



# The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

DISCERNMENT FOR HOLY  
ORDERS

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**DISCERNMENT FOR HOLY ORDERS  
IN THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA**

*Responding to God's Call:  
First Steps*

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**The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania**  
**COMMISSION ON MINISTRY**

*This document has been designed to support the discernment process in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. This discernment process was created by the Commission on Ministry, under the direction of the Rt. Rev'd Daniel G. P. Gutierrez. Materials for this process were produced by members of the Commission, in consultation with the Bishop, and include information from guides published by other dioceses, including The Episcopal Church in Minnesota, The Episcopal Diocese of New York, The Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande, and The Episcopal Diocese of Washington.*

Updated June 2023



## The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

*Then the Lord said: Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord; the Lord will pass by. There was a strong and violent wind rending the mountains and crushing rocks before the Lord-but the Lord was not in the wind,- after the wind, an earthquake-but the Lord was not in the earthquake; after the earthquake, fire-but the Lord was not in the fire; after the fire, a light silent sound. 1 Kings 19:11-12*

My brothers and sisters,

I greet you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and offer my welcome as you discern a call to ministry in the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania.

This is a sacred time of seeking, reflection, and prayer. Discerning a call to ministry is filled with both certainty and uncertainty; speaking and listening; action and contemplation. It is a time of hope grounded in the transformative power of Jesus Christ. Throughout each step of your holy journey, know that we are with you.

Take this time to discern how, and where, God is calling you to serve. Listen intently to that light, silent sound. Do not rush the process, because it will unfold in new and unexpected ways. Dedicate yourself to learning and actively following the process for discernment in our Diocese. Open yourself to learning the gifts and responsibilities of each order of ministry. Each has its own significant and distinct charisms, and this is a time to discover where you are called. You may be called to serve God and God's beloved through dynamic lay ministry, the pioneer spirit of the diaconate or the shepherding of the priesthood.

As you move forward, take time to sit in the sacred presence of our Lord. Pray, read scripture, seek forgiveness through reconciliation of a penitent, and receive the Holy Eucharist. I also encourage you to have open conversations with your family, members of your church, experienced clergy, your spiritual director, and friends. Be mindful and most importantly - enjoy this time, because no matter where it leads, God is with you.

If you have any questions or just need a boost, please reach out to us. Above all, know that I am praying for you.

May the Lord bless you and keep you always.

In Christ,

The Rt. Rev. Daniel G. P. Gutiérrez  
XVI Bishop of The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

## First Steps

*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:*

*“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.”*

*The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”*

*Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”*

Isaiah 6:1-8

*Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to thee, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly thine, utterly dedicated unto thee; and then use us, we pray thee, as thou wilt, and always to thy glory and the welfare of thy people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer, p. 832, *A Prayer of Self-Dedication*

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“Know Jesus. Change the World.” We are not alone when we seek God’s calling for us. Like Isaiah, when we see the Lord, we also see our own sin and shortcomings. But like Isaiah, we can be transformed by the recognition of God’s grace and remission of sin. Through Jesus’ teaching and resurrection, we are empowered to take that first step in faith into the heart of discipleship.

This packet is designed for those who have decided to take that first step – to come to this process of discernment and to see where Christ might be calling them to serve the Church. This first step requires courage and humility, patience and perseverance. It is a step out in true faith, not knowing where the process will lead, but knowing that wherever you ultimately find yourself, God will be present. The Diocese of Pennsylvania is grateful to you for bringing yourself to this process of holy discernment – for saying “Here am I!” May this time be filled with the movement of the Holy Spirit, and may God bless you on your journey.

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### *What is discernment?*

The term discernment is used in two ways. In its broadest sense, it is a process of determining God's calling in one's life. This can apply when one is deciding whether to accept a promotion, to enter into marriage, or to move to a new city. These decisions can be made on purely practical bases, but as Christians we ask for God to guide us so that we can live into a life and ministry that God wills for us. The word discernment is also used to talk about the specific question of entering into Holy Orders -- the formal process of discernment for those considering the priesthood and the diaconate.

The process of discernment involves the individual, the community, and the Holy Spirit. It is the process of work, thought, prayer, and listening which makes possible the recognition and understanding of the Spirit's call to an individual (or group). Discernment is a matter of identifying the gifts of a faithful individual that are suited to a particular form of ministry. Each of us has a duty to be in a lifelong process of discerning the ministries through which we may use our gifts in service to God.

Call is an essential part of all ministry in the Church. In becoming members of the Body of Christ in baptism, all are covenanted through our baptismal promises. Discernment is that ongoing process whereby we attempt to determine how we will respond to this call.

Relationship with God and with community is necessary to discern fully God's call. God calls persons, congregations, communities, and the Church continually to discern their call to mission. Discernment must be entered into with humility, care, and authenticity by all involved.

All baptized persons are called to ministry in their life. A call to ordained ministry is not a "better call." But when one's call seems to be toward Holy Orders, the Church has a great responsibility to participate in the discernment process. This includes prayerfully joining in seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, supporting the individual in further exploration of the call, and considering the Individual's gifts in the context of the needs of the Church. This work of discernment will first be carried out locally, but eventually a call to ordained ministry involves a wider circle of concerned persons within the diocese continuing the work begun at the local level.

### *How do you know if it is time to begin formal discernment in the diocese?*

The recognition of a call may begin with the Individual's sense of being drawn into a new ministry, or it may emerge from the community's identification of a person's gifts for a particular ministry. Exploration of a call may lead to a deeper sense of vocation in secular employment, to community service, to specific ministries within the Church, or to consideration of ordination. Discernment is a prayerful attempt, within the scope of human weakness and limitation, to identify a pathway to meeting God's will for the Individual, the community, and the Church.

Vocational discernment begins and continues with listening for the Holy Spirit, starting with the Individual (or seeker) and extending into ever-widening communities of discernment. The essential question of discernment is, "What is God calling me to do?" -- a question that seeks to understand how the seeker's gifts best serve the world through Christ. It is a question that must be answered in

community and by community. The community seeks to affirm a seeker's gifts by listening for the Holy Spirit in discernment for Church leadership.

*Who can pursue ordination as an Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Pennsylvania?*

Any person may pursue ordination to the priesthood, including a person who has been ordained in another faith tradition, if that person has been a confirmed adult communicant in good standing of The Episcopal Church for one year and is already in possession of a baccalaureate degree.

*Who can pursue ordination as an Episcopal deacon in the Diocese of Pennsylvania?*

Any person may pursue ordination to the diaconate, including a person who has been ordained in another faith tradition, if that person has been a confirmed adult communicant in good standing of The Episcopal Church for one year.

*What are the first steps for someone discerning a call to ordained ministry in The Episcopal Church?*

Recognition of a potential call to ministry can happen in many ways. Perhaps a parish priest will approach someone in his or her congregation to suggest that he or she might be called to be a deacon or a priest. A fellow parishioner might mention that he or she sees the gifts for ordained ministry in a particular person. Or an individual may begin to sense a stirring of the Holy Spirit in his or her own life. The first step for the Individual who is sensing this kind of a call is to approach his or her Sponsoring Priest to discuss this potential call to ordained ministry. The phrase "Sponsoring Priest" refers to the rector or priest-in-charge of that Individual's faith community. If the Individual's community has no rector or priest-in-charge, the Individual should reach out to the Office of Transitions, who will connect the Individual to another priest through the local deanery.

At this point, several things are set into motion:

- The Sponsoring Priest commits to walk with the Individual through prayer and conversation over a period of several meetings.
- The Sponsoring Priest may also recommend that the Individual meet with another person in the diocese – lay or ordained – who is gifted in the practice of discernment and who can serve as a kind of additional vocational counselor during this time. These conversations are not meant to replace the Individual's discernment with the Sponsoring Priest but to enhance it.
- If the Individual is sensing a call particularly to the diaconate, the Sponsoring Priest may also recommend that the Individual speak with one of the Diocese's Archdeacons.

If, after several months of these prayerful conversations and engagement by the Individual, the Sponsoring Priest determines that there is sufficient evidence of a call to warrant doing so, he or she, along with the Individual, reaches out to the Office of Transitions.



- The Sponsoring Priest contacts the Office of Transitions to indicate that an Individual is interested in discerning for Holy Orders and confirms that this Individual has been confirmed in The Episcopal Church for at least one year and also has been an engaged, active participant in the sponsoring faith community for at least a year.
- The Office of Transitions works with the Chair of the Commission on Ministry (COM) to find a representative of the COM to serve as a liaison with the Sponsoring Priest and the Individual. This liaison meets in person with the Sponsoring Priest, the Individual, and the Office of Transitions to review the entire process of discernment and formation, including:
  - reviewing this document, *Responding to God's Call: First Steps*
  - assuring the Individual's commitment to engage in a relationship with a spiritual director, beginning immediately, and providing a list of spiritual directors in the diocese
  - defining the numerous roles involved in the process for the Individual, Sponsoring Priest, sponsoring faith community (including the Parish Discernment Group), COM, Standing Committee, Office of Transition, and the Bishop
  - discussing what will, in this process, become the two primary components of discernment:
    - *discernment in the local community* (work to be done within the Individual's faith community, including work with the Sponsoring Priest and a Parish Discernment Group); and
    - *discernment in the diocesan community* (work to be done within the diocese, including work with the COM at the Discernment Weekend)
- After this prayerful conversation, the Sponsoring Priest and the Individual work together to form a Parish Discernment Group (PDG) to begin discernment in the sponsoring faith community.

*What does discernment in the local community look like?*

### **The Parish Discernment Group**

- The Sponsoring Priest and the Individual will work together to invite people from the sponsoring faith community to be members of the PDG. The PDG should consist of
  - The Individual in discernment
  - The Companion – a member of the faith community who agrees to walk with the Individual through the discernment process, serving as spiritual friend and guide. This person should be one who can both support and challenge the Individual and therefore needs to be spiritually mature and self-aware. The Companion should have been a member of the faith community for at least one year.
  - A vestry member – this person represents the formal lay leadership of the parish and will be responsible for reporting back to the vestry, along with the Sponsoring Priest, when their approval is required.
  - Two or three members of the faith community – these members should represent the breadth and diversity of the community itself. If possible, they should include members who know the Individual as well as those who do not.
- The PDG will meet a total of nine times, meeting no more often than every two weeks. The hope is that these meetings will be concluded in **between five and nine months**. At least two

hours should be allowed for each meeting. As the Discernment Weekend occurs during the third weekend of October each year, it is best if the cycle of meetings ends in time for the Individual to be nominated by his or her Sponsoring Priest (including the vestry endorsement) by September 1. However, because considerable work is involved in preparing for each PDG meeting, and because true discernment needs space for prayer and the moving of the Holy Spirit, the PDG should not rush their work. **The PDG should not commence its process any later than April 1**, in order to submit its recommendation to the Sponsoring Priest, and enable the Sponsoring Priest to nominate the Individual, by September 1.

- It is the job of the PDG to aid the Individual in clarifying his or her call. Is this a call to the priesthood or the diaconate? Or is this a strong call to formal lay ministry? Through a series of opportunities for intense questioning and prayer, the PDG and the Individual should come to a mutual decision about the Individual's call. At this point, the Individual should be prepared to formally claim a call to a particular order of ministry (lay, diaconal, priestly). Both the PDG and the Individual will produce documents outlining their experiences in the group and articulating their sense of the call that is present.
- If the PDG determines that the Individual does not have a call to ordained ministry, the Sponsoring Priest will work with the Individual to engage in further discernment. Where is the call to serve? Where is the Individual's "yes"?
- The PDG should stay in place, praying and supporting the Individual, until the Individual has or has not been granted postulancy. If the Individual is not granted postulancy following the Discernment Weekend, the PDG should be prepared to meet with him or her in order to provide support and care.

### **The Congregational Leadership Project**

- Depending upon the gifts of the Individual and his or her needs for development, as well as the needs of the faith community, the Sponsoring Priest works with the Individual to decide upon a congregational leadership project. These are experiential projects that explore various dimensions of leadership in the Church. These projects should be structured in a way that ensures that there are clear goals and outcomes, a comprehensive and detailed action plan, and a means for evaluation.
- Possible leadership categories include:
  - Pastoral care
  - Administration
  - Preaching
  - Teaching
  - Catechesis
  - Formation
  - Liturgy
  - Social Justice
  - Outreach
  - Evangelism
  - Communication
- There may be other categories for these projects that would be appropriate for particular Individuals and their faith communities. Projects, though, should be designed to help the Individual experience leadership in the parish in a new way, responding to a need or passion in a new area of ministry.

- Following the completion of the congregational leadership project, the Individual and the Sponsoring Priest should reflect on the outcomes and learnings from the project. Potential questions for discussion include:
  - What was the project/goals/etc.?
  - How did the Individual display leadership in this project?
  - What gifts were revealed?
  - What growing edges were revealed?
  - How would this project have been the same or different if the Individual were a priest? A deacon? A Licensed Lay Minister?
- The Sponsoring Priest should include a brief report of the Individual's work with this leadership project in his or her nomination letter to the Bishop (see next bullet point). This project will also be a point of conversation for the Individual and his or her PDG.

### **Concluding Formal Discernment in Context**

- If the Sponsoring Priest and the PDG discern that the Individual is called to be a deacon or priest, the Sponsoring Priest submits a letter formally nominating the Individual for Diocesan Discernment. It is strongly recommended that this letter include a commitment that the faith community will contribute financially to the education and formation of this Individual and also that it will involve itself in the Individual's formation for ordination. This letter should be signed by two-thirds of the Vestry or comparable body as well as by the Sponsoring Priest. (Sponsoring Priests may also use the diocesan vestry nomination form, provided by the Office of Transitions). The Sponsoring Priest then forwards all pertinent information and documentation to the diocese, including the following:
  - the report of the PDG
  - all papers/projects produced by the Individual during the PDG process
- If the Bishop accepts the report of the sponsoring parish and the PDG, the Office of Transitions helps the Individual to complete three evaluations:
  - a psychological evaluation, including personality tests and cognitive testing
  - a medical examination
  - an evaluation of the Individual's personal and family finances
- Once these evaluations are completed, the Bishop and his or her staff will review the pertinent information. If the evaluations reveal that the Individual is in good physical, mental, and financial health and has the capacity in all of those areas for a healthy engagement with the remainder of the discernment process, the Bishop will then invite the Individual to attend the Discernment Weekend. At this point, the Individual becomes a Nominee.
- Following invitation to the Discernment Weekend, the Canon for Transition will be in touch with the Nominee to acquire all canonically required paperwork, which must be submitted by August 1. This paperwork will be provided to the COM as a part of the Nominee's discernment packet along with some parts of the psychological, medical, and financial reports.

### *What does discernment in community look like?*

- The Discernment Weekend is held on Saturday, during the third weekend of October each year. It is staffed by the Canon for Transitions and members of the COM. If the COM discerns that the Nominee has a vocation to the ordained

diaconate or priesthood and the Bishop concurs, the Bishop extends an invitation to the Nominee to accept status as a Postulant for Holy Orders. If the COM discerns that the Nominee has a call to leadership in lay ministry, the COM refers the Nominee back to the Sponsoring Priest and PDG for support and further discernment.

- Discernment is a very serious matter and not to be undertaken lightly. A Nominee will be issued an invitation to accept status as a Postulant only if a number of people hear the Holy Spirit's affirmation that a call is present. These people include the Nominee him or herself, the Nominee's Sponsoring Priest, the Nominee's PDG, the COM, and the Bishop. The process is intended to be strenuous, and admission as a Postulant is not guaranteed. However, if the Nominee is granted postulancy, the Bishop and the COM are committed to that person's formation and to supporting that person in becoming the best deacon or priest he or she can be.

