

Discernment Process for  
Licensed and Ordained Ministries  
in the Episcopal Church  
Diocese of Idaho

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## Our Call to Ministry

The Diocese of Idaho encourages all of its faith communities to work actively to discern Christian vocations for all of its members. Most of the time, these will be lay vocations, some of which require specialized training and licensing. From time to time, however, we expect faith communities to identify members with possible vocations to ordained ministry.

Discernment is defined as “perception in the absence of judgment with a view to obtaining spiritual guidance and understanding.” It is commonly done in a community when we gather as Christians to perceive the “spiritual guidance and understanding” of what God is calling us to do. And, as the definition says, it is accomplished “in the absence of judgment;” discernment can only be true when it is done with open hearts and open minds to the will of God for each of us.

This handbook provides a suggested outline for vocational discernment of certain ministries in the church that require either specialized training and licensing or, in the case of ordination, a canonical process that must be followed. While most Christian vocations do not require such an intensive form of discernment, this guide can be a helpful resource for how clergy, lay leaders, and other members may discern calls to ministry in the church and in the world.

## Licensed Lay Ministries

*Details on these ministries are currently under revision by the Bishop.*

Lay vocations offered in the Diocese of Idaho which require licensing by the Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority are the following:

- **Eucharistic Minister:** A person who assists in the administration of the Consecrated Elements at a celebration of Holy Eucharist, under the direction of a deacon (if present) or priest-in-charge.
- **Eucharistic Visitor:** A person authorized to take the Consecrated Elements following a celebration of Holy Eucharist to those who were unable to attend. This ministry is under the direction of a deacon (if available) or the priest-in-charge.
- **Preacher:** A person authorized to preach in worship, under the direction of the priest-in-charge.
- **Catechist:** A person authorized to prepare persons for Baptism, Confirmation, Reception, and the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows, under the direction of the priest-in-charge.
- **Pastoral Leader:** A person authorized to exercise pastoral and administrative responsibility in a congregation under special circumstances.
- **Worship Leader:** A person who regularly leads public worship, under the direction of the priest-in-charge.
- **Evangelist:** A person who presents the good news of Jesus Christ in such a way that people are led to receive Christ as Savior and follow him as Lord. The ministry is in partnership with the priest-in-charge.

Discernment for licensed lay ministries occurs entirely within the local faith community (Local Discernment Committee). Refer to the website of the Diocese of Idaho for Guidelines and Requirements of these ministries.

# Ordained Ministries

Ordained vocations in the church are the following:

- **Deacon:** A person called 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.
- **Priest:** A person called to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a pastor to the people; to share with the bishop in the overseeing of the Church; to proclaim the Gospel; to administer the sacraments; and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God.
  - A **Bi-vocational priest** is one whose primary income is from a source outside of church work.
  - A **Seminary trained priest** is one who discerns a call to the priesthood as a primary profession and source of income.

Discernment for ordained ministries occurs both within the local faith community (Local Discernment Committee) and on the diocesan level (Commission on Ministry). Refer to the website of the Diocese of Idaho for the Overview of the Ordination Process.

The Episcopal Church does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation. For ordination, the Episcopal Church does not discriminate based on age, except that a Nominee must be an adult communicant in good standing, thus meaning at least 16 years of age, and no person may be ordained before reaching the age of 24. There is no “type” of person who may or may not be ordained, except for one thing: leadership. The Episcopal Church ordains persons to serve as leaders in the Church. Thus, communities should not nominate persons who either do not want to lead or lack the necessary gifts for leadership.

# Discernment on the Community Level:

## Local Discernment Committee

The process of discernment for any ministry begins within the local faith community. It can be formal or informal--or something in between--depending on the ministry being considered and the resources of the parish or congregation. It will include reflection upon a person's sense of identity, purpose in life, spiritual gifts, and the needs of the community.

The following process is designed for those who are seeking discernment for the ordained ministry, but it may be modified and adapted as needed for those pursuing a licensed lay ministry or any other Christian vocation.

