



EPISCOPAL DIOCESE
of Rhode Island

**A Process Guide for Those Discerning a Call to
The Sacred Order of Deacons**

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This Guide
is published by
the Commission on Ministry
on behalf of
The Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island.

It is based in part on
A Guide For Discernment: The Ordination to the Vocational Diaconate
as developed by
The Episcopal Diocese of Arizona.

The Ordination of a Deacon

The Examination

My brother/sister, every Christian is called to follow Jesus Christ, serving God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit. God now calls you to a special ministry of servanthood directly under your bishop. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely.

As a deacon in the Church, you are to study the Holy Scriptures, to seek nourishment from them, and to model your life upon them. You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live, and work, and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world. You are to assist the bishop and priests in public worship and in the ministration of God's Word and Sacraments, and you are to carry out other duties assigned to you from time to time. At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself.

My brother/sister, do you believe that you are truly called by God and his Church to the life and work of a deacon?

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 543.

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A Pastoral Letter from the Commission on Ministry¹

So you're interested in ordained life? How exciting! Who knows where God might be leading you, but we on the Commission on Ministry are committed to supporting you in your discernment.

It is our belief that the substance of a call to ordained ministry (really any ministry) comes from the Holy Spirit and is affirmed not only within one's heart but also in the context of one's home congregation and the wider Church. Enclosed you will find documents intended to assist you in your personal reflections and guide you through the Diocesan process. Please read through the materials and familiarize yourself with the outlined steps and stages.

As you will discover, this process requires of you not only serious prayer and reflection but also considerable openness. We ask that you be open to sharing with others your story-- what defines you, what you enjoy, what you understand to be both your gifts and growing edges, and what you believe. We ask that you be open to the questions, sometimes exciting, sometimes unsettling, that arise in any real discernment process. And we ask that you be open to the Holy Spirit, who is always full of surprises.

Please know we are keenly aware of the weighty nature of this undertaking. For our part, we promise to share in your journey not only with equal openness but also transparency and compassion. Regardless of the outcome, we hope you will feel held in prayer and affirmed as a faithful disciple who is being called into some new or renewed ministry. Finally, we welcome feedback from you and those who will join you in this journey so that we may ever improve upon the "art" of creating a process that captures the whispers of the Spirit.

May God bless and guide you in the conversations to come.

Faithfully yours,

The Commission on Ministry

¹ The Commission on Ministry (COM) is a body required by the Canons of the Episcopal Church for every diocese, and it is charged with assisting the diocesan bishop in three specific ways: in the implementation of Title III, the general canons dealing with ministry, in the determination of present and future opportunities and needs for the ministry of all baptized persons, and in the design and oversight of the ongoing process for recruitment, discernment, formation for ministry, and assessment of readiness therefor. (Canon III.2, Sec. 2)

A Note on Process and Terms

The Bishop and the Commission on Ministry (COM) have outlined the following steps in the hope of bringing clarity, transparency, and encouragement to those involved in the discernment process. The steps outline the process from beginning to end for a lay Episcopalian who feels called to diaconal ministry. Since the Bishop is the one who ordains, some parts of the process may be modified at the Bishop's discretion.

The steps in the ordination process have their own ecclesiastical terminology.

- One begins as an **aspirant** – someone who is directing their hopes or ambitions toward achieving ordained ministry.
- **Nomination** is the formal sponsorship by the worship community of a confirmed adult communicant in good standing to seek ordination.
- **Postulancy** is granted by the Bishop. It is a time for exploration and decision on a call to diaconal ministry. To be eligible for admission as a postulant, the nominee must complete the Application for Postulancy, interview with the Bishop and the COM, and the Diocese must receive reports from medical and psychological evaluations as well as an initial background screening.
- **Candidacy** is the second stage of approval in the ordination process. It is a time of deeper formation in preparation for ordination to the Diaconate. The period of Postulancy and Candidacy must be at least 18 months as provided in the *2012 Canons of The Episcopal Church* (Title III, Canon 6, Section 6.a.1, p. 75) but may vary in accordance to an individual's formation needs. Most postulants are approved for candidacy after the completion of their second year of formal training.
- **Ordination:** the Diocesan goal is to ordain candidates to the Diaconate after the successful completion of the candidate's required educational program and formation and a requisite examination.
- **Post-Ordination** formation is provided to each newly-ordained deacon by a mentor priest assigned by the Bishop for a period of at least one year. Ordination, however, does not guarantee an immediate position in the Diocese of Rhode Island.

A Theological Statement on Ordained Ministry and the Discernment Process in The Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island

The Theology of Diaconal Ministry

Through Holy Baptism the people of God are filled with the Holy Spirit and given the power to share in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Through Baptism we are called to servant ministry and to give our lives in service to others. In Baptism we are joined to others who share this vocation, and as members of the Body of Christ, we are servants to one another and to the world. Therefore, everyone baptized into the Body of Christ is a minister of the Gospel.