### *What happens once a person is made a Postulant?*

#### **Early Postulancy**

- Once the Nominee is made a Postulant, he or she enters under the care of the Commission on Ministry and prepares to enter formation.
- Those who are Postulants for the Diaconate will consult with the Archdeacons and Bishop to mutually determine how this formation will take place. Generally, he or she will begin the formal formation process offered by the Diocese of Pennsylvania, usually in the fall following his or her acceptance of the invitation to become a Postulant.
- Those who are Postulants for the Priesthood will consult with the Canon for Transition Ministry and the Bishop to mutually determine the theological institution where this formation will take place. The COM also may have made a recommendation to this effect following the Discernment Weekend. Generally, the Postulant will matriculate in the fall following his or her acceptance of the appointment as a Postulant.
- The Postulant will be assigned a Shepherd from the COM. This person will be a contact and liaison during the Postulant's formation process. The Shepherd will contact the Postulant early in his or her postulancy to establish a connection and to discuss the workings of this relationship. The Shepherd/Postulant relationship is intended to help with formation and accountability for both the Postulant and the COM.

# CHECKLIST FOR NOMINEE FILE

Please keep copies of everything and send all paperwork to:  
Pam Prell, Associate for Transitions  
Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania, 23 East Airy Street  
Norristown, PA 19401

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

PARISH \_\_\_\_\_

## Nominee's Responsibility-Deadline August 1

- \_\_\_ NCCC/O'Hara Report - Scheduling and Completion
- \_\_\_ Behavior Screening Questionnaire
- \_\_\_ Medical Exam
- \_\_\_ Aspirant's Personal History & Spiritual Reflection Questionnaire
- \_\_\_ Financial Statement (with Personal History)
- \_\_\_ Academic Transcripts-official (everything post-high school)
- \_\_\_ Criminal Record Check: <https://epatch.pa.gov/home>
- \_\_\_ Child Abuse History Clearance: PA Compass Portal
- \_\_\_ Application for Postulancy
- \_\_\_ Letter to the Bishop requesting Postulancy
- \_\_\_ Two recent photographs
- \_\_\_ Nominee's share of psych assessment \_\_\_\_\_(or waiver agreement)
- \_\_\_ Parish's share of psych assessment \_\_\_\_\_(or waiver agreement)

## Parish Responsibility-Deadline September 1

- \_\_\_ PDG Report

## Sponsoring Priest Responsibility-Deadline-September 1

- \_\_\_ Letter of Recommendation from Parish Priest (include description  
Congregational Leadership Project)
- \_\_\_ Vestry Endorsement

**DISCERNMENT FOR HOLY ORDERS  
IN THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA**

*Responding to God's Call:  
The Path to Ordination for the Priesthood*

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**The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania**  
**COMMISSION ON MINISTRY**

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Updated June 2019



## The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

*“As they were going along the road, someone said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’ To another he said, ‘Follow me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ Another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.’ Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’” Luke 9:57-62*

My brothers and sisters,

You are now beginning the next stage of your journey. Throughout sacred scripture, Jesus called people to follow Him. As a community of hope, we will work together to discern the next stages of your call to “follow Him.” This is a moving, difficult, and beautiful road. Hold these next steps with care. Be mindful of the people and moments; they are actively forming your ministry.

Always remember that you are not in control. Jesus has laid out a path before you and asks us to follow. But Jesus does not give a detailed description of ministerial programs, speak of his self-importance, or require perfection as a prerequisite for service. He simply says, “Follow me”.

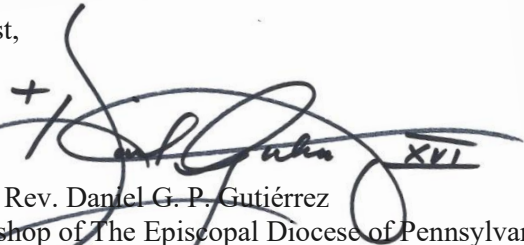
Ordained ministry is a prayerful vocation. It is not about status, title, wearing a collar or job security. It is about letting go of those concerns; it is about becoming smaller, so Jesus can become larger. Following Him is more than ordained ministry; it is about emptying yourself so that you might give your life for the next person who walks through your door.

During this next stage, please listen, ask questions, and then listen again. Pray, pray often and then pray some more. Again, do not worry about your self-imposed plans or deadlines; just ask, listen, serve, and pray. You are being called for transformative and inspirational work in the name of Jesus Christ. I encourage you to be kind, patient and forgiving. These are essential to ordained ministry.

As you progress in this journey, I urge you to ground yourself in Jesus Christ. Rededicate yourself to this holy work so that every word and action may proclaim the Good News. That is the core of ministry, and it is why you have chosen to turn your life over and follow Him as your Lord and Savior. We walk this path, because it leads to the New Heaven and New Earth that was promised at the end of the Book of Revelation.

Know that you are in my daily prayers as you journey onward and that we are always here for you.

In Christ,



The Rt. Rev. Daniel G. P. Gutiérrez  
XVI Bishop of The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania



## An Overview of the Process from Postulancy through Ordination

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,  
one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all,  
who is above all and through all and in all.*

Ephesians 4:4-6

*Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favor,  
and further us with thy continual help;  
that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee,  
we may glorify thy holy Name,  
and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer, p. 832, *For Guidance*

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Welcome to the ordination process in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. God has begun a good work in you, and we in the diocese are looking forward to sharing this profound journey with you. The following is intended to help you navigate the pathway toward ordination as a priest. Please know that the Bishop, the Canon for Transition, and the Commission on Ministry are present for you at each step in this process. We are here to pray for you, to support you, and to celebrate with you.

May God continue to bless you along this journey.

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*What happens once a person is made a Postulant?*

### **Early Postulancy**

Once you are made a Postulant, you enter under the care of the Commission on Ministry (COM) and prepare to enter formation.

Those who are Postulants for the priesthood will consult with the Bishop to mutually determine the theological institution where this formation will take place. The COM also may have made a recommendation to this effect following the Discernment Weekend. Generally, you will matriculate in the fall following your acceptance of appointment as a Postulant. During your time in seminary, you will be expected to complete one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education as well as one full year of field education. Generally these placements are made in consultation with the seminary itself; if your seminary does not assist in these kinds of placements, please contact the Canon for Transition for additional help.

During this time, you will be assigned a Shepherd from the COM. This person will be a contact and liaison during your formation process. The Shepherd will contact you early in your postulancy to establish a connection with you and to discuss the workings of your relationship. The

Shepherd/Postulant relationship is intended to help with formation and accountability for both you and the COM. The Shepherd is your primary connection to the COM between formal meetings, which is vitally important both to you and to the COM. However, this does not mean that your Shepherd is responsible for explaining the questions or decisions of the COM or the diocese, nor is he or she responsible for fixing any difficulties that may arise. He or she is there to be a friend, a listening ear, and perhaps an advisor, but he or she is always working alongside others in the diocese to help you have a healthy, holy process of formation. Your Shepherd will understand that conversations of the COM are always confidential, and neither your information nor the information of those on the Commission will be shared without permission. And, most importantly, your shepherd will understand the importance of holding you and your continuing discernment and formation in their prayers.

### **Ember Day Letters**

You are required by the canons of the church to send Ember Day letters four times a year to the Bishop. The Ember Days in the Church calendar are the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday following:

- the third Sunday of Advent
- the first Sunday in Lent
- the Day of Pentecost
- the Sunday closest to September 14 (Proper 19)

Ember Day letters should be promptly received by the Bishop during these weeks.

These Ember Day letters are, according to the national canons, to include reflections on the Postulant's "academic, diaconal, human, spiritual, and practical development." They continue through Postulancy and Candidacy.

Ember Day letters are a personal, private, pastoral communication between you and the Bishop and as such are not read by the COM or anyone else in the diocese. You are encouraged to take full advantage of this opportunity to develop a deep pastoral relationship with your Bishop. If there are changes happening in your personal life, such as an engagement, a pregnancy, a spouse's change of employment, please let your Bishop know! As with anything in this process, our hope is that these Ember Day letters will be much more than a perfunctory report on your work in formation. Bring all of yourself to these letters, and use your Bishop for council, feedback, and prayer.

### **Relationship with the Standing Committee (SC)**

The Standing Committee has a canonical obligation to review the work of Postulants and Candidates before they move along in the process towards ordination. Members of the Standing Committee are responsible for making sure the formation of those in the process is progressing in a healthy and effective way. The Standing Committee executes this obligation in several ways. First, two members of the Standing Committee are selected each year to serve on the Commission on Ministry. These two individuals are full members of the COM, participating in interviews and

discussions and contributing to the overall discernment of the COM. In addition to this, the entire Standing Committee reviews all documentation provided by the diocese relating to the formation of Postulants and Candidates. The Standing Committee also receives written recommendations from the COM following their interviews about areas of formation that may need attention or adjustment.

The Standing Committee also gathers yearly at the annual diocesan convention with all of the people who are in the discernment process in order to meet them in person and to come to know them more fully than they can by simply reading files. These gatherings are an important part of your participation in the life of this diocese, and you are highly encouraged to attend.

### **Interviews for Candidacy**

Interviews for Candidacy take place during the second year of your formation process. In order to apply for Candidacy, you should, after speaking with the Canon for Transition, write a letter to the Bishop that includes:

- a formal request to be granted Candidacy
- the date of your admission to Postulancy (from the Bishop's original letter)
- a letter of support by your sponsoring parish, which needs to include the vestry endorsement form, to be signed by two-thirds of the vestry

Once this application is received, you will be invited to a Candidacy interview with the COM. This interview will provide a chance for the COM to check in with you about your spiritual, emotional, and academic progress in this time of formation.

Following these interviews, the COM will write a letter to the Bishop with its recommendation about whether or not you should be made a Candidate. The COM may:

- recommend you be made a Candidate. This means that the COM sees strong progress in you and recommends wholeheartedly that you be made a Candidate. This endorsement may also come with some recommendations about work that you could do to enhance your formation even further, recommendations that will also be shared with the Standing Committee as material for their ongoing conversations with you.
- recommend that you remain in the process but wait to be made a Candidate. This would be in the case where the COM has some serious concerns about what has taken place during the first part of your formation, or about your spiritual or emotional health. If the COM asks you to wait before being made a Candidate, it will make specific recommendations to the Bishop about what it would like to see you do to address these concerns.
- recommend that you not be made a Candidate and be removed from the process. This would only happen in the case of critically serious concerns about your overall physical, mental, or spiritual health or the health of your vocation. While rare, this is a possibility, although the COM is committed to creating a process of formation where each Postulant has the support he or she needs to be successful in this process of formation. The process is designed so that any grave concerns such as these would be addressed in multiple contexts, and would not likely be the result of only one interview.

## **Final Academic Evaluation**

For those in formation for the priesthood, this final evaluation takes the form of the General Ordination Exams (GOE's), usually taken the January of your senior year in seminary. The point of these exams is to evaluate your academic and theological formation in the six core areas of study as outlined in the national canons:

- The Holy Scriptures
- History of the Christian Church
- Christian Theology
- Christian Ethics and Moral Theology
- Christian Worship (according to the use of the Book of Common Prayer, the Hymnal, and authorized supplemental texts)
- The Practice of Ministry in Contemporary Society

These exams are meant as a diagnostic tool and are designed to help you and the diocese evaluate your proficiency in these six areas. If you are found to be not proficient in one or more portions of the GOE's, you will work with the Bishop to determine what additional learning might need to happen in order for you to become proficient in those areas. The Bishop may assign you to study with a mentor or advisor, or to do remedial work, which will be evaluated by a team from the diocese.

## **Pre-Ordination Interviews (Transitional Diaconate)**

Pre-Ordination interviews take place in the final months before your ordination to the transitional diaconate. In order to apply for ordination, you should, after speaking with the Canon for Transition, write a letter to the Bishop which includes:

- a formal request to be ordained
- the dates of your admission to Postulancy and Candidacy
- a letter of support by your sponsoring parish, which needs to include the vestry endorsement form, to be signed by two-thirds of the vestry

These interviews provide a chance to discuss the final evaluations of your academic work and formation.

Following these interviews, the COM will write a letter to the Bishop with its recommendation about whether or not the Postulant should be made a Candidate. As with the application for Candidacy, in response to this interview, the COM may:

- recommend you for ordination. This means that the COM sees strong progress in you and recommends wholeheartedly that you be ordained. This endorsement may also come with some recommendations about work you could do to enhance your formation even further.
- recommend that you remain in the process but wait to be ordained. This would be in the case where the COM has some serious concerns about what has taken place during your formation, or about your spiritual or emotional health. If the COM asks you to wait before ordination, it will make specific recommendations to the Bishop about what it would like to see you do to address these concerns.

- recommend that you not be ordained and be removed from the process. This would only happen in the case of critically serious concerns about your overall physical, mental, or spiritual health or the health of your vocation. While rare, this is a possibility, although the COM is committed to creating a process of formation where each Candidate has the support he or she needs to be successful in this process of formation. The process is designed so that any grave concerns such as these would be addressed in multiple contexts, and would not likely be the result of only one interview.

### **Pre-Ordination Interviews (Priesthood)**

Pre-Ordination interviews take place in the final months before your ordination to the priesthood. In order to apply for ordination, you should, after speaking with the Canon for Transition, write a letter to the Bishop which includes:

- a formal request to be ordained
- the dates of your admission to Postulancy and Candidacy as well as your diaconal ordination date
- a letter of support by your sponsoring parish, which needs to include the vestry endorsement form, to be signed by two-thirds of the vestry

These interviews provide a chance to discuss the completion of your overall formation, including your time as a transitional deacon.

Following these interviews, the COM will write a letter to the Bishop with its recommendation about whether or not the Candidate should be ordained. As with the preceding applications, in response to this interview, the COM may:

- recommend you for ordination to the priesthood. This means that the COM sees strong progress in you and recommends wholeheartedly that you be ordained. This endorsement may also come with some recommendations about work you could do to enhance your formation even further.
- recommend that you remain in the process but wait to be ordained a priest. This would be in the case where the COM has some serious concerns about what has taken place during your formation, or about your spiritual or emotional health. If the COM asks you to wait before ordination, it will make specific recommendations to the Bishop about what it would like to see you do to address these concerns.
- recommend that you not be ordained a priest. This would only happen in the case of critically serious concerns about your overall physical, mental, or spiritual health or the health of your vocation. While rare, this is a possibility, although the COM is committed to creating a process of formation where each Candidate has the support he or she needs to be successful in this process of formation. The process is designed so that any grave concerns such as these would be addressed in multiple contexts, and would not likely be the result of only one interview.

## Some Helpful Tips about the Path to Ordination

1. *Be communicative.* In other words, remember your Bishop! Keep the Bishop informed of any major life events as soon as you become aware of them, including pregnancy, a change in your job or your spouse or partner's, or any health or relationship difficulties. Most things can be communicated to the Bishop via your Ember Day Letters, but if you are discerning a vocation to marriage and are planning to become engaged, please make an appointment with the Bishop to speak with him about this happy news in person. The same is true if you and your spouse are facing marital challenges or are contemplating separation or divorce.

You should also communicate regularly with the Sponsoring Priest of your home parish. Remember, he or she will need to formally recommend you both for Candidacy and for ordination, so it's good to keep the lines of communication open throughout your formation process.

And one last reminder about communication – don't underestimate the importance of being in touch often with the people from the diocese who are involved in your process with you. Your COM Shepherd and the Office of Transitions especially need to hear from you in order to advocate for you as you go through this process. This is especially true if you find that you are facing a particular problem or obstacle – those moments are the time to reach out, not to try to hide the problem or fix it on your own.

2. *Be organized.* Make and keep copies of all the documents and paperwork of your process, both what you send into the Office of Transitions and what you receive from the offices of the diocese or other institutions and advisors. Start a file now for all of these materials and keep a written record of what steps you have completed in the process and when.
3. *Be available.* Please update us with any changes in address or contact information, even if the change is temporary.
4. *Be a good planner.* Be aware of what steps in the discernment process are coming up and start well in advance of deadlines in order to meet all the requirements.
5. *Be a careful scheduler.* Set aside time every year for the Standing Committee gatherings, conventions, and ordinations of the diocese so that you can be in attendance. Mark down their specific dates as you get them and begin to plan any travel early.
6. *Be a volunteer.* You may be asked to help out at various diocesan events – say yes! We appreciate the ways you are already serving the Church in this diocese and we hope that you will share what you are learning with us when appropriate.

