



**The Episcopal Diocese of New York
Commission on Ministry**

PARISH DISCERNMENT HANDBOOK
A Guide to
Discerning God's Call to Holy Orders

The Bishop, Commission on Ministry, and the discernment community shall assist persons engaged in a process of ministry discernment to determine appropriate avenues for the expression and support of their ministries, either lay or ordained.

– Constitution & Canons of The Episcopal Church

April 14, 2021

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This handbook is designed to provide an overview of the important role priests and Parish Discernment Committees play in the process of discernment, formation, and ordination as it is carried out in the Episcopal Diocese of New York. New materials have been supplemented with information gathered from previously published diocesan handbooks and from guides published by other dioceses, including Massachusetts, Newark, Pennsylvania, Southwestern Virginia, Spokane, Washington, and Alabama.

PARISH DISCERNMENT HANDBOOK

A Guide to

Discerning God's Call to Holy Orders

Introduction

The call to ministry is a gift every Christian receives through baptism. Discerning the specifics of one's call is a lifelong adventure. Learning to respond willingly— and even joyfully—is the mark of mature faith.

Within the Christian community, another kind of call may be discerned—the call to ordained ministry. Those who become deacons, priests, and bishops serve God and the Church by encouraging and supporting all the baptized in the diverse ministries to which they are called. For this reason, the selection and, later, the formation of those who will serve as clergy require careful attention, so that they may offer faithful and fruitful service as they work to build up the Body of Christ and to reveal the presence of God's kingdom on earth.

The principal focus of discernment concerns how closely an individual's gifts and experience match the unique challenges of ordained ministry in this time and place. We pray for the Spirit's guidance in all stages of this process, and we trust that the process will continue to evolve over time.

This handbook is intended to provide priests and Parish Discernment Committees with an overview of their important role and ministry in the process of discernment, formation, and ordination as it is carried out in the Episcopal Diocese of New York. This process is our best attempt to respond faithfully to the Holy Spirit's movement in our parishes. Our hope is that this guide will provide priests and Parish Discernment Committees with the essential information and resources they need to participate fully in the discernment process for those who feel called to seek ordination to the priesthood or diaconate.

The Discernment Process and the Role of the Parish Priest and Parish Discernment Committee

Every baptized person is a minister and has been given gifts which are to be used to further God's Kingdom. The Church provides the parish priest, the Parish Discernment Committee, and the Commission on Ministry to help a baptized person to discern what his or her gifts are and how those gifts may best be used to further God's kingdom on earth. The Church is to help each baptized person to live into the ministry to which God has called her/him.

The formal discernment process begins with a focused period of inquiry, service, and exploration of call between a person and his or her priest, lasting several months to a year. To enter the process, the individual is required by the Canons of the Episcopal Church to be a baptized and confirmed or received adult communicant in good standing, who has been faithful in corporate worship and in working, praying, and giving for the spread of the Kingdom of God for the previous year. (see Appendix A)

As the spiritual and pastoral leader of the parish, the priest plays a critical role in the discernment process and supports the individual by exploring with him or her the extent and nature of the call experience, including whether the call is to service in the Church as a priest, deacon, or lay person. There are also those whose call might be to a life in one of the Episcopal monastic communities, or to one of the dispersed vowed Episcopal Christian Communities. Information about these possibilities can be found at www.caroa.net and www.naecc.net.

It is important for the priest to consider whether the individual has been living a mature Christian life over a period of time and whether there are sufficient visible signs of faithful commitment to Christ and to the Church to warrant further exploration of a call. Such signs should include regular participation in worship, active involvement in one or more ministries of the faith community, and personal practices of prayer and study. These are minimal expectations.

If the priest has seen the beginning signs of a call to ordained ministry and believes that the individual possesses the gifts and character for ordained ministry, the priest forms a Parish Discernment Committee to meet with the individual. The Parish Discernment Committee normally meets for a period of six months to a year. In preparation for meeting with the Discernment Committee, the priest provides guidance to the individual for writing a spiritual autobiography, ministry statement, and personal history that will form a basis for initial conversations with the Discernment Committee.