The ordained deacon is “called to the ministry of service . . . to serve the Lord, the church and the world.....the deacon is thrust into a position of leadership . . . as a leader who serves” (from The Servant Church by John E. Booty). The vocation of the deacon is not advancement for those who have done “every other” lay ministry. The catechism states:

The ministry of a deacon is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a servant of those in need; and to assist bishops and priests in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. (BCP, p. 856)

During the examination for the ordination of a deacon, the bishop says:

As a deacon in the Church, you are to study the Holy Scriptures, to seek nourishment from them, and to model your life upon them. You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live, and work, and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world. You are to assist the bishop and priests in public worship and in the ministration of God’s Word and Sacraments, and you are to carry out other duties assigned to you from time to time. At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ’s people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself. (BCP, p. 543)

While all baptized members of the Church are ministers who care, teach, and support one another, deacons are especially called to proclaim the Gospel and to be ready to help and serve those in need. Therefore, the process of discernment is intended to facilitate identifying those whom God is calling to this particular ministry.

Scripturally, our model for the deacon is rooted in texts such as these:

- *Shared leadership* – Numbers 11:16-17, 24-45a. Deacons work as part of a leadership team with the bishop, priests, other deacons and lay leaders.
- *Call of Jeremiah* – Jeremiah 1:4-10. It is God who works and speaks through the one whom God calls.
- *The Great Commission of Service* – Act 6:1-6. Deacons continue the tradition of Stephen and six others to “wait at tables” as an outward sign of service. The same “*service* Christ put on his ministry and of *servant* on those who minister. He is the embodiment of the first principle of this ministry: *sent to serve.*” (from The Diaconate by James Barnett)

- *Variety of Gifts* – Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13. The Diaconate is a specific ministry, part of the whole body, but no higher or lower than any other.
- *The Bridge Builder* – Matthew 25:31-46. The role of the deacon is to bridge the world to the Church and the Church to the world. To be the radical voice of those living on the margins who are thirsty, who are strangers, who are naked, who are sick and who are imprisoned. To be *transforming agents in the world!*

Introduction to the Discernment Process for the Episcopal Diocese of RI

The whole Church is responsible for raising up ordained leaders of the highest quality with the particular gifts necessary for leading faith communities into the future. Both the individual and the community are simultaneously participating in a process of discernment and affirmation. To that end, the COM, with the direction of our Bishop, is being proactive in its efforts to invite individuals into further discernment about the call to Holy Orders as a deacon. The COM is prayerful about its active steps to seek out entrepreneurial and holy leaders.

The Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island is searching for diaconal candidates with a ministry of leadership and service. These are individuals who have manifested a willingness to link the church to the needs of the world and represent the world to the church. Such candidates are engaged in working with people who live at the margins of our society, and are willing to act as agents of God's justice and mercy. This philosophy is in conjunction to the Book of Common Prayer's statement (p. 510) “. . . there are deacons who assist bishops and priests in all of this work. It is also a special responsibility of deacons to minister in Christ's name to the poor, the sick, the suffering, and the helpless.”

Step 1: Initial Discernment at the Congregation Level

It is important to note that according to the *2012 Canons of the Episcopal Church*², in order for a person to enter the ordination process, he or she must be a confirmed adult communicant in good standing (Title III, Canon 6, Section 2, p. 71) in a congregation or faith community of the Diocese of Rhode Island for at least one year before beginning the ordination process. Any individual who has been refused candidacy or dismissed from formation by other dioceses will not generally be eligible for consideration in this diocese without receipt of a letter from the bishop of that diocese declaring cause of refusal or dismissal (Title III, Canon 6, Section 3c, p. 72). A decision in this matter will be made on a case-by-case basis.

The Bishop and other representatives of the Church strive to exercise prayerful spiritual discernment and pastoral sensitivity with those who believe they might be called to ordained ministry. Any person considering applying for ordination and any clergy person participating in an applicant's discernment should be aware of the following Canon of the Episcopal Church:

No one shall be denied access to the selection process for ordination in this Church because of race, color, ethnic origin, sex, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, disabilities or age, except as otherwise specified by these canons. No right to ordination is hereby established.

Title III, Canon 1, Section 2, p. 67

² http://www.episcopalarchives.org/CandC_ToC_2012.html

It is the intention of the Bishop and the COM to encourage those individuals sensing a call into diaconal ministry to enter into a period of discussion and discernment with their rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge³ of their congregation in order to hear if God is truly calling them into diaconal ministry. Following a period of discussion and discernment with their rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation, and if the person feels called, and if their rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation is convinced of this call, then a letter of introduction and support for that individual should be sent by the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation to the Bishop for his review and action.