7. *Be patient.* The process to ordination is a long journey, and it can be easy to become anxious or upset at different times during your experience. Know that you are not on this journey alone! Christ, of course, travels with you and will be with you always, even to the end of the age. And the community of the Diocese of Pennsylvania is here to support you and to help shape this process so that it helps you to become the priest God has created you to be.
  
8. *Be a person of prayer.* Remember that it is your life of prayer that helped you to hear God's call in your life in the first place, and it is your life of prayer that will continue to sustain you in this journey. Keep up with spiritual direction, praying the office, and regular worship, either in your field education site or elsewhere. Set holy habits for yourself now, before ordination, so that they can continue when you begin to live out your ministry as a priest in God's holy Church.

**DISCERNMENT FOR HOLY ORDERS  
IN THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA**

*Responding to God's Call:  
The Path to Ordination for the Diaconate*

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**The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania**  
**COMMISSION ON MINISTRY**



*This document has been designed to support the discernment process in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. This discernment process was created by the Commission on Ministry, under the direction of the Rt. Rev'd Daniel G. P. Gutierrez. Materials for this process were produced by members of the Commission, in consultation with the Bishop, and include information from guides published by other dioceses, including The Episcopal Church in Minnesota, The Episcopal Diocese of New York, The Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande, and The Episcopal Diocese of Washington.*

Updated June 2019



## The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

*“As they were going along the road, someone said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’ To another he said, ‘Follow me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ Another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.’ Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’” Luke 9:57-62*

My brothers and sisters,

You are now beginning the next stage of your journey. Throughout sacred scripture, Jesus called people to follow Him. As a community of hope, we will work together to discern the next stages of your call to “follow Him.” This is a moving, difficult, and beautiful road. Hold these next steps with care. Be mindful of the people and moments; they are actively forming your ministry.

Always remember that you are not in control. Jesus has laid out a path before you and asks us to follow. But Jesus does not give a detailed description of ministerial programs, speak of his self-importance, or require perfection as a prerequisite for service. He simply says, “Follow me”.

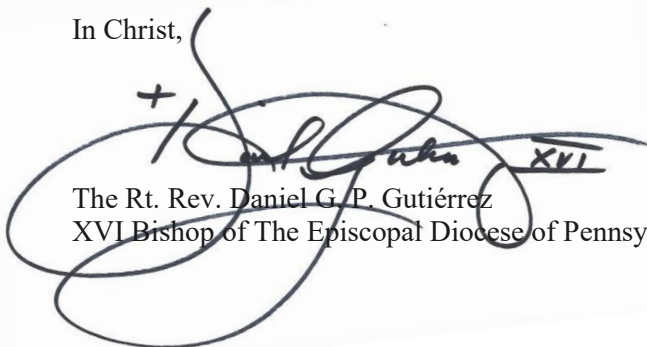
Ordained ministry is a prayerful vocation. It is not about status, title, wearing a collar or job security. It is about letting go of those concerns; it is about becoming smaller, so Jesus can become larger. Following Him is more than ordained ministry; it is about emptying yourself so that you might give your life for the next person who walks through your door.

During this next stage, please listen, ask questions, and then listen again. Pray, pray often and then pray some more. Again, do not worry about your self-imposed plans or deadlines; just ask, listen, serve, and pray. You are being called for transformative and inspirational work in the name of Jesus Christ. I encourage you to be kind, patient and forgiving. These are essential to ordained ministry.

As you progress in this journey, I urge you to ground yourself in Jesus Christ. Rededicate yourself to this holy work so that every word and action may proclaim the Good News. That is the core of ministry, and it is why you have chosen to turn your life over and follow Him as your Lord and Savior. We walk this path, because it leads to the New Heaven and New Earth that was promised at the end of the Book of Revelation.

Know that you are in my daily prayers as you journey onward and that we are always here for you.

In Christ,



The Rt. Rev. Daniel G. P. Gutiérrez  
XVI Bishop of The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

## An Overview of the Process from Postulancy through Ordination

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,  
one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all,  
who is above all and through all and in all.*

Ephesians 4:4-6

*Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favor,  
and further us with thy continual help;  
that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee,  
we may glorify thy holy Name,  
and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer, p. 832, *For Guidance*

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Welcome to the ordination process in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. God has begun a good work in you, and we in the diocese are looking forward to sharing this profound journey with you. The following is intended to help you navigate the pathway toward ordination as a deacon. Please know that the Bishop, the Canon for Transition, and the Commission on Ministry are present for you at each step in this process. We are here to pray for you, to support you, and to celebrate with you. May God continue to bless you along this journey.

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*What happens once a person is made a Postulant?*

### **Early Postulancy**

Once you are made a Postulant, you enter under the care of the Commission on Ministry (COM) and prepare to enter formation.

Those who are Postulants for the diaconate will consult with the Bishop to mutually determine how this formation will take place. Generally, you will begin the formal formation process offered by the Diocese of Pennsylvania, usually in the fall following your acceptance of the invitation to become a Postulant. Each Postulant in this formation process will be expected to complete a social service placement, a field education placement, and one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education. All of these placements will be made in consultation with the Bishop.

During this time, you will be assigned a Shepherd from the COM. This person will be a contact and liaison during your formation process. The Shepherd will contact you early in your postulancy to establish a connection with you and to discuss the workings of your relationship. The Shepherd/Postulant relationship is intended to help with formation and accountability for both you and the COM. The Shepherd is your primary connection to the COM between formal meetings, which is vitally important both to you and to the COM. However, this does not mean that your Shepherd is responsible for explaining the questions or decisions of the COM or the diocese, nor is he or she responsible for fixing any difficulties that may arise. He or she is there to be a friend, a listening ear, and perhaps an advisor, but he or she is always working alongside others in the diocese to help you have a healthy, holy process of formation. Your Shepherd will understand that

conversations of the COM are always confidential, and neither your information nor the information of those on the Commission will be shared without permission. And, most importantly, your shepherd will understand the importance of holding you and your continuing discernment and formation in their prayers.

### **Ember Day Letters**

You are required by the canons of the church to send Ember Day letters four times a year to the Bishop. The Ember Days in the Church calendar are the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday following:

- the third Sunday of Advent,
- the first Sunday in Lent,
- the Day of Pentecost,
- and the Sunday closest to September 14 (Proper 19).

Ember Day letters should be promptly received by the Bishop during these weeks.

These Ember Day letters are, according to the national canons, to include reflections on the Postulant's "academic, diaconal, human, spiritual, and practical development." They continue through Postulancy and Candidacy.

Ember Day letters are a personal, private, pastoral communication between you and the Bishop and as such are not read by the COM or anyone else in the diocese. You are encouraged to take full advantage of this opportunity to develop a deep pastoral relationship with your Bishop. If there are changes happening in your personal life, such as an engagement, a pregnancy, a spouse's change of employment, please let your Bishop know! As with anything in this process, our hope is that these Ember Day letters will be much more than a perfunctory report on your work in formation. Bring all of yourself to these letters, and use your Bishop for council, feedback, and prayer.

### **Relationship with the Standing Committee (SC)**

The Standing Committee has a canonical obligation to review the work of Postulants and Candidates before they move along in the process towards ordination. Members of the Standing Committee are responsible for making sure the formation of those in the process is progressing in a healthy and effective way. The Standing Committee executes this obligation in several ways. First, two members of the Standing Committee are selected each year to serve on the Commission on Ministry. These two individuals are full members of the COM, participating in interviews and discussions and contributing to the overall discernment of the COM. In addition to this, the entire Standing Committee reviews all documentation provided by the diocese relating to the formation of Postulants and Candidates. The Standing Committee also receives written recommendations from the COM following their interviews about areas of formation that may need attention or adjustment.

The Standing Committee also gathers at the annual diocesan convention with all of the people who are in the discernment process in order to meet them in person and to come to know them more fully than they can by simply reading files. These gatherings are an important part of your participation in the life of this diocese, and you are highly encouraged to attend.

## **Interviews for Candidacy**

Interviews for Candidacy take place during the second year of your formation process. In order to apply for Candidacy, you should, after speaking with the Canon for Transition, write a letter to the Bishop that includes:

- a formal request to be granted Candidacy
- the date of your admission to Postulancy (from the Bishop's original letter)
- a letter of support by your sponsoring parish, which needs to include the vestry endorsement form, to be signed by two-thirds of the vestry

Once this application is received, you will be invited to a Candidacy interview with the COM. This interview will provide a chance for the COM to check in with you about your spiritual, emotional, and academic progress in this time of formation.

Following these interviews, the COM will write a letter to the Bishop with its recommendation about whether or not you should be made a Candidate. The COM may:

- recommend you be made a Candidate. This means that the COM sees strong progress in you and recommends wholeheartedly that you be made a Candidate. This endorsement may also come with some recommendations about work that you could do to enhance your formation even further, recommendations that will also be shared with the Standing Committee as material for their ongoing conversations with you.
- recommend that you remain in the process but wait to be made a Candidate. This would be in the case where the COM has some serious concerns about what has taken place during the first part of your formation, or about your spiritual or emotional health. If the COM asks you to wait before being made a Candidate, it will make specific recommendations to the Bishop about what it would like to see you do to address these concerns.
- recommend that you not be made a Candidate and be removed from the process. This would only happen in the case of critically serious concerns about your overall physical, mental, or spiritual health or the health of your vocation. While rare, this is a possibility, although the COM is committed to creating a process of formation where each Postulant has the support he or she needs to be successful in this process of formation. The process is designed so that any grave concerns such as these would be addressed in multiple contexts, and would not likely be the result of only one interview.

## **Final Academic Evaluation**

For those who are in formation for the diaconate, this final evaluation takes the form of the preparation of a portfolio which gathers together work from all three years of the formation process. Portfolios are to evaluate your proficiency in the five canonical areas:

- The Holy Scriptures, theology, and the tradition of the Church
- Diakonia and the diaconate
- Human awareness and understanding
- Spiritual development and discipline
- Practical training and experience

Portfolios are reviewed by a team of people from the diocese, appointed by a Diocesan Archdeacon, and including the COM Shepherd. You will receive more information from the Archdeacon about how these portfolios are to be created and how they will be evaluated.

## **Pre-Ordination Interviews**

Pre-Ordination interviews take place in the final months before your ordination. In order to apply for ordination, you should, after speaking with the Canon for Transition, write a letter to the Bishop which includes:

- a formal request to be ordained
- the dates of your admissions to Postulancy and Candidacy
- a letter of support by your sponsoring parish, which needs to include the vestry endorsement form, to be signed by two-thirds of the vestry

These interviews provide a chance to discuss the final evaluations of your academic work and formation.

Following these interviews, the COM will write a letter to the Bishop with its recommendation about whether or not you should be ordained. As with the application for Candidacy, in response to this interview, the COM may:

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COM Shepherd and the Office of Transitions especially need to hear from you in order to advocate for you as you go through this process. This is especially true if you find that you are facing a particular problem or obstacle – those moments are the time to reach out, not to try to hide the problem or fix it on your own.

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**DISCERNMENT FOR HOLY ORDERS  
IN THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA**

*Guide to Writing a Spiritual Autobiography*

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**The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania**

**COMMISSION ON MINISTRY**



# COMMISSION ON MINISTRY

## A Guide for Writing a Spiritual Autobiography

A spiritual autobiography is the story of significant events, people, and places that have influenced your relationship with God. Here are some suggested formats a spiritual autobiography might use.

### Stepping Stones

A stepping stone is a word or brief phrase that describes a significant point or period along the road of life – for example, “early childhood,” “starting a family,” “starting a profession,” “parenting,” “lost in the wilderness,” or “retirement.” Stepping stones show a continuity of development despite the apparent shifting of direction along the way.

To use this technique for writing your spiritual autobiography, follow these steps:

- Quietly sit and think about the course of your life. On a blank page, start with the first stepping stone: “I was born . . .” Describe key people and events of the early part of your life.
- Continue writing about the remaining stepping stones until you reach the present day. Identify no more than a dozen stepping stones from the beginning of life until now.
- Once you are done, read over what you have written, sensing the flow of your life with its ups and downs. Then write a brief paragraph describing your life as a whole.
- To explore your life more fully, go back over each stepping stone, expanding what you have written to include the tone and atmosphere of that period, the significant persons in your life and your relationship with them at that time, your social attitudes, beliefs, and loyalties. Describe who and what inspired you: What books influenced you? Who were the “God bearers” in your life? The more you add to each stepping stone, the deeper your reflection will be.
- With family or friends, share as much of what you have written as you are comfortable with.

### (Between the Stepping Stones – Times of Transition)

This method asks us to look at endings and beginnings and the time between significant points of movement in our lives. The time between learning about pregnancy and the birth of a baby; the time between the loss of a spouse or another loved one and regaining your footing and moving on; the time between learning of an impending move of household and feeling comfortable in a new community; children “leaving the nest”; retirement – or other periods which you see as “in-betweens.” It is about change.

Call up several times of change in your life and spend some time reflecting on the transition periods that accompanied these changes. Use the definitions below to help sort out what was going on within you and in the world around you during these times. Record your actions and feelings.

Here are some definitions to help you with this format:

*Transition* – Passage from one place, state, or stage of development to another. This is a three part psychological process.

*The “Ending Phase”* – letting go of the old situation or identity. Giving up the familiar and valued. May be accompanied by feelings of disillusionment, disorientation and/or betrayal.

*The “Neutral Zone Phase”* – exploring the unknown territory between the past and the future – limbo, emptiness, or wilderness. An interim period between one orientation that is no longer appropriate and another that does not yet exist. Creativity and new identity are born of this phase.

*The “Beginning Phase”* – creating and moving toward a new vision and plan. A time of rebirth. An inner realignment. “Making lemonade from lemons.” Grieving is near completion and the chaos of the unknown has been endured long enough for something new to appear. Hope and energy are renewed, new possibilities are defined.

- Identify: What was happening? Was it accidental or intentional? A result of your actions or the actions of others? What did you bring with you from the past? What did you leave in the past? What did you learn about yourself? Others? The world? God? Explore your feelings, fears, and hopes.
- Select and describe one or several periods of transition in your spiritual autobiography.

You may also find that you need to create your own phases and definitions to fit the shape of your own life’s story. You are encouraged to do so – to make this project truly your own.

## **Time Lines**

Another way to examine your personal story is to examine how it weaves itself with the personal stories of others and the larger history of our times.

You can use this method for your individual story or as a way of illustrating the joint story of a family or group.

Follow these steps:

- Draw two parallel lines, one for historical events and one for personal events.
- On the far left put the date of your birth and at the far right, today’s date. You may find it helpful to divide the lines into decades.

- On the historical line mark major historical milestones like the beginning or end of a war, assassination of an important figure, or the tragedy of 9/11.
- On the personal line, identify significant events in your life.
- Examine the time line. Consider questions like:
  - How did historical events impact personal events?
  - Where was God present in those events?
  - Where did you find grace and where was grace denied?

## **Your Life in Pictures**

A pictorial autobiography helps you “see yourself” in the context of family, friends, and the larger society around you, as well as in relationship to the Church.

Here is one way to do this:

- Begin by closing your eyes. Imagine you are holding a photo album which covers your whole life. The first picture shows the day of your birth, and the last one shows you entering this room.
- In your mind turn the pages and look at the pictures of your life. For example, see yourself as a child with your parents, in your home or your school, with a favorite teacher, at your high school or college graduation. Then see yourself as an adult, with friends, spouse, and children, at your work place, in your church, and at special moments of celebration.
- Focus on the people who influenced your spiritual growth – grandparents, clergy, teachers, etc. – and the events that had a major impact on shaping who you are today. Silently give thanks for these memories.
- Produce a pictorial record of your life on a piece of paper or a poster, or in a journal. You can do this by creating an artistic representation of your life (e.g., drawing, painting, computer graphics), or by using old photographs that are particularly meaningful to you.
- Use this visual representation as the basis of sharing your spiritual journey with your family or friends. Consider answering these questions as you describe your journey.
  - Where did you find community and communion, solace and support?
  - What role has the Church played in your life?
  - How did you reach out to others and others reach out to you?
  - What form did prayer take, and what did it mean to you and those around you?

