



**ROADMAP  
TO  
HOLY ORDERS  
  
2020**

**THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN DELAWARE**  
Commission on Ministry  
913 Wilson Road  
Wilmington, DE 19803-4012



Greetings in Christ!

We are grateful that you are willing to assist those discerning a call from God.

This manual describes what happens in the process that leads from initial inquiry to ordination. It is a long process with several stages involving many people. Many questions, some of them very difficult questions, have to be raised and answered fully and honestly. The shape of this process reflects the seriousness with which we take Christian ministry, and the great importance of the discernment needed to provide the church with able and well-trained leaders, both lay and ordained.

The Episcopal tradition understands that a call to ordination comes in the context of the Christian community. Sometimes it is the community that first discovers a potential deacon or priest among its members and asks that person to begin discernment. Sometimes it is the person who first feels a call and looks to the community to test it.

The Commission on Ministry (COM) works with both aspects of the call. We help individuals use the resources of their faith and diocesan communities in clarifying a call. We also strongly encourage local congregations to recruit potential leaders who have the particular gifts needed in the Episcopal Church in Delaware.

No document can provide all that is necessary. The COM stands ready to respond to your questions and together with you discover the best path forward.

# On Christian Discernment

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide...” Jn. 15:16

“We have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God... The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God because they are spiritually discerned.” 1 Cor. 2:12-14

“For by the grace given to me, I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him. For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...” Romans 12:3-6

How do I know what God wants me to do? What is God’s will for my life? Where do I fit in the life of the church?

It seems few people sit down long enough to ponder the big questions; even fewer have the courage and presence of mind to seek the answers. The fact that you’re reading this suggests you’re one of those few.

The work of discernment takes many forms, and features in every facet of life: what to have for breakfast; what to say or do at any particular moment; whether or not to marry, and if so, whom; whether or not to enter into a deeper awareness of who you are in Christ, and what he would have you do in service to him.

The bigger questions are harder to answer because discernment is far more than just gaining enough information to be able to make a sensible decision. The work of discernment, especially the journey of discerning one’s calling or vocation, is not at all straightforward, due to the effects of sin; we see “through a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12). Christian discernment is as much if not more a matter of the heart as the head. Remember our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, especially Mt 5:8: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Authentic discernment begins through the Holy Spirit guiding us to an awareness of the truth through faith: the truth about God, the world, and the truth about oneself in Christ, as a member of his Body.

True Christian discernment involves 1) making a reasonable judgment on what is true in the light of faith, and 2) coming to an awareness of the inclinations or desires within us, and their relationship to that truth. If we’re to find our calling, our hopes and desires have to line up with what is true about us, and again, our tradition confesses this to be seen only through faith. True discernment cannot happen apart from humility, constant prayer, deep reflection,

and close consultation with other discerning Christians who know us well. Only a clear mind aided by a loving heart can discern the love of God our Creator, and his loving intentions for us.

So Christian discernment begins in, is motivated by, and ends in love: in the love of God, in love for Christ and his Church, and love of self, finding one's place as a member of Christ's body as one part grafted into the whole. This makes the search for one's Christian vocation less awareness of possible courses of action and identity, and more a search for the life God intends for us; our search is not simply for a life we think seems like a good idea at the time, but the *right* life. Christian freedom is not the ability to become whatever one wishes to become, to decide whether or not one wishes to be celibate or married, a deacon or a priest, or even to remain a member of the laity; rather, Christian freedom is found in becoming who and what God created us to be, embracing how he intended our lives to unfold to share in and testify to his saving purposes in the world through Christ. The church cannot compel any person to any particular vocation; but a failure to discern and then embrace one's vocation, whatever it might be, is a failure to embrace one's well-being in Christ.

