



ROADMAP

to the

VOCATIONAL DIACONATE

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, must be raised and answered fully and honestly. The shape of this process reflects the seriousness with which we take ordained Christian ministry, and the great importance of the discernment needed to provide the church with able and well-trained, spiritually grounded leaders.

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 discern that call with the community of faith.

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 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.

Commission on Ministry

2021

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 everyone 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 these 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: where do I put my energies this day; what to say or do at any moment; whether to marry, and if so, whom; whether to enter 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, because 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 of 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 must line up with what is true about us, and again, our tradition confesses this to be seen only through faith rooted in community. 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 God's 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 of service 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 God intended our lives to unfold to share in and testify to God's saving purposes in the world through Christ. The church cannot compel any person to any 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 are 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 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 your finding a wonderful and engaging ministry as a member of the laity being ordained; it might end in your finding now is not the time; it might end in your being ordained. All 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, and other faithful Christians in your parish, as well as at the diocesan level. This work involves five distinct steps: aspirancy, nomination, postulancy, candidacy, and ordination. This process can take three or more 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), as well as other approved liturgies and Canons which articulate our faith, 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 guide for the journey. 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.

APPENDIX I provides a timeline of accountability for steps in this process.

- * 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: _____
- 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: _____
- Your rector/sponsoring priest submits a letter to the bishop describing the discerning conversations held with you before you meet with the bishop (no specific Form). Date: _____
- Schedule a meeting with the bishop (after speaking with your priest) through the bishop's executive 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 [com@delaware.church] and your rector/sponsoring priest of the bishop's decision. Date: _____

The Road to Nomination

Once you've been made an aspirant, discernment begins at the parish/congregation level/community of faith level. A discernment group will work with you to determine whether to nominate you to pursue Holy Orders at the diocesan level. Your relationship with this group is a vitally important part of the work of discernment, and you will need their support to continue formal discernment.

- Your rector/sponsoring priest, in consultation with a COM liaison, convenes a Congregational Discernment Group (CDG), or the bishop convenes a Community of Discernment Group. Date: _____

** Notification is acceptable by email.

- Provide a spiritual autobiography (no less or more than five pages) for the CDG before they meet. Date Submitted: _____
- Meet with your Congregational or Community Discernment Group. A CDG meets for a period of at least six to eight regular meetings (about ninety minutes each) over three to five months before making its recommendation. Date Begun: _____ and 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 you are 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 churches 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 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 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. 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 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) which is extensive and requires several essays. Please allow considerable time to complete them prayerfully. 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: _____
- Complete the Background Check (FORM J). The cost is borne by the diocese. Date: _____
- Mental Health Examination [psychological] (scheduled through the Mission Support Office). The cost for this exam is borne by the diocese. Date: _____
Note: The COM receives a summary of the psychological evaluation.
- Meet with the bishop after the bishop receives and reviews the results of the background check and psychological examinations. The bishop decides whether you proceed to meet with the Commission on Ministry. Date: _____
- The chair of the COM will send you a request for an interview. Your rector/ sponsoring priest and your spouse/partner (if applicable) may accompany you in this interview. Date Received: _____

Scheduled Date for Postulancy Interview with the COM: _____

The bishop receives and reviews the results of the background check and psychological examinations and the COM's recommendation and makes a judgment on whether 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.

After your interview, if the COM recommends and the bishop grants postulancy, you will be directed to complete the canonically required medical examination.

- 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 (consult diocesan website or Mission Support Office). 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.

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.

As postulant, you are expected to cease participation, if any, on parish and diocesan committees and commissions during your formation.

The Postulant for the Vocational Diaconate will enroll and attend a program of preparation approved by the bishop, the Commission on Ministry, and the Standing Committee that fosters the formation to fulfill the vocation of a Deacon. Basic competencies for the Vocational Diaconate include academic studies of the Holy Scripture, theology, and the tradition of the Church; diakonia and the diaconate; human awareness and understanding; spiritual development and discipline; practical training and experience.

You will also be assigned a member of the COM as a liaison, to provide support and encouragement along the way.

APPENDIX II is about Sustaining Yourself during 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 3) 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, which may be found in the Book of Common Prayer. **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 the following if you have not already done so:
 1. Documents/evaluations from your completion of one unit of an Association for Clinical Pastoral Education program (ACPE-CPE is preferred). (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.
3. 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 recommends 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 can accompany you in this interview. Your spouse/partner will not attend 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 – Vocational Diaconate

On the road to the Vocational 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: _____
- Submit certification/evidence of completion from mentors/instructors of the basic competencies required of formation (no specific Form). 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 Vocational 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.

We are grateful for the time, care, and effort you have invested in this ministry. The responsibility is weighty but of vital importance to the well-being and future of the Episcopal Church in Delaware and the church.