Step 2: Initial Screening by the Bishop

Following the receipt and review of a letter of introduction and support, the Bishop and rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation will discuss the individual's gifts for ministry and the Bishop will then schedule a meeting with that person. If the Bishop is agreeable, the person will then be *formally invited* by the Bishop to attend *the Holy Orders Day of Information* to continue in the discernment process.

Step 3: The Holy Orders Day of Information

The *Holy Orders Day of Information* is held annually in the spring and is *by invitation only*. Invitees will be invited by the Bishop to attend a *Holy Orders Day of Information* along with their spouses, their rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation. The purpose of this day is to orient individuals interested in exploring a call to the ordination process and to help them with further discernment. The hope is to clarify the differences between lay, diaconal, and priestly ministries, religious orders and to explore the nature of discernment and formation in the ordination process.

Step 4: Declaration of Intent

The discernment process is multifaceted. First, it includes an individual's assessment of his/her own gifts and potential call. But other individuals who know the person will participate in the discernment process by providing a safe, intimate environment in which one's gifts, vulnerabilities, suitability and readiness for ordained ministry can be discussed openly. The community, both at the congregational level and at the diocesan level, assists the individual by discerning and evaluating his/her gifts and call. The community should be proactive in identifying those they believe might be called to ordained ministry. As the process moves forward, the community's role becomes increasingly evaluative.

Scripturally, our model for discernment is shaped by texts such as these:

- *Moses' Call* – Exodus 4:10-17. Understanding a call to leadership begins with an honest self-discernment of gifts, vulnerabilities and prayer with God.
- *Samuel's Call* – Samuel 3:1 - 4:1a. Leaders assist in discerning God's call.
- *Elizabeth and Mary* – Luke 1:39-45. Others, including friends and family, also assist in affirming one's call.
- *Matthias' Call* – Acts 2:21-26. The Community establishes criteria for selection and is guided by prayer

³ The priest who has canonical responsibility for a congregation.

and the Holy Spirit.

- *Saul's Call* – Acts 9:1-30. God's call is followed by a time of discernment of the call of the community, healing, and spiritual formation.

It is recommended that individuals interested in exploring a call to ordained ministry seek a qualified spiritual director. If guidance is needed in finding a spiritual director, please seek the advice of your rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of your congregation.

The individual who wishes to proceed in the discernment process must complete and submit *Form 1: Declaration of Intent to Seek Postulancy* and forward it to the Bishop. NOTE: *Form 1: Declaration of Intent to Seek Postulancy* must be submitted by the declaration deadline date of June 15. Once it has been submitted, the individual exploring a call is now considered an aspirant.

Step 5: A Continuation of Discernment at the Congregation Level

In preparation for discernment at the congregation level, the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation works with the aspirant to appoint a Parish Discernment Team (PDT) of not less than five and not more than seven mature Christians to discuss the call with the aspirant. Additional information about the formation of a PDT is found in Appendix A of this document.

The primary tasks of the PDT are

- to help discern God's call
- to refine the individual's ability to articulate the reason(s) he / she believes they are called to the diaconate, and
- to be a support for the aspirant whether or not the ordination process continues.

It is important to remember that this PDT does not function as a gatekeeper to pass final judgment on the aspirant's sense of call, nor is it an advocacy group whose mission is to push the aspirant toward ordination. The COM finds the book *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community* by Suzanne Farnham et al, to be a valuable resource to understanding effective dynamics in a PDT. The COM also recommends *Let Your Life Speak* by Parker Palmer as a succinct articulation of the experience of discernment. We urge all aspirants and PDT members to utilize these texts.

By October 15, the PDT will make a written recommendation to the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation about the aspirant's call to diaconal ministry (*Form 2B: Parish Discernment Team's Report*). This recommendation is based on the observation by the COM that aspirants who have this depth in discernment are generally better prepared to articulate their sense of call than others who have been in conversation with a PDT for a briefer period.

During this period of discernment, the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation provides support and feedback to the aspirant as well as discerns for him/herself whether the aspirant is called and is prepared to enter into conversation with the COM about the potential for a call to the diaconate. Pastoral guidance and possible redirection in the discernment process may occur at this point. As difficult as it is to say and hear that one is not called to the diaconate, it is almost always easier to have this conversation earlier rather than later so that the individual may focus on what ministry God is calling him/her to pursue.

During the final meeting of the PDT, the COM Consultant⁴ will provide guidance to the PDT in writing their report. The report is shared with the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation and the vestry/bishop's committee although it is recommended that the PDT not share the entire report with the vestry/bishop's committee. If the aspirant, PDT, rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation, and vestry/bishop's committee agree, the person enters the application/formation process. *The authority to move an aspirant forward in the ordination process rests with the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation and the vestry/bishop's committee.* If after reviewing the PDT's recommendation the vestry/bishop's committee desires to nominate the aspirant, **Form 2A: Nomination of Aspirant is signed and submitted to the Bishop by no later than October 15.** If the aspirant is nominated by the vestry/bishop's committee and makes an application to the Bishop for admission to postulancy, the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation will send the Bishop a confidential letter of recommendation by October 15 that includes a copy of the report of the PDT. Once Forms 2A and 2B have been submitted, the aspirant exploring a call is now considered a *nominee*. It is the hope of the COM that the PDT will continue to meet with the nominee regularly for as long as s/he continues in the application/formation process.