Different people begin to discern God calling them to Holy Orders in different ways. Some feel drawn to pastoral ministry from a very young age, others wake up to the idea at a more mature age, often when they're well into a secular career. Some respond immediately to the call, some put it off for a few years, even decades, sometimes it goes an entire lifetime without action. Sometimes a parent or a spouse will begin to suspect their loved one might have a clerical vocation well before the one being called. A growing awareness of a vocation to ordained ministry can feel terrifying or invigorating, burdensome, or like the sudden lifting of a weight. The reactions of family members and friends typically range anywhere from enthusiastic support to bitter opposition and everything in between.

Regardless of the variety of experiences we have due to our varied personalities and backgrounds, if you are indeed called to Holy Orders, there is nothing quite like moving towards the unity found in sharing a common identity with one's ministerial colleagues and, ultimately, with Christ himself.

If you think your well-being in Christ might involve ordination as a deacon or priest, then you have a duty and a responsibility to Christ, the church, and yourself to enter into a period of discernment with the church. This process begins by talking with those closest to you, and eventually by having a conversation with your priest, who will guide you in any further steps if any. Taking this first formal step requires courage; but if you're becoming aware of a greater sense of calling to Christian service and ministry, there's no other way to find peace apart from entering a period of discernment with the church. This discernment process might end in you being ordained; it might end in you finding a wonderful and engaging ministry as a member of the laity. Both are good. What matters is that you gain more clarity about who and what Christ has made you to be.



## Overview of the Discernment Process

### The Roadmap to Holy Orders

The road to ordination begins and ends with the bishop. Along the way, however, many others are involved in the work of discernment, including your parish priest, your parish, and at the diocesan level. This work involves four distinct steps: aspirancy, postulancy, candidacy, and Ordination. This process typically takes three years from nomination to ordination.\*

#### Important Notices:

- Before embarking on discernment, familiarize yourself with the relevant portions of the most current Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church (III.5-9), as well as the ordinal in the Book of Common Prayer.
- Anyone wishing to pursue ordination in the Episcopal Church in Delaware is required to agree with and abide by the historic faith and practice of the Anglican/Episcopal tradition as found in the Book of Common Prayer (1979), and conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church.
- Please note, you may begin the discernment process before reaching the minimum age for ordination, but you must be 24 years of age before the date of your ordination to the diaconate.

The following portion of this document is a summary of the discernment process from beginning to end. Where rector/sponsoring priest is written, presume that priest-in-charge, vicar, or sponsoring priest is also applicable.

Use this document as a checklist. Though it contains valuable information, please note that it is not exhaustive and may be changed at any time, and additional requirements may be added. Consult the Commission on Ministry (COM). All forms referenced in this document may be found on the diocesan website.

\* Timing and formation requirements may be slightly different for those who have completed substantial amounts of seminary before beginning discernment. For those already ordained in another church who wish to become an Episcopal priest and/or deacon consult guiding documents available on the diocesan website.

# Beginning the Journey

## Becoming an ASPIRANT for Holy Orders

Discernment begins informally with those who know you best: your family and friends, your priest, and other members of your parish. When the time is right, you begin your first steps as an inquirer as follows:

- Have an intentional conversation with your rector/sponsoring priest about beginning formal discernment. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Plan to attend a diocesan discernment retreat and Holy Orders orientation, if you have not already (consult the website for dates). Attending the retreat is not a commitment to discern, but rather an opportunity for you and your spouse (if applicable) to explore the idea of beginning formal discernment. This retreat is required for all who wish to move forward in discernment. Date of Attendance: \_\_\_\_\_
- Schedule a meeting with the bishop through the assistant to discuss your interest in beginning formal discernment. This first meeting is one-on-one, just you and the bishop. Be sure to introduce yourself to the canon to the ordinary if you haven't already. Date Scheduled: \_\_\_\_\_
- You become an aspirant if/when the bishop approves you to engage in formal discernment. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Notify\* both the COM and your rector/sponsoring priest of the bishop's decision. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Road to Nomination

Once you've been made an aspirant, discernment officially begins at the parish/congregation level, where a group will work with you to determine whether or not to nominate you to pursue Holy Orders at the diocesan level. Your relationship with your parish is a vitally important part of the work of discernment, and you will need their support to continue formal discernment.