### Guidelines for a Local Discernment Committee (LDC)

#### Overview

*What is this all about & why*

- We all have vocations.
- We can and usually do have more than one at a time.
- Vocations change over time based on our maturing and our changing environments.
- Frederick Buechner from *Wishful Thinking*: "The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most need to have done... The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."
- Spiritual Discernment involves reflection on our deep gladness, the world's deep hunger, and our spiritual gifts.
- Lloyd Edwards from *Discerning Your Spiritual Gifts*: "They are a product of my genetic inheritance, of my experience, of my particular likes and dislikes, of my particular wounds and sufferings. No one else has exactly the same combination of these as I. And it is precisely this combination all of it--that I am called to use in God's service. When we have discovered our gifts, we have discovered what is unique about our call from God; we have discovered that which most personally relates us to our creator."
- Our vocations, when we have discerned them should bring us joy, excitement, and energy. If they seem onerous to you, go back and start over. You have taken a wrong turn somewhere.

#### What Do We Mean When We Talk About Ministry?

*From the Catechism in The Book of Common Prayer:*

Q. Who are the ministers of the Church?

A. The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.

Q. What is the ministry of the laity?

A. The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of

reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.

Q. What is the ministry of a bishop?

A. The ministry of a bishop is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese; to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the whole Church; to proclaim the Word of God; to act in Christ's name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ's ministry.

Q. What is the ministry of a priest or presbyter?

A. The ministry of a priest is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as pastor to the people; to share with the bishop in the overseeing of the Church; to proclaim the Gospel; to administer the sacraments; and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God.

Q. What is the ministry of a deacon?

A. 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.

Q. What is the duty of all Christians?

A. The duty of all Christians is to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God.

## Procedures for a Local Discernment Committee

- The LDC should be comprised of at least one member of the local clergy (ideally for the order being considered), at least one member of the vestry, and at least two other ministry leaders from the congregation.
- The LDC should appoint:
  - A **Convener** who schedules and notifies the members of the meetings, and who chairs and facilitates the meetings.
  - A **Recorder** who is responsible for the final report to the Vestry. This means that the Recorder will need to make sure that all appropriate areas are covered and that notes are kept about the work of the committee and the Inquirer's responses.
  - A **Chaplain** who makes sure that meetings are opened and closed with prayer and appropriate Bible study is included in the work of the LDC. Should a conflict arise, the Chaplain should be willing to help the committee negotiate the tensions in healthy ways.
- The LDC should meet with the Inquirer with each meeting covering a portion of one of the outlined sessions. Please respect attention spans and limit meetings to 90 minutes with at least two weeks between sessions.
- Resources for the LDC include The Book of Common Prayer (particularly pages 832-33, the Catechism section concerning Ministry, the Baptismal Covenant, the Examination sections within the ordination services), I Corinthians 12:1, 4:14, Ephesians 4:7, 11-16, Romans 12:1-8, and Acts 4:13.

# An Outline of LDC Sessions

## Session I: Introductory Session

### Orientation

At the start of this first session, the following should be discussed among the committee members and the Inquirer:

1. General introductions are made
2. Group norms and guidelines are reviewed, such as the following:
  - Confidentiality must be maintained throughout the process
  - Bring questions/concerns/etc. to the whole group (i.e. no one-on-one conversations about discernment outside the group)
  - Be committed to the process (don't miss meetings)
  - Seek the fruit of the Spirit
  - Other norms may be agreed upon by the group
3. The Convener, Recorder, and Chaplain are appointed

### Guidelines for a Spiritual Autobiography

The Inquirer is then assigned the task of writing a spiritual autobiography to be provided prior to the next scheduled meeting. It should be no longer than four pages, double-spaced, 12 points in Times Roman font.

A spiritual autobiography is the story of significant events, people, and places that have influenced your relationship with God. In other words, it's about the formation of your spirituality and how that is continually fed, nurtured, strengthened and challenged. As you write your autobiography, consider these helpful prompts. You don't have to answer these questions, but weave these questions into your storyline, so that the discernment members get a better idea of who you are and what and where you have been in your life. This info will help your committees to discern your call better.

- What are your early memories of the role of religion or spirituality in your life?
- What do you believe? What is your theology?
- What influenced your beliefs and spirituality?
- Who were your role models and teachers?
- How has your understanding or experience of God changed in your lifetime?
- What incidents or experiences have been turning points in your spiritual journey?
- What have been your most profound religious experiences?
- Where have you felt God's presence in your life?