## **Your Personal Histories**

You do not have one history but many – no single expression exhausts everything you have experienced. Each telling of your history reveals something different.

In light of this, a way of approaching your history is from the standpoint of various themes in your life or by using different perspectives. Here are some examples:

- Your physical life: Construct a time line or write a narrative about your physical development and patterns of health, from childhood to the present. Have there been events in your physical life – serious accidents, major illnesses, etc. – that changed the trajectory of your life?
- Your life with others: Write your history from the perspective of significant people in your life. For example, you might focus on the history of a particularly important friendship, or the ups and downs of your relationship with a parent or a sibling. How have these relationships changed over the years? What have they meant to you? How do they affect your life now?
- Your intellectual history: When did you first realize that what you thought mattered? Is there a particular philosophy or set of values that has helped shape your life? What books or thinkers are particularly important to you? List thoughts and events that capture the main ideas of your intellectual history. What influence did these have on your spiritual growth?
- History of play: How have you used your leisure? What kinds of games did you play when you were younger, and what do you play now? Is there a hobby or sport that has been particularly important to you? Has it played a role in your spiritual development, and if so, how? How have you maintained a healthy balance between work and play in your life?

After you have approached your personal history in these or other ways, step back and look at the overall picture they give you of your life. Record any insights, ideas, learnings, and reactions.

This material has been adapted from the Church of the Holy Comforter, in Vienna, VA,  
and from the Diocese of the Rio Grande

**DISCERNMENT FOR HOLY ORDERS  
IN THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA**

*Responding to God's Call:  
A Handbook for the Parish in  
Discernment*

**The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania**  
*Parish Discernment Group Handbook*

*This guide has been designed to help Sponsoring Priests and Parishes in the formation, preparation, and implementation of Parish Discernment Groups (PDG). New materials have been supplemented with information gathered from previously published diocesan handbooks and from guides published by other dioceses, including the Episcopal Diocese of Washington.*

*Material in this handbook was compiled by: Eugenie Dieck, the Rev'd Betsy Ivey, the Rev'd Pam Nesbit, and the Rev'd Erika Takacs. It builds upon work done by Carol Chamberlain, Ruth Hindley, The Rev'd Bud Holland, Susan Mayer, Tad Meyer, and Candace Woessner*

February 2012  
adapted September 2017

## A Guide for Parish Discernment Groups

*Send out your light and your truth, that they may lead me, and bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling...*

Psalm 43.3

*O God, you led your holy apostles to ordain ministers in every place:  
Grant that your Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,  
may choose suitable persons for the ministry of Word and Sacrament,  
and may uphold them in their work for the extension of your kingdom;  
through him who is the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*  
Book of Common Prayer, p. 256, *For the Ministry (Ember Days)*, II *For the choice of fit persons for the ministry*

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The Parish Discernment Group is at the heart of a person's discernment of a call to the ordained ministry. It is within the common life of the parish that each of us finds the space, encouragement, and courage to hear the various ways that God is calling us to serve. The work of the Parish Discernment Group is to create this same kind of holy space and loving support for the discernment of ministry for one of your members. This work, in turn, provides the opportunity for prayer and holy discernment for each member of the group. You are, in the words of the writer of the letter to the Ephesians, working "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ."

May God bless you in this important work.

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### *What are Parish Discernment Groups?*

Ministry happens in community, and so it naturally follows that the call to ministry comes also through the community. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are committed through our Baptismal Covenant to support one another in ministry, whatever form that ministry takes. Therefore, it makes sense to begin the discernment of call within the community of the person being called, where he or she is well-known. The work of a Parish Discernment Group (PDG) is to aid in discerning the call to ministry of a member of that community.

The Individual, along with the members of his or her home parish, is looking to answer the fundamental question of whether ordination is the form his or her Christian ministry should take. Answering this question requires a time of exploration, reflection, and evaluation. The role of the PDG is to assist in the consideration of the Individual's call to ministry and to determine whether this call is to a lay or ordained ministry. The Individual and the PDG come together in these meetings to listen carefully for God's guidance and to prayerfully delve into the crucial questions of call and vocation, the Individual's potential for leadership, and his or her spiritual, emotional, physical, and personal readiness to pursue the path to ordination.

While this work is certainly focused on the Individual in discernment, the work of the PDG has the potential to be mutually beneficial for all involved. PDG members should, through their prayer and study, learn more about the ministries of the Church as well as their own gifts for ministry. This process also provides a means to carry the discussion about ministry into the larger parish community. While the specific content of the PDG's conversations with the Individual is strictly confidential, the discernment process as a whole can serve as a training course in ministry and faith development for the entire parish.

The members of the PDG are asked to enter into a special relationship with the Individual on behalf of the parish and the larger church. This requires a commitment of time and energy, a willingness to share of themselves, and the courage to lovingly ask honest and sometimes challenging questions of one another. This kind of commitment calls for deep humility and a readiness to be open and candid - to speak truth with love - in the context of a sacred, caring community.

### *Who should serve in a Parish Discernment Group?*

If you have been asked to serve on a PDG, your priest has seen in you the capacity for this kind of deep spiritual work. Your willingness to serve is an act of faith and generosity, and you have demonstrated unique gifts to offer this process. While we all have gifts to offer in the Kingdom of God, not everyone is best suited for this kind of intense spiritual work. Some basic qualifications for this ministry are:

- being a follower of Jesus Christ who manifests a commitment to prayer and to faithful discipleship in his or her own life
- knowing a sense of one's own ministry and vocation
- being well-known and trusted by the congregation
- having knowledge and experience of the Anglican tradition
- being willing to make a sustained commitment to prayer and to the discernment process

The Sponsoring Priest, in consultation with the church wardens or vestry, will appoint from six to eight members of the congregation to the PDG, who serve at the priest's discretion.

Membership on the PDG should include:

- The Individual in discernment.
- The Companion - a member of the faith community who agrees to walk with the Individual through the discernment process, serving as spiritual friend and guide. This person should be one who can both support and challenge the Individual and therefore needs to be spiritually mature and self-aware. The Companion should have been a member of the faith community for at least one year.
- A vestry member - this person represents the formal lay leadership of the parish and will be responsible for reporting back to the vestry, along with the Sponsoring Priest, when their approval is required.
- Two or three members of the faith community - these members should represent



the breadth and diversity of the community itself. If possible, they should include members who know the individual as well as those who do not.

Membership of the PDG should reflect the diversity of the congregation in terms of sex, age, race, and life circumstances. If possible, it should include persons who do not know the Individual, as well as persons who do. It is strongly recommended that members of the PDG attend Diocesan Antiracism Training.

Since the Sponsoring Priest remains the pastor to both the PDG and the Individual, it is strongly suggested that he or she not be present at the sessions; however, the Sponsoring Priest will be included in the committee's first gathering.

The Convenor is a member of the PDG whose primary task is to help facilitate the work of the committee. The responsibilities of the Convenor are to:

- set the time and location of the meetings
- work to create a safe and confidential environment for discussion
- help to maintain the continuity of discussion from meeting to meeting
- make sure that all members have an opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions

The PDG will select a Convenor at their first gathering. While the entire Group is responsible for completing the final report, it is the Convenor who then presents this report to the Sponsoring Priest and Vestry.

### *How does the Parish Discernment Group work?*

The primary work of the PDG members is holy listening. During the PDG's meetings, the group will be gathering information, forming impressions, and searching within themselves regarding their perceptions of the Individual's call; all of this work is grounded in a quality of holy receptivity both to what each person says as well as to what God is speaking into the moment. In order to create this atmosphere of prayerful holiness, the PDG will undergo some serious, sacred work of preparation in order to develop a sense of trust and mutual understanding. The PDG's work is definitely much more than a matchmaking process in which the Individual's gifts are compared with those needed for a particular ministry. This is work that touches on the divine, work that is done with minds and hearts in prayer, open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is good to keep in mind that the PDG discernment process is only the beginning of the effort to assist the Individual and the diocese in learning about God's call for this person. Since

this kind of ministry discernment may be new to some members of the group, the PDG sessions may be somewhat of a learning experience for those who are involved. At times, there may even be a feeling of not knowing what to do. It is important to listen for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to reach out for help if needed. The PDG's report is of great value in the discernment process because of its unique perspective; however, this report is not the only factor which determines whether or not the Individual moves forward in the process. Discernment is accomplished in community, and this community includes not only your particular parish but also the community of the Diocese of Pennsylvania.

As the PDG begins to engage in conversation, members need to be guided by their own discerning hearts. If any member feels uneasy about the process at any stage, he or she should share those feelings with the group, voicing concerns in an honest and caring manner. At times, it may be beneficial to seek the guidance of the Sponsoring Priest or a representative from the advisory body to the Bishop, the COM. Hopefully, by using all the resources available, the PDG will be able to conduct its work in a mutually supportive, healthy atmosphere and make its recommendation without reservation.

#### *How does the PDG work with the COM?*

As mentioned earlier, the COM is an advisory body to the Bishop of the Diocese of Pennsylvania. The Committee advises the Bishop on the suitability of Individuals, Postulants, and Candidates for ordination to the priesthood and to the diaconate. In carrying out that charge, the COM considers carefully the work and report of the PDG; hence it is very important that a strong and open relationship exist between these two bodies of discernment. The report of the PDG is included in the Individual's file and is read and discussed by all members of the COM.

When a PDG is formed, a member of the COM will join with the group at the PDG's initial meeting, sharing with them some thoughts about the discernment process and explaining the work of the COM and its relationship with the PDG and the Bishop. That person will become the liaison between the PDG and the COM and will be available to answer any questions about the process which emerge as the committee engages in its work. This person may also be tasked, with the Bishop's approval, to report back to the PDG about the COM's deliberations if the Individual is eventually invited to attend the Bishop's Discernment Retreats; however, it should be noted that some of those deliberations may be confidential. The COM and the offices of the diocese will do everything possible to be open, communicative, and helpful during this discernment process.

#### *And how does the PDG work with the Sponsoring Priest?*

The Sponsoring Priest has already been meeting with the Individual for some time before he or she moves to appoint a PDG. If a PDG is currently being formed, it means that the Sponsoring Priest has seen the beginning signs of a call to ordained ministry and feels confident the PDG would be a helpful tool in further discernment for the Individual. PDG's are appointed by the Sponsoring Priest, with Vestry concurrence and in conversation with the Individual. The

Sponsoring Priest should attend the first meeting along with the representative from the COM. The PDG should then meet alone with the Individual during the discernment phase of their work together.

At the conclusion of their meetings with the Individual, the PDG completes a report of its observations and recommendations and sends that report to the Sponsoring Priest and Vestry. It is important that whatever the recommendations are with regard to lay ministry, the diaconate or the priesthood, the Individual be affirmed and supported as one who has a calling to ministry through baptism and who is valued as a person and child of God.

The Sponsoring Priest and the Vestry then make a decision as to whether or not to recommend the Individual for Postulancy for the diaconate or for the priesthood. They make this decision prayerfully based on the report of the PDG and their own observations. If they wish to recommend the Individual for Postulancy, they complete the diocesan form for that purpose and send it to the Bishop. At this point, the Individual will officially become a Nominee. He or she will be asked to complete additional paperwork for the Diocese and will be invited to attend the diocesan Bishop's Discernment Retreats.

It may be that through the parish discernment process the Individual has received some clarity that he or she is not called to ordained ministry. Here the PDG can be very helpful in working with the person to look at the next steps he or she might take in deepening his or her lay ministry. In this case, the PDG writes a short report to the Sponsoring Priest and Vestry about its work with the Individual.

### *How can I best prepare for service on the PDG?*

The PDG is, first and foremost, grounded in prayer. There are many instances throughout Holy Scripture of individuals engaging in prayer, fasting, and reflection prior to undertaking a task. These are important attitudes and practices to cultivate, both at the beginning and throughout this ministry of discernment. Each member of the PDG should have a copy of this manual as well as *Responding to God's Call: First Steps*. They should read both of these documents in advance of the first meeting in order to be thoroughly familiar with their contents. In addition, members may be asked to read other materials related to vocation, some of which are listed in a Bibliography for Discernment, which can be found on the diocesan website. It may also be helpful to interview other lay and ordained ministers in the Diocese to broaden the members' understanding of what deacons, priests, and committed lay persons do in the daily context of ministry.

The bulk of preparation for the work of the PDG, outside of the reading of these materials, will be accomplished in the first meeting. This meeting will be led by a representative of the COM. He or she will discuss practical issues of forming the group as well as provide guidance for the deep work of discernment. He or she will also help the members of the PDG to see their place in the larger work of discernment, particularly in how the PDG relates to the COM and to the Sponsoring Priest of their parish.

### *What do the meetings of the PDG look like?*

The PDG process should include at least nine meetings, the contents of which are detailed later in this handbook. The outline of PDG meetings (included below) can be used as a guide in establishing a basic format for the work of each gathering. Meetings need to be long enough to allow time for the group to review, reunite, refresh their memories about the past discussions, and move ahead in its exploration of pertinent issues. In addition, ten to fifteen minutes at the end of each session should be spent in reflection. This process requires a minimum of two hours and more likely three hours to explore issues and experiences to the degree in which feelings can be expressed.

The PDG is asked to meet every two to four weeks until these meetings are completed. The process should feel spacious, and each person should have enough time between meetings for prayer and contemplation of the topics at hand. There is no need to rush; take the time that you need to have these conversations together and to have them well. At the same time, having the meetings close enough together to keep a sense of forward momentum and consistency is also important. It is recommended that the process take somewhere between 4 and 9 months.

Because of the personal nature of the PDG discussions, it is important to establish a climate of acceptance and trust. All members need to know that whatever they say will be honored and held in strict confidence within the group, that they will not be criticized or judged, and that there will be no advice offered to solve perceived problems. Patient, careful listening will greatly aid the process of sharing and will encourage risk taking in expressing feelings. Questions can be asked for clarity but should not be asked out of curiosity or in the manner of an interrogation. A sense of Christian love and learning is vital if these meetings are to be productive for all concerned. Such an open and accepting climate also allows room for the Holy Spirit to enter and work in each person involved. It is strongly recommended that each PDG adopt a Group Covenant which details the way the group will interact with each other both inside and outside the meeting space. Examples of such a covenant are included in Appendix A of this document.

For the sake of continuity, it is most helpful if each member can attend every session. When one member is absent, that person not only misses the discussion, but the group is weakened by the loss of that point of view. The group should take time to plan sessions in advance to ensure as much as is practical that all members can attend. If a member is unable to attend a session, the Convenor should be notified and a decision made as to whether to reschedule the session for another date.

Many PDGs have found it helpful to establish a structure for their meetings that includes the following elements: Opening Prayer, Engagement, Status Update, Discussion of Content, Reflection, Closing Prayer, and Evaluation. These elements are explained below.

#### *Opening Prayer (3-5 minutes each)*

Beginning with prayer helps to set the focus on God's presence within the group and throughout the entire process. Placing the group into God's hands and submitting to the guidance of the Holy Spirit requires intentional effort.

Prayers can include thanksgivings and intercessions as well as a humble invocation of the Holy Spirit. The responsibility for praying during meetings should be shared as much as possible among the group. The group may also consider asking the person appointed to pray at the beginning of the meeting to intentionally continue to pray for the duration of the meeting. This person may also be tasked with pausing or interrupting the meeting for a moment of prayer should that feel helpful or necessary.

#### *Engagement (15 minutes)*

Following the opening prayer, the group can then participate in a brief exercise that will help to collect the individual members from the diversity of their separate lives to the common purpose of the PDG. This may be a simple check-in which connects what is happening in each person's life with an awareness of God's grace, a statement of gratitude and/ or prayer needs, or other kinds of conversations. 15 minutes may seem like a lot of time, but with at least seven people in the group, this time will go quickly! Sharing should be concise, but there should be enough time for each person to share and connect to the conversation. This may also be a time to reflect on the scripture passage suggested for each meeting. What words or phrases stick out to the listener? Where does the scripture passage touch each person's life? How might God be speaking to them in those holy words?