- Your rector/sponsoring priest convenes a Congregational Discernment Group (CDG). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Write a spiritual autobiography (minimum five pages, see Form E for guidance) for the CDG before they meet. Date submitted: \_\_\_\_\_
- Meet with your Congregational Discernment Group (CDG) for the necessary period of time, usually around six months. Date begun: \_\_\_\_\_; Date completed: \_\_\_\_\_
- When their interview process is complete, your CDG submits a report along with their final recommendation to the parish vestry (FORM A). Date: \_\_\_\_\_

- If they decide to nominate you, the vestry submits their nomination to the bishop through the Mission Support Office (FORM B) along with a copy of FORM A. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Your rector/sponsoring priest submits\*\* a recommendation(FORM C). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- If nominated by your parish and supported by your rector/sponsoring priest, you write a letter to the bishop accepting their nomination (FORM D) and you become a nominee. Our church's canons require that your letter contains the following information:
  1. your full name and date of birth,
  2. length of time you've been resident in the diocese,
  3. evidence of your baptism and confirmation,
  4. whether or not you've previously been nominated or applied for postulancy in any other diocese,
  5. description of your discernment process thus far from your point of view, and
  6. indication of all degrees you've earned and certified areas of specialization, together with copies of official transcripts and/or certifications awarded.
 Date submitted: \_\_\_\_\_
- Send us a digital headshot photo for your file. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Once you become a nominee, discernment moves from the parish/congregation to the diocesan level, where you discern with and gain the support of the COM. You are not likely to know many members of the COM if any. The COM is made up of both clergy and lay members from across Delaware, and their role is 1) to discern for themselves and confirm your vocation sensed by the bishop and affirmed by your vestry, and 2) to observe whether or not you are internalizing all that you are learning and experiencing in discernment and formation. Their role is to make a recommendation to the standing committee and bishop that you be approved for the various stages leading up to ordination and ultimately for ordination itself. While their function is to advise the bishop, your time in discernment with the COM is a vital part of the process and should be engaged accordingly. The first step in progressing towards ordination is, again, being granted postulancy.

## The Road to Postulancy

The road leading to postulancy is a time of more intense and focused discernment.

- Complete the Application (FORM E). The application is extensive and requires several essays. Please allow considerable time to complete. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Complete Release of Information (FORM F). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Complete Release of Information to Applicant Only (FORM G). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Complete the Financial Statement (FORM H). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Complete the Nominee Agreement (FORM I). Date: \_\_\_\_\_

- The chair of the COM will send you an official invitation to interview. Your rector/ sponsoring priest and your spouse/partner (if applicable) will accompany you in this interview. Date Letter Received: \_\_\_\_\_

***Scheduled Date for Postulancy Interview with the COM:*** \_\_\_\_\_

After your interview, if the COM recommends you for postulancy they will direct you to complete the canonically required medical and psychological exams [III.8.5(k), III.8.7(a), III.6.5(j)] and a comprehensive background check. Complete a:

- Background Check (FORM J). The cost of this is \$\_\_\_\_\_. You are responsible for the expense, though you may ask your parish to consider a contribution.  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Life History Questionnaire for Mental Health Examination (FORM K) Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Behavior Screening Questionnaire for Mental Health Examination (FORM L)  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Mental Health Examination (scheduled through the Mission Support Office). The cost for this exam is expected to be borne by you with the support of your parish/congregation. If assistance is needed, consult the Chair of the COM. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Medical Examination (FORM M). To be scheduled with your own doctor. You are responsible for the cost. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- You submit evidence of your Safe Church training. Date of Submission: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: The canons of the Episcopal Church require the background check and the mental and medical health examinations to have been completed within thirty-six months (three years) of your ordination to the priesthood and/or diaconate. Any of these more than three years old at the scheduled date of your ordination will need to be done again.