- When have you felt God's absence in your life?
- When have you turned away from God?
- What are the personal practices that have supported your journey?
- Who are the people who have influenced your faith?
- How have you experienced God's call?
- Encounters with God (mystical, practical, in alone moments, through other people)
- Significant events (when your faith has been tested, strengthened, revealed)
- Experiences of spiritual growth (epiphanies, gradual enlightenment/learnings)
- The modeling and witness of others (the "Christ bearers" in your life)

Finally, write about the ways in which God is active in your life today. Through whom or what? What is your understanding of your relationship with Christ today? Say something about the commitments you have made as a result of your life's experiences and your sense, if any, of the Christian vocation you have developed as a result.

Reflect on all this before you begin writing. Make notes for yourself, then begin writing. You may find that you have exceeded the four-page limit we have given you. If so, keep a copy of the entire spiritual autobiography you have written for yourself, and submit the edited version to the LDC.

### **Committee Member Spiritual Timelines**

While the inquirer is composing a spiritual autobiography, each member of the LDC should make a spiritual timeline of particular events in his or her life. By doing so, committee members show that they are willing to disclose something of themselves to the group before they ask the Inquirer to do so in greater depth.

## **Session II: Getting Acquainted**

The following should then take place at the next scheduled meeting of the LDC:

- The Inquirer chooses a passage of Scripture to share with the group, shares what it means to him/her.
- Each member of the LDC takes five to ten minutes to share their spiritual timelines.
- The Inquirer shares in length the spiritual autobiography and responds to questions, clarifications, or elaboration as needed.

After reading and hearing the spiritual autobiography, the LDC and Inquirer explore the following areas over the course of the remaining meetings. These topics and questions are suggestions; they are not exhaustive. Committees may add or subtract questions as appropriate to the Inquirer.

## **Session III: Exploration of Gifts for Ministry**

### **Scripture Selection**

- Psalm 139:1-11
- 1 Corinthians 12:1,4-13;

- Romans 12:1-12
- John 20:19-23

### **Meditation**

- What do you hear?
- What insights does this passage offer us?
- What are your spiritual gifts? How have you identified those gifts?
- Think about a time you did something well and it brought you great joy.
- Think about a time you were involved in a task so deeply that you lost all sense of time.
- Think about a time when you have used one of your spiritual gifts. What was the need, and what was your action? How did your use of this spiritual gift impact others? Who benefitted?
- Think about a time when you enabled another's spiritual gifts.
- How have you used your spiritual gifts to help build the Church?
- How have you been a leader? How would others describe your leadership style? What has it been like to get others to follow your leadership?
- Think about a time when you created something new... a new ministry or group or project. Whose idea was it? Did you get help from others? How did it turn out?
- What are the gifts that you know you do not possess? What are the gifts that you think are there, but that you would like to develop further?

### **Conversation**

- Tell a story about a time when you were able to take a hurt or a wound from your past and use it to your advantage.
- Tell a story about a time you were able to help someone in need because of a similar experience you had in the past.
- Tell a story of some experience you had that was so important that it now is part of who you are.

## **Session IV: The Mission of the Church**

### **Scripture Selection**

- 2 Corinthians 5: 14-21

### **Meditation**

- What do you hear?
- What insights does this passage offer us for this meeting?

### **Conversation**

- Talk about a time when you were in a relationship that was broken. How did it break? Did you seek reconciliation? If so, how? How did that work out?

- What are some ways that you have participated in the Church's mission of reconciliation?
- Frederick Buechner defines call as an intersection of "where our deepest gladness meets the world's deepest need." What is your deepest gladness? Where does your gladness meet a need in the world? How have you already been engaged in this call? Where do you see that intersection in the future?
- The Outline of the Faith also says that the duty of all Christians is "to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God" (BCP p. 856). How have you fulfilled these duties? How has that changed over time? Tell about your journey of stewardship – how you give of your time, talent, and money.
- Review the promises all Christians make in the Baptismal Covenant (BCP p. 304-305). Looking at each of the five "discipleship questions," give examples of how you have lived out those promises in your life so far. Which of the promises do you feel you've followed most faithfully? Which ones are most difficult for you? What are the things in your life that prevent you from being faithful to these promises?

## Session V: One Body, Many Members

### Scripture Selection

- 1 Corinthians 12: 4-28

### Meditation

- What do you hear?
- What insights does this passage offer us for this meeting?

