

PARISH DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

Discernment for Holy Orders, a call to monastic life, or specialized lay ministries begins in the congregation. This is where the person and his or her ministry is best known and is best considered. Persons should have been active in a congregation for at least a year before a Parish Discernment Committee is gathered for his/her discernment.

A Parish Discernment Committee is called to enter into deep conversation and discovery with an individual to assist in the naming of the gifts of that individual and to what service the individual is being called by God and by the Church.

If this conversation is successful, the other members of the committee will also deepen their understanding of their particular gifts and service.

In Baptism, God calls all Christians to the royal priesthood and to Christ like service (*diakonia*). Some persons are called to ordination or to particular lay ministries, for the building up of the Body of Christ, for gathering and equipping the church to be effective ministers in the world.

1) The committee membership of six to eight persons will be appointed by the Rector, Vicar or Priest-in-Charge of the congregation. In the absence of appointed or elected clergy leadership, the Bishop shall appoint the committee in consultation with the Vestry.

2) Prior to nomination for Holy Orders a discernment group meets with a person in discernment for at least 2 hours a month for a *minimum* of nine months, having conversations on diverse subjects including the following:

- What are spiritual gifts have been manifested in your ministry?
- What ministry gives you life? Drains you?
- What do you believe the Church calling you to do? To be?
- How is that call manifested?
- How have you gathered people together in your daily life as well as in the church?
- How have you empowered folks for ministry?
- Which of the ordination vows will be most challenging? Most exciting? (This presumes deep conversations about both diaconal and priestly ordination liturgies.)
- How would you plan to be prepared for ordination (academic, practical, clinical, spiritual)?

Further possible questions and meeting agendas are listed at the end of this document.

3) Discernment:

3a) Over the year or so of meeting the individual and the committee should come to a consensus as to the nature of the call of the individual. When the committee discerns that the person is called to lay ministry, the committee helps the individual make a plan for going forward.

3b.) When the Discernment Committee discerns a call to ordination, they provide a confidential written report to the Vestry. The report should include:

1. A list of meetings of the committee, including agenda for each meeting.
2. A summary of the learnings of the committee
3. The recommendations of the committee

4. How the discernment committee plans to support this person in their process toward ordination or in their continuing discernment if the Bishop or Diocesan Commission on Ministry does not concur with this recommendation.

4) The Vestry then interviews the individual and decides whether or not to nominate the individual for ordination.

4a) Should the Vestry decide to nominate, the written report from the Discernment Committee is included with the nomination papers submitted to the Bishop and then to the Diocesan Commission on Ministry.

- Included in the report are the person's gifts for ministry
- The reasons the Church needs this person ordained and how the Church will benefit from this ordination.
- How the congregations will contribute financially and substantially to the person's process for ordination.

4b) Should the Vestry decide not to nominate the Parish Discernment Committee continues to meet with the person for further discernment.

6) The person meets with the Bishop, and if invited by the Bishop, meets with the Diocesan Commission on Ministry (DCOM)

6a) If the Bishop and the DCOM discern a call to ministry, the Parish Discernment Committee continues to meet with the (now) postulant quarterly (as possible) to support him/her in the ordination process.

6b) If either the Bishop or the DCOM do not discern a call to ministry, Parish Discernment Committee continues to meet with the person for further discernment.

The following questions are examples from several formats and may be helpful in guiding the discussions for Discernment Committees. Many other questions would be appropriate.

- 1) What is the Aspirant's understanding of his/her sense of vocation to ordained ministry and what gifts does he/she have to offer God's Mission for the Church?
- 3) How clearly is the Aspirant able to talk about this?
- 4) Please describe the Aspirant's past and current history of ministry. Be specific.
- 5) What is your impression of the Aspirant's intellectual, emotional and spiritual capacities?
- 6) Please describe the Aspirant's strengths. Be specific using examples.
- 7) Please describe areas needing development. Be specific using examples.
- 8) What is your general sense of the Aspirant's suitability for ordination?
- 9) Are there any other factors that you regard as significant?
- 10) Do you recommend this Aspirant for continuance in the process? Why?

Suggested questions for exploration with the aspirant.

1. In what way(s) has the Church been important in your life?
2. How has your life changed recently so that it seems to be pointing towards ordination?
3. What is a deacon for you? What is a priest?
4. Why does the Church need priests and deacons? Does it?
5. Tell us about your family and its relationships. Is your family supportive of your vocational goals?
6. How do you relate to people in a community?
7. Tell us about your activities and participation in the life of this congregation.

8. What lay ministry have you exercised in this parish? How do you define the ministry of the laity?
9. Tell us about your prayer life. Do you participate in a prayer group? Who is your spiritual director and how did you choose this person?
10. Who is Jesus Christ for you?
11. Has any particular thing happened recently that reaffirmed your call to holy orders? 12. Why do you believe ordination is necessary for the ministry to which you feel called? What difference will ordination make?
13. What financial plans have you made for your theological education? What help from the parish and diocese?
14. Have you approached any other congregation asking for sponsorship?
15. What do you consider to be your responsibilities to the parish (or mission) and its to you, if the vestry agrees to sponsor your postulancy?
16. What will you do if you are refused postulancy?
17. Do you plan to seek full-time employment in the Church after ordination?
18. Are you aware of the possibilities of employment?
19. What are you most afraid of in the vocations process? In the ordained ministry?
20. What are you most excited about?

Possible formats for meetings:

2 minutes	Opening collect.
10	Check in of all members.
20	Centering prayer
30	Bible Study
50	Conversation
10	Intercessions and closing prayer
15	Morning or Evening Prayer
25	Bible Study
10	Check in
60	Conversation
10	Intercessions and closing prayers

A Discernment Committee is not a substitute for Spiritual Direction. Both systems are to be engaged in during the discernment process.