#### *Status Update (3-5 minutes)*

Before entering into discussion, it is usually helpful for the Convener to review the progress to date, to receive any reports that the group may have assigned, and briefly to state the goals for the current session. It is suggested that, after the second meeting, this time conclude with the reading aloud of the ordination vows for the particular order (diaconate or priesthood) about which the Individual and the PDG are in discernment.

#### *Meeting Format and Content (60 minutes)*

This time is the very the heart of the matter. This discussion should include a period of reflection on the biblical verses appointed for the meeting, as well as on the Individual's writing sample or other project, which all should have had a chance to read before the meeting. These two points should lead naturally into a discussion of the meeting's topic - outlined for each meeting below, with appropriate questions for conversation. You may find that you need a break in the middle of this discussion - if you do, take one! You'll all be better contributors if you have a chance for a bit of rest and refreshment.

#### *Reflection (15 minutes)*

Thoughtful group reflection is an important part of each session. Near the end of the meeting, take time to review - in the presence of the Individual - the highlights of what was discussed and shared. It may be helpful to list on newsprint what helped or hindered the meeting, how the meeting format for that day was or was not useful, what subject areas need to be explored further, and what additional resources or information may need to be gathered for the next meeting. Ask yourselves specific questions about the meeting itself.

How did it go? Was everyone engaged? Were people upholding the Group Covenant? Are there any procedural elements to be considered before the next meeting? What should the group be praying about in the coming days? What should be the goals for the next session?

*Closing Prayer* (3-5 minutes)

The person appointed to pray for the meeting offers a prayer of thanksgiving and blessing as the group travels home and continues their work. A holy and intentional silence may also be appropriate. At the conclusion of this prayer, the Individual is dismissed.

*Evaluation* (15 minutes)

It is recommended that at least fifteen minutes be allotted at the end of each session for the PDG to share their impressions and continue their evaluation of the Individual's call on an ongoing basis. In each working session of the PDG (excluding the first session), the group will be provided with questions members should answer together. You will find these questions listed by meeting topic at the end of this document in the final evaluation form.

The last fifteen minutes of each meeting should be a chance for the PDG, outside of the presence of the Individual, to offer its thoughts in answer to this question. One person should be tasked to be the recorder of these thoughts and to write a response on behalf of the entire group. These responses will be collated by the Convenor at the end of the PDG's work into the final report that is sent to the Sponsoring Priest and the COM.

### **Content for PDG Sessions**

The following topics for the nine meetings of the PDG are provided for you to use as a guide. Your group may find that you need to make adjustments to this schedule or to include additional topics for conversation. Please feel free to be flexible if it helps all parties to discern God's call more clearly. The hope is that each PDG will include *at least* these many points of conversation for their time together.

### **Meeting 1 PDG Initial Meeting**

*Includes:* all PDG members, the Individual, the Individual's spouse or partner, the

Sponsoring Priest, and a representative from the COM

*Scripture for the Day:* Isaiah 43:1-4a or Isaiah 42:1-9

*Assignment:* All read this handbook, as well as *Responding to God's Call: First Steps* from the diocese

This initial meeting is an opportunity for the members of the PDG to get to know one another, as well as to hear from the diocese directly about the hopes and expectations for their work. The group should take the time to reflect on the scripture for the day, to share a little bit about themselves (a deeper spiritual sharing will come later), and to ask questions of the representative of the COM, particularly about the PDG's role in the discernment process and its relationship with the COM and with the Sponsoring Priest and Vestry. After this meeting, the PDG will meet on its own, without the COM representative or the Sponsoring Priest, so this meeting is the best opportunity to clarify procedures and goals.

This meeting is also an important time for the PDG to get to meet the Individual's spouse or partner. This person will be invited to join the Individual at a later meeting, so introducing each member to him or her now will allow for greater ease and openness at that later, important meeting. Please do all you can to make him or her feel valued and like the vital part of the process that he or she is.

At some point during this first meeting, the Sponsoring Priest will commission the PDG for its important and holy work. After this, the Sponsoring Priest and COM representative will leave the meeting. The remaining time should be spent on the following:

- Exploring the members' understanding of ordained ministry, including the reading of the ordination vows found in the *Book of Common Prayer* (pages 531-532 for the priesthood, pages 543-544 for the diaconate).
- Discussing the document *Responding to God's Call: First Steps*
- Discussing the strengths that each member brings to this committee's work. This will give the PDG information on how to structure its work, allow members to get to know one another, and recognize each individual's contribution to this ministry.
- Discussing the questions or growing edges each member brings to this committee's work. An honest exploration of each member's questions or even biases will enable the committee to recognize if these ever begin to interfere with the process of discernment.

This meeting also provides an opportunity for the PDG to create a Group Covenant. Models for this covenant are included in Appendix A of this handbook. These covenants can be somewhat flexible, but it is important that they include guidelines for confidentiality and procedures to help each person in the group contribute to the conversation. It is also very important that each member of the PDG agree to this covenant, either by voice or in writing. Accountability and shared responsibility is only possible if each member believes that the covenant is appropriate and worthwhile.

During this meeting the PDG should decide upon a Convenor. This person is responsible for communicating meeting times and changes as well as collating the meeting's reports into the group's final report to the Sponsoring Priest and Vestry. The group may also wish to decide to appoint a timekeeper for each upcoming meeting, either ahead of time or at the beginning of each meeting. This prevents the entire group from feeling responsible for watching the clock! The group should also discuss the question of food during meetings - do you want to provide snacks? If so, how will you divide this responsibility? If you do provide food, it is recommended that you take time for a break mid-meeting so that you can both enjoy your fellowship and also be entirely focused on the conversation when it is happening.

By the end of this meeting, the group should have scheduled Meeting 2 and should feel well-prepared for their work together. The COM and the Sponsoring Priest are, of course, always available should the PDG feel like it needs help in the weeks and months to come, but for the most part, after this meeting, the PDG functions on its own.

## **Meeting 2     Vocation and Spiritual Stories**

*Includes:* all PDG members and the Individual in discernment

*Scripture for the Day:* Psalm 139: 1-18

*Assignment for the Individual:* Write your own spiritual autobiography

This meeting should be a time for each member of the PDG, including the Individual, to share his or her spiritual story. You can do this in several ways. You can simply give each member a certain amount of time to talk about their life in spiritual terms, always answering the question of where God was in their lives during seminal moments or decision points. You can also invite each member (including the Individual) to make two timelines of his or her life. The first includes major life events

in his or her personal and professional life, including peaks, valleys, and plateaus, from birth until the present moment. The second timeline, which is superimposed over the first, is a spiritual timeline, representing his or her life with God. When have you felt closest to God? When have you felt distant or resistant to God? There are several more examples of how to create a spiritual autobiography in the document *Guide for Writing a Spiritual Autobiography*, which can be found on the diocesan website.

Whichever model is chosen, the group should have time to discuss the relationships they are seeing in their own lives and in others. What calls are being seen? What ministries are being lived out?

Where do they see God's grace in each other lives or in their own?

No one in the group needs to share anything that makes him or her uncomfortable, but all are encouraged to share as much as they can about how they perceive God to have been active in their own lives.



*Note:* While this is the only meeting entitled "Spiritual Stories," this kind of story-sharing can be an important way of engaging in conversation in all of the following meetings. If, for example, a member is trying to get at an understanding of leadership styles, he or she may share an experience from his or her own life that illustrates the point. It is the hope that these meetings will be an opportunity for sustained and continuing sharing of stories for all of the members.

### **Meeting 3     The Nature of Christian Ministry**

*Includes:* all PDG members and the Individual in discernment

*Scripture for the Day:* John 13: 1-7, 12-15 or Acts 6:1-6 (diaconate)

John 21: 15-19 (priesthood)

*Assignment for the Individual:* Write a two-page paper on your understanding of the orders of Christian ministry. To what order of ministry do you think you might be called? Why? What gifts do you have to bring to this ministry?

or

Imagine that you are working in a parish that has recently called a new deacon. Write a letter to your parish explaining the role of this person within the congregation. In your letter, imagine that you are representing the order of ministry to which you feel called, *e.g.* if you are in discernment for the priesthood, write the letter as if you were the rector inviting a new deacon into the congregation, and if you are in discernment for the diaconate, write the letter as if you were introducing yourself to the congregation for the first time. Be specific about the particular vocation of the deacon as it relates to both the priesthood and to the ministry of the laity.

Remembering their own stories and the fact that, by virtue of our baptisms, we are all called to Christian ministry, the members of the PDG should begin by discussing the four-fold ministry of the Church. This is a good opportunity to read through some sections of the *Book of Common Prayer*, including the Catechism (p. 845.D) and the ordination vows (pages 531 -532 for the priesthood, pages 543-544 for the diaconate). The conversation should then focus on what gifts the Individual brings to ministry, and what vision for ministry the Individual has in mind.

#### *Suggested Questions*

- If a newcomer to the Church asked you about Christian ministry, how would you describe it? How would you describe the ministry of the whole Body of Christ? How would you describe the differences between the ministries of lay persons, deacons, and priests? How have you seen those differences lived out

in your own experience?

- What gifts do you have for ministry? Describe an instance where those gifts were put to use in the Church. Were they used well? Why or why not? Tell us how your gifts were developed in this parish. What gifts do you see in the other people in the PDG?
- What other vocations are you living out in your life? Are you called to teach, or to be a spouse or a parent? How do you know this is a true vocation?
- Give an example of how you live out your baptismal ministry currently. Why would ordination be a truer representation of your gifts for ministry? What could you do as a priest or deacon that you cannot do as a lay minister, and why would that matter to you, the Church, and to God?
- Tell us the story of your call. When did it start? Who was involved in it or influenced it? What important conversation partners have you had (including books or passages from scripture).

#### *Things to Think About*

- Can the Individual talk about the ordained ministry in a clear and compelling way? How does he or she understand the unique qualities of each ministry? What does he or she still have to learn?
- What experiences have been most meaningful to this Individual in his or her vocational life so far? What do they tell you about his or her call?
- What do you hear in the Individual's story? Does he or she talk easily about his or her relationship with Jesus Christ and with God's place in his or her call?
- How does the Individual articulate his or her call? With joy? Hesitation? Reluctance? Passion?

At the conclusion of this meeting, the group should co firm the order for which they think the Individual is in discernment: the priesthood or the diaconate. The group should then commit to reading the examination and ordination vows for that order together at each of the following meetings. This does not, however, mean that the question of other kinds of calls cannot still be addressed. In fact, this is one of the chief tasks of the PDG - to determine not only *if* the Individual is called, but *to which* order of ministry he or she is called. There may be the discovery during the course of your meetings that the Individual is actually called to a different order. If at some point it becomes clear that the Individual is truly called to be a deacon instead of a priest or vice versa, the group should adjust their work together accordingly.

## **Meeting 4    Spirituality and Faith**

*Includes:* all PDG members and the Individual in discernment

*Scripture for the Day:* Isaiah 55:6 -11; Philippians 4:4-9; or Gal 2:16-21

*Assignment for the Individual:* Write your own Rule of Life. What are the practices you employ now for discipline and growth in your life of faith? If you do not already have a Rule of Life, begin to craft what that Rule needs to be as you move forward from this point in the process.

or

Write a sermon for your congregation on the importance of having a Rule of Life. What scripture passages would this sermon use as its foundation? What would you encourage your congregants to consider as they craft a Rule of Life, and how would you recommend they go about doing so? What are the parameters of such a rule for us as disciples of Jesus Christ?

The first and most important criterion in discernment of ministry is the faith of the Individual. Those who are considering ordination must love God with heart, mind, and soul, and who know and love the person of Jesus Christ and seek to make him known. There are many ways the PDG can gain a sense of the depth of the Individual's faith life and discipleship. Remember, the group has already shared deep spiritual stories in the second meeting. At this meeting, the group may wish to have a discussion of each member's current faith practices. The group will also gain a deep sense of the integration of the Individual's faith life from the way he or she answers other questions. For example, if the Individual brings a discussion of discipleship, his or her prayer life, or another such reference into the discussion, it may speak just as loudly as the direct answers to questions asked about spirituality.

#### *Suggested Questions*

- Talk about your Rule of Life. How has it changed? Why is it important for you? Tell us about a time when you felt your Rule supporting and transforming your life.
- Imagine that someone new to the church asked you who Jesus is. What would you say? Be specific and personal in your response.
- Tell us about your relationship with the Book of Common Prayer. How do you use it in your prayer life? Tell us of a time when you found the BCP to be uplifting, or challenging, or both.
- How often do you read the Bible? How do you read the Bible? How would you describe the Bible and its place in the Church's life? What does the Bible have to offer to people who are non-church-goers?
- What questions do you still have about your faith? About Jesus? About the Church? What do you do with these questions?
- Tell us about your work with your Spiritual Director. Tell us, as much as you are able, of a time when that work was transformative in your relationship to yourself, your neighbors, or God.

#### *Things to Think About*

- How well does the Individual articulate an understanding of the faith

expressed in Scripture and the Book of Common Prayer? (See the Catechism, BCP p.845.1l).

- What evidence of having a personal relationship with God do all the members of the PDG give in word and deed? ...does the Individual give in word and deed?
- Has the Individual done any teaching in the parish? If so, how well did this teaching instruct and inspire other parishioners?
- What has each member, including the Individual, established as his or her Rule of Life and how successfully is it followed? What benefits are derived from it?
- What did you hear the Individual say about his or her continuing questioning, searching, and probing the mysteries of the faith?
- How do the Individual's specific prayer practices shape his or her life? How would they support him or her in a life of ordained ministry?
- How does the Individual relate to his or her spiritual director? How is this practice supporting his or her discernment?

## **Meeting 5      Growth and Maturity**

*Includes:* all PDG members and the Individual in discernment

*Scripture for the Day:* Philippians 2:1-8

*Assignment for the Individual:* Write a two-page paper on growth in your life. How do you grow intellectually? How do you grow spiritually? What are the challenges to your growth in either of these areas? Include an example of a period in your life when you saw clear growth of some kind in yourself.

or

Write a poem or a song describing an important period of growth in your life. What were the circumstances that led to the growth? How did that period feel? Where did you feel Christ walking beside you during that time?

The ordination process demands growth in multiple areas of a person's life - spiritual, intellectual, and emotional. This meeting is intended to get at the potential for growth that lies within the Individual in all of these realms.

Formation for ordination includes graduate level education that requires the ability to understand and analyze complex ideas, speak articulately, write clearly, and be open to new concepts. The ordained priest or deacon must have a lifelong commitment to learning and personal growth.

Growth in the ordination process, of course, is not limited to intellectual growth. The process of forming priests and deacons should also lead to profound personal, emotional, and spiritual growth. This process of intentional discernment should help members of the PDG and the

Individual become more of who they were created to be - mature, self-differentiated children of God who are aware of their strengths and their challenges and also of what they need in their lives to support their work, pray, and play. Remember, your work here is not to analyze the Individual in a clinical way, but simply to consider how his or her character, maturity, and integrity lends itself to life as an ordained person in the Church.

### *Suggested Questions*

- Tell us about your intellectual life. Do you enjoy writing? Reading? Speaking in public? Describe an experience of academic work that has been particularly rewarding or challenging for you.
- Are you looking forward to seminary or other coursework in pursuit of ordination? Why or why not? What hopes do you have for this work?
- Tell us of a recent time when you learned something important about yourself. How did this realization occur? What impact did it have on your life?
- In what areas - intellectual, emotional, spiritual, or other - do you hope to grow in the coming years? Why? What impact would that growth have on your life as an ordained person?
- Describe a time in your life when you were under intense emotional stress. What were the circumstances? How did you handle it? How did you pray about it? What did you learn, and what mistakes did you make? Where were the places you found support during this time?
- How do you balance and integrate your work and free time now? Give us an example of when you had to make a difficult decision regarding this balance.
- How do you take care of yourself? What activities or practices feed your soul? What are the most important practices of love of self for you to take into this process of discernment?