### Conversation

- Tell about your experience as a layperson in the church. How have you "represented Christ and his Church," bearing witness to Christ to others, participating in reconciling work in the world, and participating in the life of the church. How has this been satisfying, or not?
- Describe ways that you have been a servant to those in need. What were those experiences like? What did you learn?
- Tell about a time when you were in conflict with someone who had authority over you. What was the problem? What did you do? How was the situation resolved? What did you learn?
- What are some indications of being called? To any particular vocation? To the ordained ministry?
- Tell about a time when you experienced grace – a gift that you did not deserve or earn, but received anyway. What did you gain from that experience?
- When you reflect on your current sense of call to ordained ministry, what are your fears? Why?
- How might God use some of your "deficiencies" for good?

- How have people in your community responded when they hear that you are discerning for ordination? Who has supported you? Has anyone been surprised? If so, why? Has anyone reacted negatively? If so, why?
- Tell about your life in the Episcopal Church. If coming from another tradition, what drew you to the Episcopal Church? What do you see as the main differences with your former tradition? Have you participated in the Episcopal Church beyond your home?

## Session VI: Counting the Cost

### Scripture Selection

- Matthew 10:5-16

### Meditation

- What do you hear?
- What insights does this passage offer us for this meeting?

### Conversation

- Describe a time when you chose to make a significant change in your life. What was your goal? What did you sacrifice in order to achieve that goal? How did you manage the stress related to the change? What did you learn from that experience?
- What do you imagine you would have to give up in order to pursue ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church? How do you feel about those potential sacrifices?
- Talk about the potential roadblocks between you and the possibility of ordination (financial, health, relocation, etc.) How will you navigate these roadblocks?
- (If there is a spouse) How does your spouse feel about this call? In what ways is he/she supportive? Is he/she willing to make changes (financial, moving for seminary, etc.)?
- What is your educational background? How did you do as a student? How do you feel about going through an educational process again?
- Describe an experience when you were disappointed. What happened and how did you respond?
- Describe an experience of conflict. What happened and how did you respond?
- What do you do regularly to take care of yourself? Are there any persistent struggles that affect your wellness?

After exploring these topics, the LDC and Inquirer should discuss whether there are any topics that require further discussion, or any important areas left untouched. Additional meetings may be scheduled as needed.

## Session VII: Report of the Local Discernment Committee

The LDC meets without the Inquirer to complete the report to the Vestry and Priest. See Appendix A in this guide for a sample letter that may be helpful in creating the report.

Additionally, the Inquirer is assigned to write a reflection to be submitted to the LDC. In 500 words, discuss what you have learned about yourself and your call in this discernment process.

The final session should be scheduled to include the LDC, the Inquirer, and the Rector or Priest-in-Charge (if not already a member of the LDC). The above reports should be provided to all at least one week prior to the meeting.

## Session VIII: Final Meeting

The LDC, Inquirer, and the Rector or Priest-in-Charge meet to review the Report to the Vestry. Revisions may be made using feedback from anyone involved in the process. A final copy should be given to the Inquirer, Rector, and Vestry. The local discernment process is then brought to closure.

# How to Nominate Someone for Ordination

Following the conclusion of the local discernment process, a nomination for ordination is appropriate whenever a faith community identifies a person they believe to have a possible vocation to ordained ministry and deserving of further discernment at the diocesan level.

Electronic versions of the forms mentioned below may be found on the website of the Diocese of Idaho under "Overview of the Ordination Process."

1. As soon as possible, arrange for the potential Nominee to interview with the bishop.
2. A Nominee must be an adult communicant in good standing of the congregation.
3. The Rector / Vicar / Priest-in-charge plus at least 2/3 of the Vestry or Bishop's Committee must sign a letter of nomination (template available on the website).
4. A congregation may specify the nomination for the priesthood or the diaconate or to be determined.
5. The Nominee must accept the nomination in writing (template available on the website).
6. The Nominee must fill out the Nominee Information Form (template available on the website), and mail this form to the diocesan office along with a resume, transcripts, and photo.
7. The Nominee must provide an updated copy of the spiritual autobiography and the final reflection on the discernment process.

After the above information is sent to the Bishop's Office and the person is admitted as a Nominee, the Commission on Ministry (CoM) for the diocese begins the next stage of further discernment.