The COM wishes to remind all those participating in the discernment process as well as members of a vestry/bishop's committee that *confidentiality is to be strictly adhered to by all who will be involved with an aspirant's journey in seeking ordained ministry.* The COM Consultant will be emphasizing this important effort frequently to everyone participating in the discernment of a potential call by an aspirant.

Step 6: Nomination and Application for Postulancy

If the sponsoring rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation, the Bishop, and the aspirant feel that there is sufficient reason to continue in the discernment process, the aspirant should formally initiate the process to become a postulant in the Diocese of Rhode Island. Deadlines for each milestone in the application process will be announced at the *Holy Orders Day of Information* and found in Appendix B of this document.

Form 2A: Nomination of Aspirant must be completed and sent to the Bishop by October 15. The rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation must also send a confidential letter of personal recommendation for the nominee addressed to the Bishop by October 15. A copy of the written report from the PDT should also be included with this letter.

The nominee must complete and submit Form 5: The Application for Postulancy by November 15. NOTE: Answers to Essay Questions 1 – 8 are to be attached to Form 5.

The application fee of \$1200.00 which includes the cost of the canonically required psychological evaluation and initial background screening will be shared equally between the nominee (\$400.00), the sponsoring church (\$400.00), and the Diocese (\$400.00). Canon Law (Title III, Canon 6, Sec. 2a.1, p. 71) requires sponsoring congregations to provide financial support to applicants, and a contribution toward the application fee is an appropriate beginning in this regard. If financial assistance is required by a congregation, a letter to the Bishop requesting waiver of the application fee should accompany the application in lieu of a check.

⁴ Appointed by the COM to provide information about and guide the PDT in its work with an aspirant.

Step 7: Health Related Process

Once *Form 2A: Nomination of Aspirant* has been submitted by the vestry/bishop's committee nominating the aspirant, the nominee will schedule all health-related evaluations to be completed in time for reports to reach the Bishop prior to January 1.

- The nominee must go to The Diocesan website (<http://www.episcopalri.org/ForClergyCongregations/LeadingYourDiocese/CommissiononMinistry.aspx#83120-guide-for-deacons>) and download the following required forms:
 - Form 3: Waiver of Confidentiality and Permission to Share Information
 - Form 4: HIPAA Compliant Authorization for Release of Medical, Psychological Records
 - Medical Examination
 - Mental Health
 - Life History Questionnaire
 - Behavioral Screening Questionnaire
- **The nominee must complete and submit a copy of Form 3: Waiver of Confidentiality and Permission to Share Information to the Bishop's Office by no later than October 15.** The nominee should keep two copies of *Form 3*: one for his or medical doctor and one for the Diocesan appointed psychiatrist/psychologist.
- The nominee must schedule a medical exam with his or her physician. He/she must provide his/her physician with a copy of *Form 3*. **The doctor must complete the Medical Examination Form and send it to the Bishop's Office by January 1.**
- A psychological exam must be completed by a professional evaluator named by the Diocese. It is important to note that **the Diocese is the client and the confidential report must be received by the Bishop's Office by January 1.** The nominee must forward a copy of *Form 3* and a copy of the completed Behavioral Screening Questionnaire to the psychologist / psychiatrist two weeks prior to the exam.
- **The nominee must complete and submit a copy of Form 4: HIPAA Compliant Authorization for Release of Medical, Psychological Records to the Bishop's Office by October 15.**
- A background check will be completed for the nominee which is generated through the Diocesan Office.

Step 8: Nominee Interviews with the COM

Once Steps 1 through 7 have been completed and once *Forms 1 through 5* have been processed, received by the Bishop's Office, and reviewed by the Bishop, the nominee will then be directed to make an appointment to meet with the COM. The COM will review *Form 1: Declaration of Intent to Seek Postulancy* and *Form 5: Nominee's Application for Postulancy*, and schedule an appointment to meet with, interview, and evaluate the nominee for Postulancy.

Following that meeting, the Bishop will join the COM to continue the process of communal discernment and recommend whether or not the nominee is to continue in the diaconal process as a postulant. The final

decision is also based upon the results of a background check and the physical and psychological examinations *which the Bishop may review with appropriate health care professionals*. The result is followed up by an official letter from COM to the Bishop about their recommendation.