### *Things to Think About*

- What evidence do you see for the Individual's capacity to learn?
- How well is the Individual's writing that you've seen so far able to express clear and compelling thought?
- How open is he or she to questioning, self-exploration, and reality testing? What openness have you seen during the sessions? When and how have you seen the Individual grapple with a difficult issue and emerge with a new viewpoint?
- What evidence is there of his or her continuing commitment to learning and intellectual growth?
- How have personal and spiritual growth been apparent in the Individual's life in the past? What challenges to growth has he or she experienced in the past? What challenges does he or she experience now? What inhibits the ability to grow?
- How do you see the Individual growing during the course of this discernment process? How do you see growth in each other?

- Does the Individual have a realistic view of the world or of him or her own self?
- How aware is she or he of her or his own feelings? How have you seen him or her express this understanding?
- How have you heard the Individual talk about working under pressure, dealing with stress, or managing conflicting demands?
- Does the Individual have a level of maturity and ability to adapt that is commensurate with his or her chronological age? How do you know this? What have you seen him or her do that makes you feel this way?
- Is there anything that makes you uncomfortable around this person? Is this because of your own life and history, or is it something else?

## Meeting 6      Relationships

*Includes:* all PDG members, the Individual in discernment, and the Individual's spouse or partner. Unmarried or unpartnered Individuals may choose to bring in a friend or family member to help them discuss this topic.

*Scripture for the Day:* I Corinthians 13

*Assignment for the Individual:* Write a two-page paper on how you foresee this process impacting your relationships, particularly with your spouse, but also with your friends and family of origin. What will be the blessing there? What are the challenges? What would you and your spouse need to help make this kind of transition?

or

Conduct and record a series of interviews with your spouse, partner, or other key person in your life. Ask them about the impact this discernment is having on their own identity and spirituality. What are they most excited about in this process? What do they most fear? What are they learning about themselves as they watch the Individual discern and grow? Bring the recording to the meeting, or write it up as an interview as if for a church newsletter.

If the Individual has a spouse or partner it is vitally important that the PDG meet with him or her to discern whether he or she is supportive of the Individual's pursuit of a vocation as a priest or a deacon. This should be a gentle and joyful conversation in which the spouse or partner's feelings and desires for the future of the union with the Individual are foremost.

### *Suggested Questions for the Couple*

- What gifts for ministry do you see in your spouse? How can you see your spouse or partner as a Deacon or Priest? Why?
- How do you imagine your time together will change during the ordination process? Once your spouse/ partner is ordained?
- How will your finances change because of this process?
- Are you enthusiastic about this new chapter of your lives together? Fearful? Fearfully enthusiastic?
- Are you (the Spouse or partner) an active member of your church? If so, how do you imagine your role in the church changing once your spouse or partner is ordained? If you are not an active member of your church, how do you imagine your role in your spouse or partner's church once he or she is ordained?
- What resources do you have as a couple to help you in this process? What additional resources might you need during the period of formation or early ordained ministry?
- How do you both care for each other? How do you care for yourselves? How might this practice of care change and grow in the years to come?
- If you have children, how have you seen this vocation of parenthood manifested in your lives? Is this something to which you feel called - either now or in the future? Tell us of a time when you have felt God's presence in this part of your lives.
- Outside of your primary relationship, what other relationships sustain and support you both? Give an example of a time when one of these relationships was of particular importance to you in your life.
- Are there relationships in your life that you would like to cultivate more? Tell the group of your hopes regarding these new or newly-important relationships.

If the Individual does not have a spouse or partner, it might be helpful for him or her to bring in a close friend or family member to talk about the impact of the discernment process and ordination on their relationship and on all important relationships in the Individual's life. It might also be helpful to ask the Individual questions about future relationships, including:

- Do you hope to find a romantic partner someday, or do you think you may be called to a celibate life?
- What challenges and opportunities might ordination present to meeting someone to share your life with? What questions would you have of that person when you begin dating?
- How do you order your sexual life now? How would you order your sexual life when you meet a romantic partner?
- What are your hopes for your primary relationships in the future? What would be the greatest blessing for you in this area of your life?

### *Things to Think About*

- How does the Individual talk about his or her primary relationships? How does he or she describe their importance, their challenges?
- Do you see evidence that the Individual has a pattern of healthy relationships in his or her life? Destructive ones? Has he or she demonstrated the ability to get help with relationships when needed?
- How could the pattern of this Individual's household be seen as a sign of faithful discipleship and of the presence of God?
- Are there areas of the Individual's life that you would recommend he or she speak with the Bishop about?

*Note:* It is important to remember that the PDG is not, at its heart, a therapy group. The point of these questions about relationships is simply to see how the Individual's relationships impact his or her discernment to a holy vocation. There may be elements of his or her life that are necessarily off-limits to a group like the PDG. In this case, the Individual should discuss these issues directly with his or her Sponsoring Priest or with the Bishop. It is true that the whole of the Individual's life is important when discerning a vocation to the ordained ministry; it is also true that the whole of that life might not be open to discussion with the PDG. The COM and the Office of Transitions can be helpful in this area; please feel free to call on them if necessary.

## **Meeting 7                      Leadership, Collaboration, and Communication**

*Includes:* all PDG members and the Individual in discernment

*Scripture for the Day:* Isaiah 50:4-5 or John 13:12-18

*Assignment for the Individual:* Write a two-page reflection on your leadership project in the parish. What has gone well? What felt natural? What were the challenges? What have you learned about the parish and about yourself? Include a potential evaluation tool for your project, a survey or other questionnaire that you could provide to those with whom you served.

or

Create a video presentation of your work with your leadership project. Include interviews with those with whom you served. Imagine that this is something you might put on a parish website to publicize a particular ministry or mission.

Holy leadership and the capacity for collaborative work and good communication are essential for persons entering ordained ministry. Under the Sponsoring Priest's direction, the Individual will be completing a ministry project as one of the steps in the discernment process. As the project takes shape, the PDG should reflect on this experience in the life of the Individual and



the congregation to gain additional insights into the Individual's qualifications for leadership and collaborative ministry. It will be helpful to identify the actions taken by the Individual, what leadership was demonstrated, how effective it was, other possibilities that might have been tried, and the ability of the Individual to evaluate his or her own work. Another approach to assess leadership skills might be the use of case studies with role playing to allow for the Individual to give examples of how he or she might act within a situation that a deacon or priest might realistically encounter. A critical part of good leadership is good communication. Knowing one's own communication preferences and styles is vitally important in gaining the appropriate trust and openness in communication with others. Some of the group's conversation in this meeting should be about the Individual's communication style, along with his or her gifts and challenges in this area.

### *Suggested Questions*

- Tell us about your parish leadership project. What has been the greatest joy for you in this work, and the greatest challenge? Why? What have you learned about yourself in this work? How have you experienced God in this work? Give us an example of an experience you had in this project and how it informs your understanding of yourself and of Christian leadership.
- Tell us of a time when you helped someone in your life to discern a call or a spiritual gift. How did you empower him or her to claim his or her spiritual gifts and resources?
- Tell us of the leadership styles of various people you've known or worked with. How did these styles work for you? Are they similar or different to your own style? Are they helpful or harmful to the Church? Why?
- Tell us of a time when you collaborated on a project or a ministry. What did you enjoy about that experience? What was difficult about it? How do you imagine collaborating with others when you are a deacon or a priest? What would be the same, and what would be different? Why?
- Describe a time when you had to claim your authority, in school, work, or in ministry. Was that easy for you? Challenging? What did this teach you about yourself?
- Describe a time when you had to lead in a creative or new way. What was that experience like for you?
- Describe a time when something you worked on failed. What was that experience like for you? What did you learn from that experience? Is that something you see as having value in the Church? Why or why not?

### *Things to Think About*

- How does the Individual describe making important decisions that will affect others as well as herself or himself? How will this process serve him or her well in ordained leadership? How will it be challenging?
- Does the Individual demonstrate initiative, appropriate self-confidence, enthusiasm, flexibility, and creativity?
- Have you seen evidence that he or she can motivate and inspire others?

- Is she or he aware of and at ease with a variety of leadership styles and able to use them as the situation indicates?
- How comfortable is she or he with being a person in whom authority rests? To what extent is he or she ready to claim and use that authority appropriately?
- How has her or his leadership already been evidenced in prior or current lay ministries in school, work, or church settings?
- How do other people respond to his or her leadership?
- How does she or he describe the leadership of others?
- Does the Individual express ideas clearly, both in speaking and in writing?
- What listening skills does the Individual make use of? How do I feel when he or she is listening to me?
- Can the Individual read other people's non-verbal cues accurately and tailor a response of appropriate length and complexity?
- When dealing with his or her feelings, do the Individual's physical gestures and movements (body language) match the words spoken?
- Does he or she listen thoughtfully, or does he or she sometimes interrupt, override, or attempt to verbally dominate others? Does the Individual take the time to listen to each person and respond appropriately, without regard for age or status of the person?

## Meeting 8 Final Meeting

*Include:* all PDG members and the Individual in discernment

*Scripture for the Day:* Isaiah 43:1-4a

*Assignment for the Individual:* Write a two-page paper outlining your learning from this process.

or

Create a lesson plan for an adult forum at your parish about this experience. What would be the most important things to communicate about your discernment? Where have you seen the Holy Spirit at work in this process? What has this process taught you about yourself, your parish, and the Church? Be specific, and include both your own learnings and perceptions as well as what questions you would ask the congregation to engage them in their own reflection.

This meeting should serve both as a kind of catch-all meeting as well as a time for reflection. If there are topics of discussion that you feel you need to flesh out more fully, or questions that still need to be asked, now is the time to do so. This meeting, though, should also provide you with time to reflect upon your learning. In this time together, what have you learned about

yourselves? The Church? The Individual? Take the time to discuss together your next steps moving forward- are there changes you'd like to make in your life? Do you hear the Holy Spirit calling you to something new? What is the most important thing you are taking away from this time?

This meeting should also be an opportunity for the group to discuss with the Individual how best to be involved in his or her life and ministry going forward. If the Individual is recommended for ordination, how can the PDG support him or her over the coming years? If the Individual is not recommended for ordination, how can the PDG help to continue to support his or her ministry, and possibly to help him or her discern a new kind of call? Ideally, the PDG's work does not end with these series of meetings, but continues until the Individual is settled in a new ministry and beyond.

This is also a time to celebrate! The PDG and the Individual have undertaken this important and holy work for months now, and you should take the time to say thank you to each other and to God. Enjoy this time together, and show your appreciation in the best way you know how.

## **Meeting 9 PDG Evaluation Meeting**

*Includes:* all PDG members, without the Individual

*Scripture for the Day:* I Corinthians 12:4-13 or Romans 12:3-11

*Assignment for the PDG:* Review all of the writing that has been done so far.

The purpose of the evaluation session is to review the progress to date and come to a decision and recommendation about the call of the Individual, as well as to finalize the statements for the written report of the PDG.

After many sessions of discussion, you undoubtedly have developed a more intimate knowledge of how each PDG member views himself or herself, how each views the world and his or her relationships in it, the talents and skills each person possesses, how each contributes to and relates to the community of your parish, and especially how each person functions in relation to God. Now it is time to consider what type of ministry you feel would be appropriate for the Individual in this period in his or her life.

Ask yourselves, "Can I envision this person as a priest or a deacon? ...as *my* priest or deacon?" If you have some feeling that you would not be able to turn to the Individual as your priest or deacon, your feelings should be explored with the group. This feeling may indicate that there is some hesitation within the group about the Individual's proceeding toward ordination; however, this is not always the case. These feelings may also indicate that the Individual is in fact called to ordination but in a new and groundbreaking way. The

committee needs to be careful not to think only in terms of their particular parish ministry. There are many types of parishes, and a variety of positions for priests and deacons that are not associated with parishes.

Ask yourselves, "Do we want to present the Individual to the Vestry and Sponsoring Priest for approval?" If you have reservations, decide whether or not the areas of doubt include skills, experience, or characteristics that have a reasonable potential for improvement. If so, state your reservations clearly on the report form with your recommendation to either delay for improvement or to go ahead with the understanding that there are areas for continued work. Another very real possibility is that the person is called to serve as a lay minister. If it becomes very difficult for the members to make such a decision, or if they are still unsure of their recommendation, consult with your Sponsoring Priest and then, if necessary, with your COM liaison.

Discuss from a broad point of view what changes in your attitudes or concepts of Christian ministry have occurred in these meetings. Perhaps some PDG members would like to share these perceptions with the congregation (remembering to preserve confidentiality) through a newsletter article or a discussion at the adult forum.

A formal report to the Sponsoring Priest and Vestry should be composed in the format provided by the Diocese (included at the end of this document). It is very helpful to the Bishop, the COM, and the Standing Committee if you state the group's opinions -including reservations - clearly in your report and explain any difficulties in coming to your final decision. The report should be read to the Individual by a minimum of two people from the PDG before it is presented to the Sponsoring Priest and to the Vestry. It may be necessary to assist the Individual to recognize that the PDG understands his or her call differently than he or she envisions it. Explain how you understand the call, with both its challenges and areas of satisfaction. Reiterate the Individual's talents as they have been revealed to you and relate them to the call as you see it, and call on your Sponsoring Priest for counsel and support.

*Note:* It is possible that meetings 8 and 9 can be combined, based on the kind of follow-up needed following meeting 7. If this seems appropriate, feel free to condense these final two meetings into one, but do allow the group the extra time if needed.

### **Completing Your PDG Service**

As a member of a PDG, you have served the Individual, the parish, and the diocese in an important way. Your report will be passed on to the Commission on Ministry, the Standing Committee, and the Bishop. We hope you realize how much your service is valued by them. At the same time, we ask you to understand that your recommendation is only one

part of a broader discernment process. Others involved in the various stages also seek to discern God's will for the Individual. At times Individuals recommended by a PDG are redirected to another ministry or delayed at later stages of the discernment process. We know how disheartening it is when this happens to someone in whom you have invested a lot of time. It is especially important that you trust the process and see all those involved in discernment as persons who are continuing the discernment process you began in the parish. You can be of most help to the Individual by guiding him or her to see and consider what truth is present in the judgment of others, and by continuing to support him or her in the coming months and years.

## REPORT OF THE PARISH DISCERNMENT GROUP

**TO:** The Sponsoring Priest and Vestry of

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**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**INDIVIDUAL:**

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**PDG CONVENOR:** \_\_\_\_\_

The findings of the Parish Discernment Group (PDG) based on the questions furnished by the Diocese of Pennsylvania are as follows:

*(When answering these questions, please be as specific as possible and provide examples to support your response.)*

### Spiritual Stories

1. In what ways is the Individual able to describe his or her spiritual journey and growing relationship with Christ? Give examples.
2. How have you heard him or her speak in a personal, thoughtful, and compelling way of his or her experience of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit?

### The Nature of Christian Ministry

1. How does the Individual articulate his or her understanding of Christian Ministry? Is this understanding based in scripture, tradition, and reason? Are there areas of understanding that he or she still needs to learn? If so, does this impact his or her readiness for the ordained ministry?
2. What gifts do you perceive in this Individual for ordained ministry? What challenges?
3. Does the Individual have a pastoral and kind presence? Give examples of what kind of presence you saw in the group's meetings. How have you seen the Individual loving God, neighbor, and self?
4. Do you believe that he or she will be able to do the practical work of ministry, managing time well and prioritizing work?

### Spirituality and Faith

1. Briefly describe the Individual's prayer life and Rule of Life. How does this life prepare him or her for life as an ordained person?
2. Does the Individual display a loyalty to and love for Jesus Christ and the Church? Does he or she understand the role of holy obedience in the life of an ordained person?

### Growth and Maturity

1. Do you feel the Individual has grown during his or her experience of the PDG? If so, how?
2. At the level appropriate to his or her training, does the Individual display an adequate

intellectual grasp of theological concepts? Does he or she have the ability to express his or her faith theologically, to think reflectively, and to articulate his or her understanding within the context of the Anglican and the Episcopal tradition, given his or her formation thus far?

If there are challenges here, what might your recommendations be?

