
"Is it your will that we ordain *Miguelina* a bishop?"

We responded:  
**"That is our will."**

The Presiding Bishop then asked:  
"Will you uphold *Miguelina* as bishop?"

And the cathedral resounded with a loud:  
**"We will!"**

The service moved into the ministry of the word, during which we heard the sermon by Bishop Baskerville Burrows. She opened with a poem by Pauli Murray, the first African American woman to be ordained an Episcopal Priest.

The poem is titled:

*Dark Testament Verse 8<sup>2</sup>*

Pauli Murray, published in *Dark Testament and Other Poems* in 1970, and recently reissued by Liveright Publishing in 2018.

Hope is a crushed stalk  
Between clenched fingers  
Hope is a bird's wing  
Broken by a stone.  
Hope is a word in a tuneless ditty —  
A word whispered with the wind,  
A dream of forty acres and a mule,  
A cabin of one's own and a moment to rest,  
A name and place for one's children  
And children's children at last . . .

Hope is a song in a weary throat.  
Give me a song of hope  
And a world where I can sing it.  
Give me a song of faith  
And a people to believe in it.  
Give me a song of kindness  
And a country where I can live it.  
Give me a song of hope and love  
And a brown girl's heart to hear it.

Bishop Baskerville Burrows shared a personal story about her experience in Western Massachusetts when she discovered the Episcopal church during her time at Smith. And she encouraged us and our new bishop to be the church we are called to be. To embrace our new expansive vision of ourselves and others. She urged us to recognize our past brokenness, and current blind spots - while we lean into our will to do and be better. To continue to live into being the kingdom of God in this place - even when it's going to be demanding work, at an extraordinarily challenging time.

Give me a song of hope  
And a world where I can sing it.  
**Give me a song of faith**  
**And a people to believe in it.**  
Give me a song of kindness  
And a country where I can live it.  
Give me a song of hope and love  
And a brown girl's heart to hear it.

After the sermon and the litany of prayer, the service moved into the Examination of the bishop-elect. The Presiding Bishop began the examination with these words:

My *sister*, the people have chosen you and have affirmed their trust in you by acclaiming your election. A bishop in God's holy Church is called to be one with the apostles in proclaiming Christ's resurrection and interpreting the Gospel, and to testify to Christ's sovereignty as Lord of lords and King of kings.

You are called to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church; to celebrate and to provide for the administration of the sacraments of the New Covenant; to ordain priests and deacons and to join in ordaining bishops; and to be in all things a faithful pastor and wholesome example for the entire flock of Christ.

With your fellow bishops you will share in the leadership of the Church throughout the world. Your heritage is the faith of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and those of every generation who have looked to God in hope. Your joy will be to follow him who came, not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Are you persuaded that God has called you to the office of bishop?

The answer as it's included in the prayer book is: "I am so persuaded."

With enthusiasm, Bishop-elect Howell said: "**I am SO persuaded!**" Which had everyone laughing and cheering.

Following the examination questions, we stood in witness as all the bishops gathered around and laid hands upon Miguelina and prayed for her, saying:

Therefore, Father, make Miguelina a bishop in your Church. Pour out upon *her* the power of your princely Spirit, whom you bestowed upon your beloved Son Jesus Christ, with whom he endowed the apostles, and by whom your Church is built up in every place, to the glory and unceasing praise of your Name.

Which we approved with a loud **AMEN** that echoed through the cathedral and the museum seating.

Our newly consecrated bishop was then vested, and Bishop Doug handed her the crozier, transferring to her the role of chief pastor and shepherd. And together we celebrated the Eucharist, with our new bishop as our celebrant.

It was joyful and powerful - an extraordinary day. As one of our members commented:

What a beautiful cross section of people coming together in one sacred and holy space to celebrate this beautiful person who is our bishop. The music catered to all present, gospel, Latin, traditional. I was taken by the enthusiasm when people started clapping to the music.

And another wrote:

It felt like everyone gathered knew we were witnessing an important moment not only for the Diocese of Western Massachusetts, but for the life of the Church. The liturgy itself was beautiful and deeply prayerful. There was a wonderful balance of reverence, celebration, and genuine joy. You could feel the energy in the room as voices joined in prayer and song, and as people from many communities came together to support Bishop Miguelina as she began this new ministry.

One of the most touching parts of the day was seeing Bishop Miguelina's family there, many having traveled from the Dominican Republic to celebrate with her. Their love and pride were visible, and it added such warmth and humanity to the occasion. It was a reminder that vocations are never lived in isolation, they are nurtured by families, communities, and the grace of God working through many people over time.

...

I came away grateful, inspired, and hopeful. Grateful for all who made the day possible, inspired by Bishop Miguelina's faith and presence, and hopeful for the future of our diocese under her leadership. It was a blessing to be there and to share in such a sacred and joyful beginning.

And another member noted:

the hope and love that was shared through all the words spoken and messages given. I was ... inspired, in ways I didn't expect, and [I'm] looking forward to what Bishop Howell continues to bring to this diocese.

For me, the celebration was made even more glorious by the presence of so many women bishops of color. In the midst of so much division and prejudice in our culture, the leadership of the Episcopal Church is becoming more diverse and inclusive. And that gives me hope for our future.

The Diocese of Western Massachusetts is doing our part. With the consecration of the Rt. Rev. Miguelina Howell: the first female bishop of our diocese; the first black bishop of our diocese, and the first Latina bishop to lead our diocese.

May we, the people of God in the Diocese of Western Massachusetts, support our new bishop in her wise and careful leadership, and work with her to bring into being our diverse, inclusive understanding of God's kingdom - with fierce joy and conviction, and faith, so much faith.

Let's close with this prayer for the Church, which is prayed at every ordination service:<sup>3</sup>

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through

whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Text from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979, Consecration of a Bishop, 512-521.

<sup>2</sup> Pauli Murray, published in *Dark Testament and Other Poems* in 1970, and recently reissued by Liveright Publishing in 2018.

<sup>3</sup> BCP, 515.