If the nominee is named a postulant, his or her name and the date of admission are recorded in the Diocesan Register. The Bishop then informs the postulant, the postulant's rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation, the COM, and the Standing Committee⁵. If the nominee is *not* named a postulant, the Bishop will contact the nominee, the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation.

Step 9: Postulancy

The Bishop meets with the postulant to recommend a course of study and preparation. The Bishop will consult with the postulant regarding financial resources which will be available for the support of the postulant throughout preparation for ordination. The Episcopal Church Canons note that a postulant may be removed at the sole discretion of the Bishop who, at that point, would give written notification.

The cost of the Diaconal Formation Program will be shared equally between the postulant, the sponsoring congregation and the Diocese. Canon Law (Title III, Canon 6, Sec. 2a.1, p. 71) requires sponsoring congregations to provide financial support to applicants. The vestry/bishop's committee is responsible for determining the amount of the congregation's contribution. If a congregation is unable to provide the shared amount, the Vestry may send a letter to the Bishop requesting a waiver.

Diaconal formation officially begins with Postulancy. The postulant is to pursue a program of preparation developed by the Bishop and COM which includes theological training, practical experience, emotional development, and spiritual formation. If no baccalaureate degree has been obtained by the postulant, additional academic work must be done, as deemed necessary. Prior education and life experience may be considered as part of formation. Formation should take place in community if possible and shall take into account local culture and the postulant's background, age, occupation, and ministry.

Subject areas of study as set forth in the Episcopal Church Canons shall include:

- 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

(Title III, Canon 6, Section 5f, p. 74)

Preparation for ordination shall include training regarding

- prevention of sexual misconduct
- civil requirements for reporting and pastoral opportunities for responding to evidence of abuse
- Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, particularly Title IV thereof
- the Church's teaching on racism

(Title III, Canon 6, Section 5g, p. 74)

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) may be required before ordination to the Diaconate.

⁵ The Standing Committee acts as the Bishop's council of advice and assists him in the administration of the ecclesiastical affairs of the diocese.

The postulant must send, until ordination, a quarterly report to the Bishop stating academic, personal, and spiritual status and outlining any important changes in these areas since the preceding letter. The Bishop prefers that these letters be sent by e-mail. "Ember Days" have been specified by Canon law (Title III, Canon 6, Sec. 3e, p. 72) as the dates to send these letters. Ember Days are traditionally the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday following: the First Sunday in Lent, Pentecost, Holy Cross Day (September 17), and December 13.

The postulant will attend an *Orientation Day* in June. Currently, postulants and candidates from the Diocese of Rhode Island are attending the Diaconal Formation Program of the Diocese of Massachusetts. A Diaconal Formation Handbook will be provided to all postulants at that time. Please refer to the *Handbook for Diaconal Formation* for step-by-step guidance to the process and requirements.

Step 10: Candidacy

Traditionally, postulancy lasts about two years, but it is important to remember that different people move through discernment at different paces. Some postulants, for one reason or another, may ask or may be asked to hold off from application to candidacy for further discernment as a postulant. As the postulant enters the second semester of his/her second year of training

- The postulant must make application to the Bishop to become a candidate (***Form 6: Postulant's Application for Candidacy***).
- The application must include a letter of support from the sponsoring congregation or faith community and be signed by 2/3 of vestry/bishop's committee and the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation (***Form 7: Rector, Vicar, or Priest-in-Charge and Vestry Affirmation for Candidacy***).
- The Bishop is to receive a statement from the COM attesting to continuing formation of the postulant.

Oxford Document Province One Behavioral Screening

Oxford Document Company is a firm that conducts background checks to screen the candidates of this diocese. They will receive a number of forms directly from Oxford Documents which should be filled out and returned to them upon receipt. These forms ask for information about them and their life over the past fifteen years. The firm will send questionnaires to references they have identified as employers, educational institutions or Bishops with whom they have been involved in order to receive information about their time there. It is important that they fill out the Oxford Documents forms completely and honestly. Doing so will ensure that there will be no surprises from their past that will hinder or terminate their process to ordination later on. Like the initial background screening and psychological exam, the cost of this background screening will be shared equally between the postulant, the sponsoring church and the Diocese.

The Bishop is to receive approval in writing of the Standing Committee who shall have interviewed the postulant and who shall have had an opportunity to review the documentation relating to the application of the postulant.

If the Bishop admits the applicant as a candidate, the Bishop records the candidate's name and date of admission in the Diocesan Register. The Bishop then informs the candidate, the member of Clergy exercising oversight of the congregation (or other faith community), the COM, and the Standing Committee.

If the postulant is not named a candidate, he or she will receive notification from the Bishop. The rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation and the COM Liaison should remain in relationship with the postulant long enough for the postulant to be able to process the information he or she has received. For some this will be a time of deep disappointment and it is important that the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation and the COM Liaison remain in communication with the postulant long enough for the postulant to explore what this decision might mean for his or her vocation and Baptismal calling to serve the Lord. The COM Liaison should also bring back to the COM any issues the postulant might have expressed about the overall process.