3. Is this person self-differentiated and mature enough to handle the challenges of the ordained life? Is he or she possessed of personal integrity, authenticity, and reliability? Does he or she display sound judgment? Why or why not? Give examples.

#### Impact on Relationships

1. Describe the Individual's relationship with his or her primary partner. Does the couple have a realistic picture of the gifts and challenges of the formation process and the ordained life? What support do they have or will they need to meet these challenges?
2. Does the Individual display an appropriate sense of humor, a mature sense of appropriate Christian sexual behavior, and the ability to manage finances, both personally and professionally?

#### Leadership, Collaboration, and Communication

1. Describe the Individual's current leadership project within the parish community. How effective has the Individual's leadership been? How well is the Individual able to reflect on his or her leadership skills? How do people in the parish respond to his or her leadership?
2. Describe the qualities of effective leadership, collaboration, and communication that the Individual brings to his or her current ministries. Does he or she articulate a clear vision and possess the capability to motivate others to share in that vision?

#### Final Evaluation Questions

1. In what ways can you envision this person as a deacon or priest, either in your or another context?
2. Do you have any reservations about the Individual? Please explain.
3. From your observation, are there any areas of growth that the Individual should pursue prior- to or during theological education (other than the normal course of study)?
4. Describe how the Individual responded within the group, e.g. his or her willingness to share deep personal concerns and commitments, openness to differences of opinion, willingness to consider new insights.

We recommend that \_\_\_\_\_pursue:

- Lay Ministry in the area(s) of \_\_\_\_\_
- Diaconate
- Priesthood

Additional Comments (*Please be specific*):

## Appendix A: Models for a Group Covenant

### Small Group Guidelines

1. The primary purpose of our discussions is to listen for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and lovingly share what we have heard.
2. Speak specifically and personally. Use *I* language. For example, "When you/she said *this*, I felt *this way*."
3. Be responsible for yourself in the group.
4. Be an active listener. Ask questions. Watch your assumptions. You are not here to convince, advise, or judge. Try to hear the feeling behind others' words.
5. It's okay to pass, but try to claim your share of the discussion.
6. Be lean in your speech. Everyone should have a chance to contribute.
7. Attend every meeting with very few absences. This is your commitment. Continuity of your contribution is very important for the life of the group.
8. Maintain the confidentiality of the group, both by refraining from discussing specific matters of the COM outside of the group and also by refraining from discussing COM matters with just a few members at times other than our official meetings.
9. Focus on the conversation at hand and avoid sideline discussions.
10. Remind other group members of the covenant when they are not observing it. Speak the truth in love.
11. Seek and serve Christ in each person in the group, especially those most different from you.



## Discernment Listening Guidelines

(from *Grounded in God*)

*The goal of spiritual discernment is to receive God's guidance.*

1. Take time to become settled in God's presence.
2. Listen to others with your entire self (senses, feelings, intuition, imagination, and rational faculties).
3. Do not interrupt.
4. Pause between speakers to absorb what has been said.
5. Do not formulate what you want to say while someone else is speaking.
6. Speak for yourself only, expressing your own thoughts and feelings, referring to your own experiences. Avoid being hypothetical. Steer away from broad generalizations.
7. Do not challenge what others say.
8. Listen to the group as a whole-to those who have not spoken aloud as well as to those who have.
9. Generally, leave space for anyone who may want to speak a first time before speaking a second time yourself.
10. Hold your desires and opinions-even your convictions-lightly.

## **Appendix B: The Qualities We Seek in Our Ordained Leaders**

The ordained leadership in the Diocese of Pennsylvania must first be grounded in the love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Leaders in this corner of the Church should find the beginning, middle, and end of their calls in the obedience, passion, expectation, and hope of those who are disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. These leaders must also possess certain gifts that can be used to guide and shepherd God's holy people. The gifts and qualities described here are not exhaustive, nor are these qualities exclusive to the ordained ministry. The discernment process of the diocese will focus on discerning the presence, or the potential presence, of these qualities and abilities in each person.

### **1. A visible love for the proclamation of the Gospel and for the Church**

The Diocese of Pennsylvania seeks to raise up clergy who love God with heart, mind, and soul, and who know and love the person of Jesus Christ and seek to make **him** known. Those seeking ordination must place Jesus Christ as the center of all they do, say, and feel. Their discipleship should be evident in their speech and action, their choices, and their relationships with friends, community, and family. We are looking for clergy who demonstrate a visible love of the Gospel and of God's people. Ordained leaders in this diocese should show a genuine, holy love for those whom they serve and those who are in their care, a love that gives them the strength and compassion to give freely of themselves to others, even to give their own lives for their people and for the sake of the Gospel. Clergy in this diocese will have both a deep reverence for the sacraments at the heart of our liturgical life as well as an understanding that the world itself is a visible sign of God's love and care and is therefore worthy of our good stewardship.

### **2. The ability to communicate the truth of the Gospel in ways that lead to connection and transformation**

Clergy in the Diocese of Pennsylvania are called to be communicators of God's love to God's beloved. Ordained leaders in this diocese must have the capacity to clearly articulate how Jesus transforms their lives, the Church, and the world. In order to do this, our clergy need to speak several languages - both figuratively and literally - whenever they speak from the pulpit, in personal or pastoral conversations, and through various forms of social media. Clergy in this diocese are called to minister in a wide variety of contexts and among all sorts of people. The Diocese of Pennsylvania seeks to raise up clergy who have the skills for honest, open, and effective communication that demonstrates a love of both God and neighbor.

### **3. Spiritual maturity, self-awareness, and authenticity**

The work of the ordained ministry is a great gift and blessing; it also can be complex, challenging, and exhausting. To be an effective clergy person requires a strong spiritual center, physical and mental resilience, a deep knowledge of one's own spiritual gifts, a profound sense of humility, a commitment to a healthy integration of work and play, and a willingness to grow and learn alongside others. All of this is grounded in a life shaped by a discipline of personal prayer, public worship, and other holy conversation. We seek to raise up clergy to be servants of the Gospel, who will be able to persevere in challenging circumstances, recognize areas for personal growth, and be willing to learn new skills and ask for help in doing so. We pray that all of our ordained clergy will "lead a life worthy of the calling to which [they] have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:1)

### **4. The ability to lead, organize, and equip others in ministry**

"Leadership is authentic self-expression which creates value for others," says the Rev'd Doug Travis. Clergy in this diocese must not only possess a depth of faith and spiritual devotion but also the ability to lead others to find the same depth and devotion in their own lives. They should have a vision for the ministry of the Episcopal Church and the wisdom to guide others into discovering and using their own gifts in the service of the Gospel. The Diocese of Pennsylvania seeks to raise up clergy who have a heart for this kind of mutual ministry and vocational discernment. Ordained leaders in this diocese should be wise mentors and guides who are motivated by the desire to help others find the place for their gifts in the Kingdom of God.

### **5. A capacity for creative leadership**

The Diocese of Pennsylvania seeks to raise up leaders who are able to develop and employ their sense of creativity in ministry. Our clergy must be able to thoughtfully discern new paths in the life of the Church through a careful listening to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. They must also have the courage to follow where these paths may lead. Ordained leaders in the church should have gifts to listen, learn, gather support, and then lead their congregations in taking risks for the sake of the Gospel. Our clergy must be courageous enough to make honest mistakes and humble enough to learn from them. We are looking for priests who see opportunity and hope where others see decline, who find assurance and inspiration in the knowledge that Christ is present and active in the Church today.

## **6. The ability to lead congregations through change**

We live in a rapidly changing world, and our congregations live in that world as well. This means that all of our congregations will face adaptive challenges as they seek to proclaim the Gospel in this world. We seek to raise up priests who can help our congregations to respond faithfully to God's calling of them into this unknown future. These priests see Grace in the process of transformation and change and possess the skills to help others see this Grace as well.

## **7. A willingness and ability to be vocationally flexible**

The churches in the Diocese of Pennsylvania are in a variety of contexts in a variety of locations and with a variety of needs. We seek to raise up leaders who will be able to respond to this variety with flexibility and creativity. Few priests in this diocese are likely to serve in one role at one type of church in one city for their entire vocation. We recognize, too, that a growing number of parishes require clergy leaders who do not depend on them for their entire livelihood; therefore, we need to raise up priests who can offer their presence and their gifts in a part-time or non-stipendiary capacity. We are looking for clergy who can demonstrate flexibility in their vision of professional ministry in order to respond to God's call to them and to the Church in our world.

**DISCERNMENT FOR HOLY ORDERS  
IN THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA**

*A Guide for Sponsoring Priests*

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**The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania**

**COMMISSION ON MINISTRY**

## A Guide for Sponsoring Priests

### *What is a Sponsoring Priest?*

A Sponsoring Priest is the Rector or Priest in Charge of the congregation where the person who is discerning a call (the Individual) regularly worships and serves. In the case where this Individual is a member of a parish with no Rector or Priest in Charge, the Sponsoring Priest could also be a priest in a neighboring parish, appointed by the Bishop.

### *What is your initial role in discernment?*

As the Sponsoring Priest, you have a special responsibility. You may be the first person with whom an Individual speaks about his or her growing sense of call in a serious, prayerful, and prolonged way. Your work of discernment with the Individual is of utmost importance. It shapes the beginnings of the formal process and lays the groundwork for the kind of work that follows. If your time with the Individual is prayerful and allows for the movement of the Holy Spirit, there is more likelihood that the Individual will seek out that kind of an environment for the rest of his or her formation. This is the kind of holy work the Diocese seeks to encourage and support.

As is outlined in the diocesan document *Responding to God's Call: First Steps* the Sponsoring Priest is invited to commit to meet with the Individual for an unspecified amount of time to pray together and discern what kind of a call the Individual is hearing. The language of this document is very intentional, for this work is much more than a series of casual meetings. The Sponsoring Priest has the duty and holy responsibility to walk this path with the Individual, invoking God's blessings as they journey, no matter where this path may lead them – even if that path does not lead to ordination.

### *What should your conversations with the Individual look like?*

These conversations are, first, pastoral ones. Your job is to hear the Individual's story – what has led him or her to this point, what gifts he or she feels can be offered to this ministry, what challenges might present themselves along this journey, and, most importantly, where God is at work in this person's life. At one level, you should ask the same kinds of questions you might ask in any pastoral situation – questions that get at the heart of the matter, that invite the Individual to consider a topic in a new light, and that point to the presence of God in the life of the Individual and of the Church.

But these conversations are also about discernment for both you and the Individual. What are you seeing in this person that leads you to believe he or she has the capacity for ordained leadership? As one priest on our diocese puts it, "I try and tease out what this sense of vocation consists of. It's not enough to feel 'called to be a priest' – what does that mean? What is it that you're called to?" It is important for you and for the Individual that these conversations include a robust discussion of the different orders of ministry and the skills, openness, and spiritual maturity that are required to effectively live each one. If the Individual is already ordained in another faith tradition, speak with them about their move into The Episcopal Church. Why has this Church felt like their spiritual home? What life events precipitated this change? How might their ministry look different in this new faith tradition?

Many priests encourage the Individual to do some particular reading, either about the Anglican tradition, discernment, or about the charisms of particular orders. The Diocese offers a bibliography (included here as Appendix A) that includes some important resources for this kind of study. But don't limit yourself to these books – if there was a book that was particularly meaningful to you in your own discernment, offer it to the Individual if it seems appropriate. And please, let the diocese know so we can add it to our list!

The discernment process, of course, happens in community, which importantly includes the Individual's spouse or partner. Invite them to come meet with you together. Talk honestly with them both about the joys and challenges of the ordained life, about their finances, about the possibility of jobs changing, relocating, or seminary. If you sense that there is reluctance on the part of the Individual's partner or spouse, ask some good questions about that now, and know that this is truly a gift to them and to their relationship.

Above all, take your time. Meet for as long as you need to. Also, ask the Individual to wait if you need to. The diocese asks that the Individual be a person who has been a confirmed Episcopalian for at least a year, and the hope is that he or she is someone who has worshiped regularly in your parish for enough time that you feel you have a sense of them as a person and as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Part of your job may be to ask the Individual to continue to pray and offer his or her gifts in your parish – all the while listening for God's guidance – while putting the discernment process on hold for a while. Once you begin your conversations, remember that your discernment and the discernment of the Individual is on God's time and is not bound to the diocesan calendar.

The diocesan guide asks you to encourage the Individual to take on a leadership project within the parish. More details about this project can be found in *First Steps*, and you should take time during your conversations to discuss how this work is going and how it is helping the Individual to see his or her own gifts and growing edges when it comes to leadership in the ordained ministry. You should include your own assessment of this leadership in your letter to the Bishop recommending this Individual for the Discernment Retreat with the Commission on Ministry, so conversation about it now will be most helpful.

### *What are some resources for these conversations?*

We have already mentioned the bibliography of helpful reading in Appendix A. Appendix B contains a series of seven helpful questions for discernment of vocation, as prepared by the Rev'd Bud Holland of this diocese. Appendix C of this document lists the qualities the diocese has identified as being important for ordained leadership. We hope that using these resources as a framework for your conversations will be helpful.

Also, feel free to avail yourself of the help offered by the Commission on Ministry (COM). If it would be helpful for you to talk through this process with someone from the COM, please do so. Every member of the COM would be most happy to be a sounding board for you in your own discernment. You do not have to do this alone!

As was mentioned earlier, if you would like even more help with this discernment, the COM is happy to provide an additional vocations counselor for the Individual to meet with. These

counselors are people within the diocese who have experience and gifts for this kind of discernment and can serve as an additional place for prayer and reflection with the Individual about his or her call. Conversations with these counselors are not meant to replace conversations with you, but they are meant to augment and fill out the discernment process. You should be clear with the Individual and with the vocations counselor about how much of your conversations you are willing to share.

### *What are the next steps?*

If after several months of conversations with the Individual, you perceive enough of a call to the ordained ministry to move forward in the process, you should reach out to the Office of Transitions to meet with you and the Individual to discuss next steps, including the formation of the Parish Discernment Group. Specific instructions about the make-up of these groups can be found in *First Steps* and in the *Responding to God's Call: A Handbook for the Parish in Discernment*.

Of course, the next step may also be telling an Individual that you do not perceive a call to the ordained ministry at all. As one priest in our diocese puts it, "I do take seriously a responsibility not just to push people to the next step of the process. [Ordained leaders] need to be capable, organized, personable, engaging, etc., and it does us no good as a Church to call people who will not

thrive...Discerning a call to the [ordained ministry] is the Church's responsibility as well as the individual's, and we do no service to anyone if we just pass people along to the next stage of the process without being honest with ourselves and with them about whether we honestly think this would work."

In other words, another important part of your role is to prayerfully redirect Individuals for whom the ordained ministry is not a healthy or holy option. Before you form a Parish Discernment Group (PDG) to aid a member of your community in ascertaining his or her call, pray to determine whether you personally believe in this person's vocation. If you have some reservations about a person's call but see sufficient evidence of a vocation to warrant forming a committee, share your misgivings with the Individual transparently and kindly from the outset. If you simply cannot discern that this person has a vocation as either a priest or a deacon, share that fact with him or her. Do so kindly, honestly, transparently, and with love – but please do so. While being this honest and transparent with a parishioner may be painful, far less damage will ensue for the Individual, your parish, and you by taking this direct path than if you are not clear and honest about your perceptions. There is no justifiable warrant for forming a PDG for a person whom you cannot in good conscience support for ordination.

### *How do you interact with the Parish Discernment Group?*

Generally if you discern a person may have a call, the PDG that you appoint will likewise discern a call. However, this is not guaranteed. Should a PDG fail to affirm a person's call, it is your responsibility to share that fact with the Individual. Do so with honesty, transparency, and – above all – with kindness and love. Also, please do so personally, yourself; nobody else in the parish is as well-equipped as you are to deliver this news as you are. And remember, your support of prayer and presence should continue after the work of the PDG is finished, whether the Individual is moved



forward in the ordination process or not. He or she will continue to need your guidance and prayer in the days ahead, whether he or she is applying to seminary or to find a clearer sense of a call to lay ministry. Helping our parishioners to discern a call, and then providing resources and space which empower them to live out that call, is true Gospel work. It is work that grows the Kingdom of God, and as such is some of the most important work you can do. May God bless you in this holy part of your ministry.