The spiritual autobiography (1-3 pages) is the story of the individual's relationship with Jesus Christ and the significant events, people, and places that have influenced that relationship. The spiritual autobiography includes, for example, the faith heritage into which the individual was

born, a description or explanation of any subsequent personal conversions, his or her call to ministry, religious experiences, and significant persons and events that continue to impact his or her spiritual growth and development.

The ministry statement (1 page) provides the individual's vision and understanding of the needs of the Episcopal Church today and how he or she will help meet those needs as a priest or deacon. Why is he or she seeking ordination as a priest or deacon rather than another vocation, and what is his or her vision of his/her ordained ministry in the Diocese of New York? If the individual has been actively involved in the ministries of another denomination, how will those ministries be incorporated into his or her ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church? Why is he or she seeking ordination in the Episcopal Church rather than another denomination?

The personal history (1 page) describes the individual's family of origin, current family relationships, and important and supportive personal relationships. It includes significant persons, especially as they have impacted (positively or negatively), or continue to impact, his or her personal growth and development.

The spiritual autobiography, mission statement, and personal history are to be given to the Discernment Committee before the first meeting with the Discernment Committee.

The role of the Parish Discernment Committee is to help the individual gain greater self-awareness and a deeper understanding of his or her call to ministry, and whether it requires ordination or not. Once the individual is engaged in the formal discernment process, he or she is referred to as an aspirant.

The priest selects four to seven members of the congregation who reflect the diversity of the congregation in age and history in the congregation and with the aspirant, including one vestry member, to serve on the committee. Discernment sessions may be conducted with four Discernment Committee members. For the sake of continuity, it is important that each member attend every session. When one member is absent, he or she not only misses the discussion, but the group is weakened by the loss of his or her point of view. To accommodate scheduling, and ensure the availability of four members to participate in every session once discernment with an individual is begun, it is helpful to select up to seven members of the congregation to serve on the committee.

The priest also appoints a chair for the group who will convene the group for its work with the aspirant on a regular basis, and ultimately oversee the writing of an evaluation report at the end of the discernment process.

The Parish Discernment Committee is to ask the difficult and challenging questions of vocational discernment. The group should consider that its role is to listen carefully and reflect

on what they hear. Normally this process will take a minimum of six months and up to a year, involving between six and eight sessions and should be an exploration of ministry and its meaning.

If this is the first time a parish is convening a Parish Discernment Committee, the parish may request that a Discernment Facilitator from the Commission on Ministry attend and facilitate the initial orientation and also provide training in the Listening Hearts practice of Spiritual Discernment. This training is designed to immerse the committee in the practice of spiritual discernment and fully prepare the group to participate in fruitful discernment with the aspirant.

Throughout the time of the Discernment Meetings with the aspirant, first time Parish Discernment Committees can request the support and guidance of a member of the Commission on Ministry. Upon conclusion of its work, the Discernment Committee summarizes its discernment in a written Parish Discernment Committee Report to the priest. The priest has the responsibility of making recommendations about the aspirant to the bishop. If the priest discerns that the aspirant should move forward and into the diocesan discernment process, he or she submits a letter to the bishop nominating the aspirant to postulancy for either the priesthood or diaconate (see Appendices B and C).

During the time of parish discernment, the parish priest and aspirant are encouraged to attend the annual diocesan Vocations Day. This is an opportunity for those in formal discernment, along with their priests, to interact with the bishop, members of the Commission on Ministry, along with fellow aspirants, aspirants, postulants, and candidates. It also provides an occasion to reflect on our journey of discernment. This event is intended only for those in formal discernment, that is, those in the diocesan discernment process, meeting with a parish discernment committee, or formally talking to a priest about the call to ordained ministry.

What Do We Mean When We Talk About Ministry?

From the Catechism in *The Book of Common Prayer* (pg. 855):

Q. Who are the ministers of the Church?

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

Q. What is the ministry of the laity?

A. The ministry of the 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.

Ordained Ministers: Priests and Deacons

Within the general ministry of the people of God, the Church calls certain men and women who are committed to serving God and the Church to ordained ministry. This call to Holy Orders comes to the individual from God as well as from the Church. The need for ordained leadership in our Church suggests that only a very few will exercise their baptismal ministry through ordination as priests and deacons. Discerning whether a person is called to be a priest or a deacon is central for everyone involved in testing a call.