Prior to ordination as a deacon, there must have been a thorough medical and psychological examination. If the medical and psychological evaluations or background check have taken place more than 36 months prior, they must be updated. The candidate must continue until ordination to report quarterly to the Bishop, either in person or by letter, stating academic, personal, and spiritual development and outlining any important changes in these areas since the preceding letter. The Bishop prefers that these letters be sent by E-mail. "Ember Days" have been specified by Canon law as the dates to make the quarterly reports. Ember Days are traditionally the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday following: the First Sunday in Lent, Pentecost, Holy Cross Day (September 17) and December 13.

The candidate must remain in canonical relationship with the Diocese in which admission has been granted until ordination to the Diaconate. Combined period for postulancy and candidacy shall be no less than 18 months.

Step 11: Ordination to the Diaconate

Prior to ordination to the Diaconate, the Standing Committee of the Diocese must certify that all canonical requirements have been met and make a recommendation. To do so the Bishop must obtain in writing and provide to the Standing Committee:

- The application for ordination with ***Form 8: Candidate's Application to be Ordained A Deacon***
- Accompanying letter of support from the congregation or other faith community with ***Form 9: Rector's, Vicar's, or Priest's-in-Charge and Vestry's/Bishop's Committee Affirmation for Ordination***
- A certificate from the Bishop giving dates of admission to postulancy and candidacy.
- A letter from the COM giving a recommendation regarding ordination.

The Standing Committee, with a majority of members consenting, must certify that all Canonical requirements have been met and there is no sufficient objection on medical, psychological, moral, doctrinal or spiritual grounds. The Standing Committee will then recommend ordination using the form specified in the canons. This testimonial is presented to the Bishop, and there being no sufficient objection on medical, psychological, moral, doctrinal or spiritual grounds, the Bishop may ordain the candidate a deacon.

Step 12 – Post-Ordination Formation

Each newly ordained deacon in the Diocese, whether employed or not, shall be assigned a mentor Deacon by the Bishop in consultation with the COM. The mentor and new deacon shall meet regularly for at least a year to provide guidance, information, and a sustained dialogue about diaconal ministry.

APPENDIX A: Parish Discernment Team Instructions

Forming a Parish Discernment Team (PDT)

The COM Consultant will contact the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation and provide that individual with an overview of the PDT selection process.

- The rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation meets with the aspirant to select individuals from the congregation who will make up the PDT.
- Working together, the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation and the aspirant form a PDT that includes people who know the aspirant at some level and those who do not know the aspirant.
- The appointment of five members is a wise practice, as circumstances sometimes require a group member to withdraw before the process is completed.
- Ideally one member of the discernment group is also a member of the vestry/bishop's committee/chapter.
- The COM does not recommend that the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation be a member of the PDT, although it is helpful if the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation attends the first meeting of the PDT along with the COM Consultant.
- One of the PDT members will be designated as the convener or chairperson. Another member of the PDT should be appointed scribe so as to keep highlights (not copious notes) and be prepared to construct the first draft of the letter of response to the Rector, Vicar, or Priest-in-Charge.

Meetings

The PDT needs to meet a minimum of four times with the aspirant. Additional meetings could be called as needed, but only in consultation with the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation and the COM Consultant. The meetings should be held about two weeks apart and should last no longer than 90 minutes.

Preparation

The COM finds the book Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community by Suzanne Farnham et al, to be a valuable resource to understanding effective dynamics in a PDT. Additionally, the COM finds that the use of the book Let Your Life Speak by Parker Palmer as a succinct articulation of the experience of discernment. Both of these books are available on loan from the Diocesan Library.

NOTE: Discernment is an act of the community, which in this case is experienced in a slice of that community through a discernment team. Together this team listens to the Holy Spirit speak into the soul of one in their midst not only for the sake of one person but for the entire church. While the members of the PDT often find themselves focused on the vocational call of one individual, the results of such work enhances the personal discernment of each participant within the team.

Tasks

The primary tasks of the Discernment Team are

- to help discern God's call,
- to refine the aspirant's ability to articulate the reason(s) s/he believes s/he is called to the diaconate, and

- to be a support for the aspirant whether or not the ordination process continues.

NOTE: It is important to remember that this PDT does not function as a gatekeeper to pass final judgment on the aspirant's sense of call, nor is it an advocacy group whose mission is to push the aspirant toward ordination.

Meeting Content

First meeting: This is an organizational meeting only. The COM Consultant will meet with the PDT to provide instruction and guidance for the structure of the meetings. The convener and scribe should be appointed. The COM Consultant will outline the meeting organization and construction, provide information regarding discernment and answer any question from the PDT or the aspirant.