## Appendix A: A Bibliography for Spiritual Discernment

### General Reading

*The Book of Common Prayer:*

- “Holy Baptism” pp. 299-314
- “Ordination” pp. 511-555
- “An Outline of the Faith” pp. 845 ff., especially 854-858

Countryman, L. William. *Living on the Border of the Holy: Renewing the Priesthood of All*. Harrisburg, Penn.: Morehouse, 1999.

Edwards, Lloyd. *Discerning Your Spiritual Gifts*. Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1988.

Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books, 1994.

Farnham, Suzanne G., Stephanie A. Hull, R. Taylor McLean. *Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations*. Revised Edition. Harrisburg, Penn: Morehouse, 1999.

Farnham, Suzanne G., Joseph P. Gill, R. Taylor McLean, Susan M. Ward. *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community*. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 1991.

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Scripture & Discernment: Decision Making in the Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983.

Palmer, Parker J. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. New York: Wiley, 1999.

### The Diaconate

*Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church*

- Canon III.6: Of the Ordination of Deacons
- Canon III.7: Of the Life and Work of Deacons

Booty, John E. *The Servant Church, Diaconal Ministry and the Episcopal Church*. New York: Church Publishing, 1982.

Plater, Ormonde. *Many Servants, an Introduction to Deacons, Revised Edition*. Lanham, Md.: Cowley, 2004.

### The Priesthood

*Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church*

- Canon III.8: Of the Ordination of Priests

- Canon III.9: Of the Life and Work of Priests

Brown, Rosalind & Christopher Cocksworth. *On Being a Priest Today*. Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 2004.

Pritchard, John. *The Life and Work of a Priest*. London: SPCK, 2007.

Proctor, Samuel D., and Gardner C. Taylor. *We Have This Ministry: The Heart of the Pastor's Vocation*. Valley Forge, Penn.: Judson, 1996.

Sedgwick, Timothy F. *The Making of Ministry*. Boston: Cowley, 1993.

### **The Anglican Tradition**

Griffiths, James. *The Anglican Vision*. (Book 1 of The New Church Teaching Series). Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley, 1997.

Nichols, Aidan, O.P. *The Panther and the Hind*. T&T Clark, 1993.

Ramsey, Michael. *The Anglican Spirit*. Seabury Books, 2004.

Rowell, Geoffrey, Kenneth Stevenson and Rowan Williams. *Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness*. Oxford: Oxford, 2004.

Williams, Rowan. *Anglican Identities*. Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley, 2003.

## **Appendix B: The Big Seven Questions**

How would I describe my vocation in one sentence (or two)?

What or who has influenced my sense and understanding of my vocation: lives of others, history, scripture, prayer, prayer book and worship, ordination vows, sense of God's mission, the evolution of perspective about my vocation over time?

What gifts do I bring to my understanding of vocation and the ways I have incarnated my vocation over the years?

What have I learned about myself with regard to my great interests, passions, enjoyment, skills, achievements, facing into the whirlwind, dealing with life's deep issues and crises?

What would be the best stewardship of me?

How open am I to other challenges, urging from others, senses from my prayers about what God might want for me to do and be?

What stories from scripture, tradition, my upbringing, culture, personal positions, and reflected experience inform and instruct me about who I am, who I am called to be, and what I am called to do?

## Appendix C: The Qualities We Seek in Our Ordained Leaders

*Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant....*

2 Corinthians 3:4-6a

*The power for authentic leadership...  
is found not in external arrangements  
but in the human heart.  
(Parker Palmer)*

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The ordained leadership in the Diocese of Pennsylvania must first be grounded in the love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Leaders in this corner of the Church should find the beginning, middle, and end of their calls in the obedience, passion, expectation, and hope of those who are disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. These leaders must also possess certain gifts that can be used to guide and shepherd God's holy people. The gifts and qualities described here are not exhaustive, nor are these qualities exclusive to the ordained ministry. The discernment process of the diocese will focus on discerning the presence, or the potential presence, of these qualities and abilities in each person.

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### **1. A visible love for the proclamation of the Gospel and for the Church**

The Diocese of Pennsylvania seeks to raise up clergy who love God with heart, mind, and soul, and who know and love the person of Jesus Christ and seek to make him known. Those seeking ordination must place Jesus Christ as the center of all they do, say, and feel. Their discipleship should be evident in their speech and action, their choices, and their relationships with friends, community, and family. We are looking for clergy who demonstrate a visible love of the Gospel and of God's people. Ordained leaders in this diocese should show a genuine, holy love for those whom they serve and those who are in their care, a love that gives them the strength and compassion to give freely of themselves to others, even to give their own lives for their people and for the sake of the Gospel. Clergy in this diocese will have both a deep reverence for the sacraments at the heart of our liturgical life as well as an understanding that the world itself is a visible sign of God's love and care and is therefore worthy of our good stewardship.

### **2. The ability to communicate the truth of the Gospel in ways that lead to connection and Transformation**

Clergy in the Diocese of Pennsylvania are called to be communicators of God's love to God's beloved. Ordained leaders in this diocese must have the capacity to clearly articulate how Jesus transforms their lives, the Church, and the world. In order to do this, our clergy need to speak several languages – both figuratively and literally – whenever they speak from the pulpit, in personal or pastoral conversations, and through various forms of social media. Clergy in this diocese are called to minister in a wide variety of contexts and among all sorts of people. The Diocese of

Pennsylvania seeks to raise up clergy who have the skills for honest, open, and effective communication that demonstrates a love of both God and neighbor.

### **3. Spiritual maturity, self-awareness, and authenticity**

The work of the ordained ministry is a great gift and blessing; it also can be complex, challenging, and exhausting. To be an effective clergy person requires a strong spiritual center, physical and mental resilience, a deep knowledge of one's own spiritual gifts, a profound sense of humility, a commitment to a healthy integration of work and play, and a willingness to grow and learn alongside others. All of this is grounded in a life shaped by a discipline of personal prayer, public worship, and other holy conversation. We seek to raise up clergy to be servants of the Gospel, who will be able to persevere in challenging circumstances, recognize areas for personal growth, and be willing to learn new skills and ask for help in doing so. We pray that all of our ordained clergy will "lead a life worthy of the calling to which [they] have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:1)

### **4. The ability to lead, organize, and equip others in ministry**

"Leadership is authentic self-expression which creates value for others," says the Rev'd Doug Travis. Clergy in this diocese must not only possess a depth of faith and spiritual devotion but also the ability to lead others to find the same depth and devotion in their own lives. They should have a vision for the ministry of the Episcopal Church and the wisdom to guide others into discovering and using their own gifts in the service of the Gospel. The Diocese of Pennsylvania seeks to raise up clergy who have a heart for this kind of mutual ministry and vocational discernment. Ordained leaders in this diocese should be wise mentors and guides who are motivated by the desire to help others find the place for their gifts in the Kingdom of God.

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The Diocese of Pennsylvania seeks to raise up leaders who are able to develop and employ their sense of creativity in ministry. Our clergy must be able to thoughtfully discern new paths in the life of the Church through a careful listening to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. They must also have the courage to follow where these paths may lead. Ordained leaders in the church should have gifts to listen, learn, gather support, and then lead their congregations in taking risks for the sake of the Gospel. Our clergy must be courageous enough to make honest mistakes and humble enough to learn from them. We are looking for priests who see opportunity and hope where others see decline, who find assurance and inspiration in the knowledge that Christ is present and active in the Church today.

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world. We seek to raise up priests who can help our congregations to respond faithfully to God's calling of them into this unknown future. These priests see Grace in the process of transformation and change and possess the skills to help others see this Grace as well.

#### **7. A willingness and ability to be vocationally flexible**

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**DISCERNMENT FOR HOLY ORDERS  
IN THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA**

*Postulancy Application*

---

**The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania**  
**COMMISSION ON MINISTRY**





# The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

## Application For Postulancy

*Certificate Required under Title III, Canon 8, Section 2*

*To the Right Reverend Daniel G.P. Gutiérrez, Bishop of Pennsylvania, I hereby make application to be admitted by you as a Postulant for Holy Orders.*

FULL NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Married/Partnered: \_\_\_\_\_ Single: \_\_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_ F \_\_\_

Spouse's/Partner's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If Dependents, Name(s),  
Age(s) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Level of education attained, with degrees earned and areas of specialization:

\_\_\_\_\_

Military or Alternate Service:

\_\_\_\_\_

### **Employment information:**

Business Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Business Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

List any other information concerning your background which can be used in determining your application for Postulancy and eventual Ordination:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Please use additional pages for all questions if necessary*



# The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

## Application For Postulancy

*Certificate Required under Title III, Canon 8, Section 2*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Parish information:

Parish Church: \_\_\_\_\_ Rector: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of time in parish: \_\_\_\_\_ Length of time in this Diocese: \_\_\_\_\_

Baptism (date/church/denomination): \_\_\_\_\_

Confirmation/Reception (date/church/Bishop): \_\_\_\_\_

### Vocation:

Have you ever participated in a Discernment process before? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, where and when: \_\_\_\_\_

What was the result? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you been previously ordained in another denomination? If so, which one, and how you left those orders:

\_\_\_\_\_

***I, \_\_\_\_\_ understand that all materials prepared by me and others concerning my participation in this process, become the property of the Bishop and all are maintained in the permanent records of the Diocese of Pennsylvania.***

*Applicant Signature & Date:*

\_\_\_\_\_

**RETURN TO: (transitions@diopa.org) or by mail to:  
Pam Prell, Associate for Transtions  
The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania  
23 East Airy Street  
Norristown, PA 19401  
(Phone) 267-486-6944**

**VESTRY ENDORSEMENT OF APPLICATION FOR POSTULANCY**

Diocese of Pennsylvania

To the Ecclesiastical Authority \_\_\_\_\_

Diocese of Pennsylvania

Place \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

We, whose names are hereunder written, testify to our belief that \_\_\_\_\_ is sober, honest and Godly, and is a confirmed adult communicant of this Church in good standing; and set forth the following grounds (based on personal knowledge or on evidence satisfactory to us) upon which we judge \_\_\_\_\_ possess such qualifications as would fit \_\_\_\_\_ to be admitted a POSTULANT for Holy Orders:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

[signed] \_\_\_\_\_ Minister of \_\_\_\_\_ Parish

[signed] VESTRY OF SAID PARISH (a two-thirds majority required)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**ATTESTATION OF FOREGOING CERTIFICATE**

I hereby certify that the foregoing certificate was signed at a meeting of the Vestry of \_\_\_\_\_ Parish, duly convened at

the \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_,  
and that the names attached are those of all (or 2/3 majority of all) the members of the Vestry.

(signed) \_\_\_\_\_ Rector or Member of Clergy in charge of  
\_\_\_\_\_ Parish; or  
\_\_\_\_\_ Clerk or Secretary of Vestry of  
\_\_\_\_\_ Parish

But should the Parish be without a Rector or Member of the Clergy, it shall suffice that the certificate be signed by some Presbyter of the Diocese in good standing to whom the Postulant is personally known, the reason for the substitution being stated in the attesting clause.)

CERTIFICATE TO BE RETURNED TO:  
The Office of Transitions  
The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania  
23 East Airy Street  
Norristown, PA 19401

**VESTRY ENDORSEMENT FOR CANDIDACY**  
Diocese of Pennsylvania

To the Ecclesiastical Authority \_\_\_\_\_  
Diocese of Pennsylvania

Place \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

We, whose names are hereunder written, testify to our belief that

\_\_\_\_\_

is sober, honest and Godly, and is a confirmed adult communicant of this Church in good standing; and set forth the following grounds (based on personal knowledge or on evidence satisfactory to us) upon which we judge \_\_\_\_\_ to possess such qualifications as would fit to be made a candidate for Holy Orders:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rector/Priest In Charge [signature]

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rector/Priest In Charge [Printed Name]

of \_\_\_\_\_ Parish

VESTRY Signatures (a two-thirds majority required)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**ATTESTATION OF FOREGOING CERTIFICATE**

I hereby certify that the foregoing certificate was signed at a meeting of the Vestry of \_\_\_\_\_ Parish, duly convened at \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_, and that the names attached are those of all (or 2/3 majority of all) the members of the Vestry.

(signed) \_\_\_\_\_ Rector or Member of Clergy in charge of  
\_\_\_\_\_ Parish; or  
\_\_\_\_\_ Clerk or Secretary of Vestry of  
\_\_\_\_\_ Parish

But should the Parish be without a Rector or Member of the Clergy, it shall suffice that the certificate be signed by some Presbyter of the Diocese in good standing to whom the Postulant is personally known, the reason for the substitution being stated in the attesting clause.)

**CERTIFICATE TO BE RETURNED TO:**  
Office of Transitions  
The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania  
23 East Airy Street, Norristown, PA 19401

**VESTRY ENDORSEMENT OF ORDINATION TO THE DIACONATE**  
Diocese of Pennsylvania

To the Ecclesiastical Authority \_\_\_\_\_  
Diocese of Pennsylvania

Place \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

We, whose names are hereunder written, testify to our belief that

\_\_\_\_\_

is sober, honest and Godly, and is a confirmed adult communicant of this Church in good standing; and set forth the following grounds (based on personal knowledge or on evidence satisfactory to us) upon which we judge \_\_\_\_\_ to possess such qualifications as would fit to be ordained to the DIACONATE:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rector/Priest In Charge [signature]

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rector/Priest In Charge [Printed Name]

of \_\_\_\_\_ Parish

VESTRY Signatures (a two-thirds majority required)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**ATTESTATION OF FOREGOING CERTIFICATE**

I hereby certify that the foregoing certificate was signed at a meeting of the Vestry of Parish, duly convened at \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_, and that the names attached are those of all (or 2/3 majority of all) the members of the Vestry.

(signed) \_\_\_\_\_ Rector or Member of Clergy in charge of  
\_\_\_\_\_ Parish; or  
\_\_\_\_\_ Clerk or Secretary of Vestry of  
\_\_\_\_\_ Parish

But should the Parish be without a Rector or Member of the Clergy, it shall suffice that the certificate be signed by some Presbyter of the Diocese in good standing to whom the Postulant is personally known, the reason for the substitution being stated in the attesting clause.)

CERTIFICATE TO BE RETURNED TO:  
Office of Transitions  
The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania  
23 East Airy Street, Norristown, PA 19401

**VESTRY ENDORSEMENT FOR PRIESTHOOD**  
Diocese of Pennsylvania

To the Ecclesiastical Authority \_\_\_\_\_  
Diocese of Pennsylvania

Place \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

We, whose names are hereunder written, testify to our belief that

\_\_\_\_\_

is sober, honest and Godly, and is a confirmed adult communicant of this Church in good standing; and set forth the following grounds (based on personal knowledge or on evidence satisfactory to us) upon which we judge \_\_\_\_\_ to possess such qualifications as would fit to be made a candidate for Holy Orders:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rector/Priest In Charge [signature]

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rector/Priest In Charge [Printed Name]

of \_\_\_\_\_ Parish

VESTRY Signatures (a two-thirds majority required)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**ATTESTATION OF FOREGOING CERTIFICATE**

I hereby certify that the foregoing certificate was signed at a meeting of the Vestry of Parish, duly convened at \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_, and that the names attached are those of all (or 2/3 majority of all) the members of the Vestry.

(signed) \_\_\_\_\_ Rector or Member of Clergy in charge of  
\_\_\_\_\_ Parish; or  
\_\_\_\_\_ Clerk or Secretary of Vestry of  
\_\_\_\_\_ Parish

But should the Parish be without a Rector or Member of the Clergy, it shall suffice that the certificate be signed by some Presbyter of the Diocese in good standing to whom the Postulant is personally known, the reason for the substitution being stated in the attesting clause.)

CERTIFICATE TO BE RETURNED TO:  
Office of Transitions  
The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania  
23 East Airy Street, Norristown, PA 19401