# Appendix A

## Report of the Local Discernment Committee to the Priest and Vestry

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the Inquirer \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Church \_\_\_\_\_

The findings of the Local Discernment Committee are the following (each answer not to exceed more than 350 words):

1. What is this person's understanding of Christian ministry?
2. How is this person growing in the Christian faith?
3. Describe the current and past ministries of this person.
4. What is this person's capacity to learn?
5. What is the status of this person's physical and emotional health?
6. Describe this person's leadership style and roles.
7. How do you experience this person's ministry?
8. What do you believe is this person's call to ministry?
9. Do you believe the call is to ordained ministry, and if yes, to which order?
10. What evidence do you see in this person's life to support your conclusion?
11. What obstacles or weaknesses are present that may prevent this person from serving fully and fruitfully as an ordained minister of the Church?
12. What additional training, skills, and resources does this person need to respond to this call?

Recommendation of the LDC \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix B

## **Sample Timeline for Ordination to the Priesthood or Diaconate The Episcopal Diocese of Idaho (*updated March 2023*)**

### **Inquirer**

1. Individual becomes an involved member of a parish in the Episcopal Diocese of Idaho. The individual is a baptized and confirmed adult communicant in good standing of the parish for a minimum of one year. During this time the individual comes to know and become involved in the parish and gets to know parishioners and clergy.
2. The Inquirer meets with the clergy in charge regarding discernment of a call to ordained ministry. Inquirer and clergy begin a period of service and exploration of the person's sense of call (**Form 0**).
3. The clergy in charge writes a letter to the bishop describing the inquirers involvement in the parish and their sense of call. In response to the letter the bishop issues an invitation to the clergy and inquirer to meet together with the bishop.
4. The bishop invites the inquirer to begin the process of formal discernment with the Local Discernment Committee (LDC) and requests the Commission on Ministry (COM) initiate training of the LDC (**Form 1 and 2**).
5. COM trains the LDC.

### **Nominee**

1. LDC and Inquirer meet together to discern a call. Meetings should be held with a minimum of two weeks between meetings.
2. Upon completion of local discernment (a period lasting from 6 month to 1 year) an application MAY be made for nomination to the COM. This application includes letters of support from the vestry and clergy (**Forms 3 and 4**).
3. Nominee completes application (**Form 5**) for admittance to postulancy.
4. Nominee completes (1) Background check (**Form 6 & 11**) (2) psychological evaluation (**Forms 7, 8 and 9**) and (3) physical evaluation (**Form 10**).



5. Bishop reviews application and recommends nominee receives invitation to interview with the COM (Form 12), which will then make a recommendation regarding postulancy to the bishop (Form 13).
6. The bishop makes a determination regarding postulancy; the determination may be “yes”, “no”, or “not at this time” (Form 14).

## **Postulant**

(~3 years)

1. The bishop, after consulting with the postulant, makes a recommendation and decision regarding the seminary the postulant will attend or the program of study the postulant will follow.
2. Postulant commences formation at the specified seminary or school of ministry.
3. Postulant stays in regular contact with their assigned COM liaison and submits required Ember Day correspondence with the bishop.
4. No earlier than the final year of study, the postulant applies (Form 15) for Candidacy. Postulant interviews with the COM. Application will be accompanied by progress evaluations from postulant’s course of study. Each will make their recommendation and the bishop makes the final determination regarding candidacy. The determination may be “yes”, “no” or “not at this time.” (Form 16, 17 & 18)

## **Candidate and Ordinand**

1. After a minimum of 6 months the Candidate may apply for ordination to the Diaconate (if a candidate for Diaconate) or Transitional Diaconate (if a candidate for priesthood). (Form 19) \*Application will be accompanied by updated background checks, psychological and medical evaluations, endorsement by the Postulant’s clergy and vestry (Form 20), report from the examining chaplains (results of General Ordination Exams offered each January in a candidates final year of study or results from the local board of examining chaplains) (Form 21) and completion of required trainings (Sexual Misconduct Awareness, Title IV of the Canons of the Episcopal Church, and Anti-Racism).
2. Candidate will be invited to interview with the COM and the Standing Committee of the Diocese as well as the bishop. (Form 22 & 23)
3. Candidate is ordained to the Diaconate (or Transitional Diaconate if a candidate for priesthood). (Form 24)

4. A Transitional Deacon (one whose call is to the priesthood) may apply for ordination to the priesthood once they have served as a Deacon for minimum of six months. (Form 25). Application includes clergy and vestry endorsement (Form 26), report of examining chaplains (Form 27), and meeting with COM (Form 28) and Standing Committee of Diocese (Form 29).
5. Transitional Deacon is ordained to the priesthood (Form 30).

*\*Details on the licensed ministry training will be provided at a later document after some careful revision and study by the Commission on Ministry.*