After the bishop receives and reviews the results of the medical and psychological examinations, the bishop will review the COM’s recommendation and make a judgment on whether or not to grant you postulancy. If you are made a postulant, the bishop may invite you to discuss any developmental recommendations the COM may have given. At this point you will also develop a plan for your theological formation\*\*\* and training with the bishop and in consultation with the COM. You will also be assigned a member of the COM as a liaison, to provide support and encouragement along the way.

***Date Postulancy Granted by the Bishop:*** \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: Once you become a postulant, your relationship with the bishop becomes closer and more formal. The bishop will need to be made aware of any significant life changes, including things such as the need for a new job, a desire to get married, etc., as these can have a significant impact on discernment and formation.



## The Road to Candidacy

The road to candidacy is a time focused on your continued theological and spiritual formation. The interview for candidacy is an opportunity to check in with you, the discerner, making sure you are 1) demonstrating the same qualities that were evident at your postulancy interviews, 2) still confident and growing in your sense of vocation, and receiving suitable formation.

- Complete any supplemental requirements or conditions specified by the COM and the bishop that may have been given.
- Write the bishop four times a year, during the Ember Days. **DO NOT NEGLECT THESE LETTERS.** They are canonically required and important both for informing the bishop as to your progress and well-being and as an indicator of your active engagement in the ordination process. Failure to submit letters can result in corrective action, and continued disengagement can result in being removed from the discernment process.
- Before your interview, submit any of the following which will have been completed by the time of the interview:
  1. Documents/evaluations from your completion of one unit of Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE-CPE is preferred) program. (In some cases a CPE-equivalent experience may be approved, or a rigorous and challenging missionary experience. The bishop must approve any alternative.)
  2. Letter of reference and any other relevant documentation from a ministry practicum or field education experience or parish internship
- Submit proof of Anti-Racism training and education on Title IV Disciplinary Process. Date Submitted: \_\_\_\_\_

If your process is on the timeline of a three-year residential seminary, in your second year your parish vestry completes and submits their Reaffirmation for Candidacy for Holy Orders (FORM N). (NOTE: The length of postulancy could be different, depending on the nature of your approved discernment process and formation. Please consult with the COM regarding the timing of your application for candidacy.) Date Submitted: \_\_\_\_\_

- Once the Mission Support Office (the diocese) receives (FORM N), you write a letter to the bishop applying for candidacy (FORM O). Be sure to include in the letter, the date you were admitted as a postulant. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Submit an update to your spiritual autobiography, reflecting on your development and growth since your application for postulancy. Date Submitted: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: If all necessary materials are not submitted promptly, your interview could very well be postponed to a later date.

***Scheduled Date for Interview with the COM:*** \_\_\_\_\_

If the COM votes to recommend you for candidacy, the standing committee will interview you as well. Their approval is required before you can be made a candidate. Beyond getting to know you, their canonical responsibility is to ensure that you are being adequately and properly prepared for ordained ministry according to the canons of the church and according to our bishop's standards and expectations.

***Scheduled Date for Interview with the Standing Committee:*** \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: Your rector/sponsoring priest/sponsoring priest accompanies you in this interview. Your spouse/partner will not be needed at this interview.

If the bishop accepts the recommendation of the COM and the certification of the Standing Committee, you will be made a candidate for Holy Orders.

***Date Candidacy Granted by the Bishop:*** \_\_\_\_\_

## **The Road to Ordination – Transitional Diaconate**

As candidate,

- Complete any supplemental requirements or conditions specified by the COM and the bishop.
- Continue to write the bishop four times a year during the Ember Days.
- Continue your formation, which should be at or nearing completion.
- Submit your most recent seminary transcript(s) or educational program record to the Mission Support Office. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Submit any outstanding items related to ministry practicum/field education/internship, CPE/mission experience, etc.
- Complete and pass Diocesan Ordination Exams, if any, or General Ordination Exams (GOE) Date: \_\_\_\_\_ [This step may be taken during your time as a Transitional Deacon.]
- Request endorsement for ordination to the diaconate from your sponsoring congregation/parish (FORM P). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Write a letter to the bishop requesting ordination to the diaconate, being sure to include the dates you were admitted to postulancy and candidacy (FORM Q). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- The COM may interview you. Scheduled Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- The Standing Committee will interview you. Scheduled Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If the bishop concurs with the recommendation and approval of the COM and Standing Committee, he will approve you for ordination to the diaconate and schedule your ordination (in most cases no sooner than 18 months from the date of your nomination). Diaconal ordinations are typically performed at \_\_\_\_\_. The format and content of any invitations must be approved by the Mission Support Office before mailing. Consult the bishop regarding guidelines for ordinations.