NOTE: As the baseline, foundation, and touchtone for discernment, all parties should refer to the Examination (The Book of Common Prayer, p. 543) and answer the question, *how does this charge resonate with the aspirant's sense of call?*

Second meeting: Prior to this meeting, each member of the PDT will give thought to and be prepared to share with their fellow PDT members a 5 – 10-minute response to the following:

- Tell us about your religious upbringing.
- How do you nurture your relationship with God? What practices (formal / informal prayer, worship, journaling, study, retreat) assist you?
- What person(s) have had a significant influence on your spiritual life? Who you are today is in part due to their influence on you.
- What defining moment (a decision you made, an event you participated in, an experience you had) has shaped your spiritual life.

NOTE: The aspirant will be present as an observer and listener for this meeting.

Third meeting: This meeting is dedicated to the aspirant telling her/his spiritual autobiography to the PDT. The spiritual autobiography should be written but not read. After the telling of the story, then copies are distributed. These can be used as reference for later questioning and reflection. The aspirant, if he/she moves forward, will have to submit several essay questions (*Form 5*), and the spiritual autobiography will be helpful in preparing written responses for presentation to the COM.

At the **fourth meeting** the PDT members will ask open-ended questions allowing the aspirant to experience self-discovery regarding *their* call. The discussion might focus on the following as initial points of exploration and discussion:

- Tell us about your experience in the Episcopal Church.
- What is your understanding of ministry, the different functions of the laity, deacons, priests, and bishops?
- Why do you seek the diaconate rather than another vocation?
- Who is God to you?
- Describe for us this sense of calling that you have toward the diaconate. What is it about the diaconate that draws you to this vocation and not another?
- Describe for us your prayer life. Who has been particularly significant in helping you grow in your relationship with God?

- Describe for us ways in which you have demonstrated leadership?
- Describe for us an incident in which you experienced and dealt with conflict.
- What is your sense of the world beyond this community? What are the needs of the Church as you understand them?
- Tell us of a time when your passion to serve others has moved you to action.
- What do you do to relax? How do you balance work, leisure, family, and care for self?
- What does it mean to be a *servant leader*?

Subsequent questioning and self-discovery meetings will be held as needed.

Fifth meeting: At some point the PDT will want to meet without the aspirant to arrive at a decision about their findings to be included in their report. Several options are available to the DT:

- The PDT believes the aspirant is called to the diaconate and is ready to write their report to the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation. The report needs to be written, approved by all members and signed by all members of the PDT (*Form 2B*).
- The PDT is unsure or divided about the aspirants call to the diaconate. A report should be constructed to portray the full spectrum of the PDT's observations, concerns, unanswered questions and conclusions. A subsequent meeting of the PDT with the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation, and in absence of the aspirant, needs to be held. How the results of the PDT's conclusions will be dispersed to the aspirant is at the rector's, vicar's, or the priest's-in-charge of their congregation discretion.
- The PDT does not believe the aspirant is prepared to move forward for a variety of reasons. A subsequent meeting of the PDT and the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation needs to be held to discuss next steps and how this information will be given to the aspirant.

Subsequent meetings could be held with or without the aspirant depending upon the discretion of the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation. The PDT could be called upon to continue to meet with the aspirant for support as the person moves through the process. That decision must be made in consultation with the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation and may be directed by the COM, the COM Liaison and/or the Bishop. The final report may or may not be shared with the aspirant at the discretion of the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation.

The PDT's report will be shared with the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation on or before October 15 by the facilitator of the PDT. Only the portions of the PDT report selected by the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation to omit inappropriate information for dissemination, if any, will be shared with the Vestry, and after nomination by the Vestry, *Form 2A* will be signed and submitted to the Bishop and the COM by October 15. If the Vestry approves the aspirant, the discernment report will be sent forward with the rector's, vicar's, or the priest's-in-charge of their congregation letter of recommendation to the COM by October 15.

Report Content

The content of the report should include:

Use of these prompts in preparing the Report of the Parish Discernment Team is optional but recommended. The PDT may find it helpful to selectively use only some of the prompts, disregarding those that do not seem to fit the aspirant they serve. The Report should be in memo form, addressed to the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of

their congregation and vestry/bishop's committee. If the aspirant is nominated for postulancy, the report will also be read by the Bishop and the Diocesan Commission on Ministry (COM). Recommended length is 500 to 800 words. Generally the report is compiled by one committee member based on input from all committee members. In writing the report, it is helpful to bear in mind that the Bishop and the COM understand the characteristics of the diaconal call to be as described in the Examination from the liturgy for the Ordination of a Deacon which begins on page 537 in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP).