The Role and Ministry of a Priest

The priest exercises the ministry of Christ on behalf of the local community, particularly as pastor to the people. Priests are called:

- to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to life by word and deed
- to teach the faith, administer the sacraments, and bless and declare pardon in the name of God
- to share with the bishop in building up the Church
- to "equip the saints," and to inspire and challenge them to fulfill their Baptismal Covenant through their work in the world

While many priests serve local congregations, exactly how each priest of the Church exercises that ministry varies according to their local community. Some may serve the sacramental needs of a community while working outside of the institutional church structure or in a non-traditional church setting, others may be chaplains. Priests with entrepreneurial skills may create new and vital ministries for a congregation and those with satisfying careers may consider becoming bi-vocational priests.

From the Examination in the Ordination of a Priest:

“As a priest, it will be your task to proclaim by word and deed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to fashion your life in accordance with its precepts. You are to love and serve the people among whom you work, caring alike for young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor. You are to preach, to declare God's forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God's blessing, to share in the administration of Holy Baptism and in the celebration of the mysteries of Christ's Body and Blood, and to perform the other ministrations entrusted to you. In all that you do, you are to nourish Christ's people from the riches of his grace, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come.” (*The Book of Common Prayer*, pg. 531)

The Role and Ministry of a Deacon

Deacons serve a particular congregation taking a full role in the liturgy and life of the congregation, but their charge is to use their specific skills in service to the needs of the community and to lead and equip the Church to bring the ministry of Christ to those outside their doors. Deacons think creatively about the ways in which their ministries can draw the Church into the life of the community in which it resides and understand and address needs in places where the Church may not have gone before. Deacons are called:

- to be bold community agents who make their Christian faith visible where they live and work
- to interpret the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world to the Church
- to serve as catalysts and guides for people engaged in the outreach work of the Church
- to assist bishops and priests in proclaiming the Gospel and administering the sacraments

From the Examination in the Ordination of a Deacon

“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." (*The Book of Common Prayer*, pg. 543)

What Are the Qualities We Seek in Our Priests and Deacons?

The Episcopal Diocese of New York seeks ordained leaders able to empower our congregations to adapt to new realities and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in ways that speak to the varied missional contexts of our communities. Moving forward into new mission fields, our ordained leaders will need to be mission-focused, innovative, collaborative, and adaptive.

The qualities described here are not exhaustive—nor are these qualities exclusive to priestly and diaconal ministry. We do not expect every candidate for the priesthood or the diaconate to exhibit all of these qualities, but we do expect them to exhibit most of them. Our discernment process focuses on discerning the presence, or the seeds of presence, of these qualities and abilities in every aspirant who is recommended for the priesthood or diaconate.

+ Compelling spiritual life and a passion for the Gospel: There is great spiritual hunger in the culture at large and in our congregations. The diocese seeks clergy who love God with heart, mind, and soul, and who know Christ and seek to make Christ known. We seek clergy who have a vision for the Episcopal Church's ministry and how to guide our people to greater faithfulness and spiritual depth; clergy who have both a deep reverence for the sacraments at the heart of our liturgical life and a sacramental worldview in which outward and visible things reveal inward and invisible truths.

+ Spiritual maturity, self-awareness, and authenticity: The work of the Episcopal clergy is challenging. We seek clergy who have a strong spiritual center, physical and mental stamina, healthy personal boundaries, and a willingness to grow and learn alongside others. We seek clergy who are able to persevere in challenging circumstances, recognize their personal growth edges, and are willing to learn new skills and ask for help.

+ Ability to communicate the Gospel in ways that people and communities find engaging and relevant to their lives: Communication is multi-faceted. We seek clergy who connect with others and draw them in from the pulpit, in personal conversation, and in social media. We seek clergy who are called to minister in a wide variety of contexts and engage people of all ages.