***Date Approved by the Bishop for Ordination to the Diaconate:*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Scheduled Date for Ordination to the Diaconate:*** \_\_\_\_\_

## **The Road to Ordination - Priesthood**

If you are on the road to priesthood, you must be a deacon for an absolute minimum of six months. Once you are ordained a deacon and are placed in a parish, the parish in which you currently minister as a deacon takes over as your sponsoring parish, as they are in the best position to observe your ministry and continued discernment towards the priesthood.

- Request endorsement for ordination to the priesthood from the vestry of your sponsoring parish (FORM R). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Your rector/sponsoring priest writes a final letter of recommendation. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Write a letter to the bishop requesting ordination to the priesthood, being sure to include the dates you were admitted to postulancy, candidacy, and the date you were made a deacon (FORM S). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- The COM may interview you. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- The Standing Committee will interview you. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If the bishop concurs, the bishop will schedule your ordination to the priesthood in consultation with your rector/sponsoring priest (if applicable). You and your rector/sponsoring priest are responsible for the planning of your ordination service. As with ordination to the diaconate, the format and content of any invitations must be approved by the Mission Support Office before mailing. Again, consult the bishop regarding guidelines for ordinations.

***Date Approved by the Bishop for Ordination to the Priesthood:*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Scheduled Date for Ordination to the Priesthood:*** \_\_\_\_\_

## The Road to Ordination – Vocational Diaconate

If you are on the road to the diaconate you must,

- Request endorsement for ordination to the diaconate from the vestry of your sponsoring parish (FORM P). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Your rector/sponsoring priest writes a final letter of recommendation. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Write a letter to the bishop requesting ordination to the diaconate, being sure to include the dates you were admitted to postulancy, candidacy, (FORM Q). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- The COM may interview you. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- The Standing Committee will interview you. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If the bishop concurs, the bishop will schedule your ordination to the diaconate in consultation with your rector/sponsoring priest (if applicable). You and your rector/sponsoring priest are responsible for the planning of your ordination service. The format and content of any invitations must be approved by the Mission Support Office before mailing. Again, consult the bishop regarding guidelines for ordinations.

***Date Approved by the Bishop for Ordination to the Diaconate:*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Scheduled Date for Ordination to the Diaconate:*** \_\_\_\_\_

REMINDER: The canons of the Episcopal Church require the background check and the mental and medical health examinations to have been completed within 36 months (three years) of your ordination to the priesthood and/or diaconate. Any of these more than three years old at the scheduled date of your ordination will need to be done again. This is the case for ordination to the priesthood, even if you were ordained recently to the diaconate.

### NOTES:

- \* Notify – notification is acceptable by email.
  - \*\* Submit – all original submissions are to be sent to the bishop’s executive assistant and copies scanned and emailed to the Chair of the COM [com@delaware.church] unless otherwise noted – please check carefully
- The Episcopal Church in Delaware  
913 Wilson Road  
Wilmington DE 19803-4012
- \*\*\* Plan for your theological formation – for those seeking the Vocational Diaconate whose formation/education is not a residential/formal seminary the following applies: the plan will be developed in consultation with the bishop, COM, and Archdeacon, put forth in writing and signed by the postulant/candidate, bishop, Archdeacon, COM chairperson, and sponsoring priest. Progress under the plan shall be evaluated by the mentoring clergy and will be reported to the COM in writing.

**A document adopted and edited with the permission of the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas TX.**