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

Completed original forms should be submitted to:

The Episcopal Church in Delaware
 Attention: Executive Assistant to the Bishop
 913 Wilson Road
 Wilmington DE 19803-4012
 (302) 256.0374 | www.delaware.church

Copies scanned/sent/mailed to Chair, Commission on Ministry, com@delaware.church

APPENDIX I

A Timeline of Expected Accountabilities Utilize FORMS as available on Diocesan Website

After being named an Aspirant for Holy Orders

A Congregational Discernment Group (CDG), appointed by a sponsoring priest (or bishop), is expected to begin its work together **within 45 days** of notification of Aspirant status.



A CDG meets for a period of at least six to eight regular meetings (about 90 minutes each) over three to five months before making its recommendation if the Aspirant is to become a nominee for Holy Orders.

The Vestry (or other body) receives the CDG recommendation and **submits its letter of support** to the bishop and Commission on Ministry along with that of the sponsoring priest **within 25 days** of the conclusion of the work of the CDG.

After being named a Nominee for Holy Orders

The **nominee schedules the psychological evaluation** directly. It is expected that the completion time for the **psychological evaluation and report to the bishop be no more than 60 days** following completion of evaluation.



Upon receipt of all required documents as part of the application for postulancy the nominee is notified. The **Commission on Ministry** is expected to **meet with the nominee within 45 days**.



Within 14 days of the conclusion of interviews, the **Commission will submit its recommendation** regarding postulancy to the bishop.

The **bishop informs the nominee** of status as postulant **within 25 days**.



The Postulant moves toward Candidacy

The Postulant is notified of receipt of all required documents. The **Commission on Ministry** is expected to **meet the postulant within 30 days** in person or via Zoom. The Commission may meet with the postulant on more than one occasion. The **Commission submits documentation of its recommendation to the bishop within 14 days** of completing its interviews.



The Standing Committee acts on status of Candidacy

The **Standing Committee** of the diocese now **meets the postulant within 60 days of the COM's recommendation**. The **Standing Committee** acts on whether to affirm the postulant as having met all requirements to become candidate **at said meeting** and the **postulant is informed in writing within 10 days on status as candidate**.



Candidate applies for ordination as a Vocational Deacon

The **Standing Committee meets with the candidate within 60 days** of receipt of all documentation. The **Standing Committee** acts on whether to affirm the candidate as having met all requirements for ordination and informs the bishop at said meeting. The **candidate is informed in writing within 10 days** on approval for ordination.

APPENDIX II

Sustaining Yourself

The hope is that your time of formation for ordination will deepen your relationship with God and your sense of God's presence in your life. Most people, however, feel frustrated, at least occasionally, by the various requirements and challenges of the process. With this challenge in mind, we ask you to maintain regular spiritual disciplines and to sustain your relationship with God in the following ways.

I. Keep up a Regular Discipline of Prayer

As you know, regular prayer is an integral part of discernment. Because each person encounters God in a different way, use whatever method or discipline works best for you.

II. Meet with your Spiritual Director

If you do not already have a spiritual director, find one. Meeting with your spiritual director on a regular basis is an integral way of remaining open to God and listening for the ways that God is working in your life. It is also recommended that you take one personal retreat each year.

III. Consider Counseling or Coaching

Take time to get to know yourself better through counseling or coaching. Are there past experiences from that impinge upon your well-being? Do you know how you respond to distress and conflict? How can you build emotional resilience for the long term? Do you know the kind of a leader you are?

IV. Take of your body

Take care of your body and it will take care of you! Nothing new here, but all true. Attention to good diet, exercise and sleep pays dividends.

V. Play

Keep up your hobbies or start new ones. That ball game is important. The party with friends. The drive with the family, movie and game nights, stay-cations and vacations, music, and museums. Whatever it takes; whatever tickles your fancy.

VI. Know your Team

At the end of many books the author thanks a host of people, all who made it possible for the writer to succeed. They are often fun and interesting to read. Who is on your team helping you to author your formation? Name them; pray for them; ask them to pray for you. Talk with and listen to them. You matter to them.

Remember to:

- Keep in touch with your sponsoring priest

Now, perhaps more than ever, your sponsoring priest, often your rector, is a resource in your continuing discernment and formation. Plan regular conversations.

- Consult with your COM liaison/shepherd
- Your liaison helps to keep you informed. Your shepherd also keeps the COM aware of your progress. If you have concerns, your shepherd can assist your communication to the COM. Your liaison will ask you about your field education, your seminary experience and your spiritual discernment and may challenge you to think and pray about your journey thus far. He or she may get back in touch with you after reporting to the COM to give you more specific guidance.