1. A statement indicating how often the PDT met, a list of the team members, and a line or two of what each member does (inside/outside the church) and how long they've known (or not known) the potential nominee.
2. Describe the process of coming together as a PDT. Were there aspects of group-bonding with which the group struggled? Was the material in the book Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community helpful? Are there positive aspects of this group-bonding experience which the group wishes to share?
3. In the view of this group, how important are the Sacraments to this aspirant? How has the group observed the aspirant relating to the Sacraments?
4. Can the group give a specific example of a way in which this aspirant has drawn others closer into community or into closer relationship to Christ?
5. Does the group agree that this aspirant fashions her/his life in accordance with the Good News of Jesus Christ? If so, please give an example to illustrate.
6. Would each member of the group feel comfortable turning to this aspirant in a time of personal crisis? *(NOTE: it is suggested that each group member share their own answer to this question The COM recognizes that some people may have discomfort for reasons not specific to the aspirant; e.g. if someone older than the aspirant has difficulty turning to a younger adult for support or counsel.)*
7. Does the group experience the aspirant as someone 'reclaiming the Great Commission' (Matthew 28:16-20)? If so, please give a specific example.
8. Does the group believe that this aspirant is open to formation as a deacon in this Church?
9. The liturgy for The Ordination of a Deacon includes a vow of obedience to the Bishop (p. 538, BCP). Does your PDT believe that this aspirant can balance dynamic leadership with obedience? Why or why not?
10. Does the group recommend that this aspirant be granted Postulancy, the first step in the ordination process?

The actual recommendation text for the potential nominee should be reflective upon information "heard" by the committee during the meetings – the use of responses to the question prompts on pages 13 and 20 of the "A Guide for Discernment – Vocational Diaconate" are *optional* but *highly recommended*.

This recommendation is for the Diaconate, NOT Priesthood; another resource to interpret what is being heard can be found within "The Examination – Ordination: Deacon" on pages 543 and 544 in the Book of Common Prayer. An additional thought comes from The Diaconate – A Full and Equal Order by James Barnett on page 168:

They [deacons] are to “inspire, promote and help coordinate the service that the whole Church” is to do . . . deacons acting to involve increasing numbers of laity in service ministries. The ministries [serving abused children, homeless, victims of racial and ethnic discrimination, prisoners, etc.] are societal in nature, flowing from Christian love, and are directed both toward those within and without the Church . . . guidelines further state that deacons have “a special responsibility to identify to the Church those who are in need and particularly those who are without power or voice at the margins of our society.

As a committee, does the potential nominee have the “Heart to serve”, “Hands to Prayer”, and the “Voice to lead”?

Structure of the PDT’s Report

- Content is compiled by one member of the committee (i.e. chairperson) – ALL members must sign the report.
- A statement indicating how often the committee met, a list of the committee members, and a line or two describing what each member does (inside/outside the church) and how long they’ve known (or not known) the potential nominee.
- It is to be in narrative text?
- It should use a memorandum format addressed to the rector, vicar, or the priest-in-charge of their congregation and the vestry/bishop’s committee.
- Approximately 500 to 800 words in length.

APPENDIX B: Deadline Dates



ASPIRANCY – POSTULANCY

ACTION ITEMS	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	DEADLINE DATES
Letter of introduction & support	From Rector/Vicar/Priest-in-Charge (PIC) to Bishop	March 15
Initial screening	Bishop	April 15
Invitation to Holy Orders Day of Information	From Bishop to aspirant, spouse, Rector/Vicar/PIC	April 15
Attend Holy Orders Day of Information	Invitees are expected to attend	April / May (TBD)
Download* and process <i>Form 1: Declaration of Intent to Seek Postulancy</i>	From aspirant to Bishop	June 15
Form Parish Discernment Team (PDT)	Aspirant, Rector/Vicar/ PIC, & COM consultant	June
Attend PDT meetings	Aspirant, PDT, & COM consultant	June – October
Download* and process <i>Form 2B: Discernment Team Report</i>	From PDT to Rector/Vicar/PIC	October 15
Download* and process <i>Form 2A: Nomination of Aspirant</i>	From Vestry & Rector/Vicar/PIC to Bishop	October 15
PDT Report & Rector's/Vicar's / PIC's confidential letter	From Rector/Vicar/PIC to Bishop	October 15
Download* and process <i>Form 3: Waiver of Confidentiality</i>	From nominee to Bishop	October 15
Download* and process <i>Form 4: Release of Records</i>	From nominee to Bishop	October 15
Download* and process <i>Form 5: Application for Postulancy</i>	From nominee to Bishop	November 15
Download* and process medical forms; schedule medical exam	Nominee to nominees primary care physician	January 1
Download* and process psychological forms; schedule psychological evaluation	Nominee to Dr. Margaret Wool (401-261-1500)	January 1
Nominee interviews with Commission On Ministry (COM)	COM chairperson to nominee	(TBD)
COM meets with Bishop	COM chairperson to Bishop	(TBD)

* <http://www.episcopalri.org/ForClergyCongregations/LeadingYourDiocese/CommissiononMinistry.aspx>