+ Ability to lead, organize, and equip others in ministry: Many people are drawn to ordained ministry for the love of ministry—pastoral care, teaching, service, and speaking out for justice. The predominant model of ministry in most Episcopal churches is that of a solo pastor (the priest) ministering to all the people, or at the center of the church's ministry. We seek a new paradigm, of clergy able to equip others for meaningful Christian lives and vocations, inviting

others into the life of Christian community and ministry. We seek clergy who have community organizing skills and the ability to identify and mentor new leaders.

+ Innovative leadership: Twenty-first century clergy need creativity, the capacity to discern new paths, and the willingness to make mistakes and learn from them. We seek individuals who are able to take risks and try new things in ministry; innovative leaders who see opportunities where others see decline, possibilities where others see insurmountable challenges.

+ The ability to lead congregations through change: The majority of our congregations face significant adaptive challenges. We seek clergy who will lead our congregations through parish life as it has been to the mission fields to which God is now calling us. As with our spiritual ancestors, there is a process of transformation required of us on the journey, as well as the ability to adapt to new ways of being the Church. We seek clergy who are able to show the way, in faithfulness to God's call and in the challenging work of change.

+ A willingness and ability to be vocationally flexible: Our churches are in a variety of contexts in a variety of locations with a variety of needs. Few ordained leaders are likely to serve in one role at one type of church in one city for their entire vocation. We seek clergy who are able to respond to this variety with their own flexibility. In addition, a growing number of congregations require clergy leaders who do not depend on them for their entire livelihood. Thus, we seek some priests who can offer their presence and their gifts as priests in a part-time or non-stipendiary capacity. We seek clergy who will demonstrate flexibility in their vision of professional ministry in order to respond to God's call to them and the church in our world.

Guidelines for Parish Discernment Sessions

The following outline of meetings and sample questions is intended to guide the Parish Discernment Committee as they meet with the aspirant to help discern his or her qualities and gifts for ministry and the nature of his or her call to ministry to date. The format is flexible, allowing for rearrangement, modification and replacement as appropriate: It is not a checklist.

1) Orientation

The Discernment Committee, the aspirant, and the priest attend the Orientation Session. At this meeting, introductions are made, the role and responsibilities of the Parish Discernment Committee are reviewed, and the aspirant provides copies of his or her spiritual autobiography, personal history, and ministry statement to the Discernment Committee.

If this is the first time that a parish is convening a Parish Discernment Committee, it is recommended that a Discernment Facilitator from the Commission on Ministry attend the Orientation Session. He or she will provide an overview of the discernment process in the

Diocese of New York and the role and responsibilities of the Parish Discernment Committee and also give an introduction to the Listening Hearts practice of spiritual discernment.

2) Listening Hearts Spiritual Discernment Training

The Commission on Ministry offers first time Parish Discernment Committees training in the Listening Hearts practice of spiritual discernment. This optional training provides a structure in which the precepts of spiritual discernment can take root. Through shared experience, participants are drawn closer to God and one another, as they learn how to listen deeply and prayerfully with one another, perceive the signs of God at work, and wait with patience for God's Holy Spirit to show the way.

Discernment Sessions

After the Orientation and Listening Hearts Spiritual Discernment Training, the Parish Discernment Committee reads the aspirant's spiritual autobiography, personal history, and ministry statement and begins the discernment sessions with the aspirant. The following sequence of topics and sample questions are provided for use as a guide, and may be modified as appropriate.

The Discernment Committee is to ask the difficult and challenging questions of vocational discernment, listen carefully, and reflect on what they hear – how is the Holy Spirit already moving in the life of the aspirant and where is the Holy Spirit leading him/her now? Therefore, questions that address the aspirant's regular engagement in the disciplines of prayer and worship, service in the Church, leadership, pastoral care, and community building are particularly important.

3) What is the Aspirant's Relationship with God?

The first and most important criterion in discernment of ministry is the faith of the Individual. Those who are considering ordination must love God with heart, mind, and soul, and love the person of Jesus Christ and seek to make him known.

- When you look back over your life, how has God been at work in your life?
- In what ways do you experience Christ in other people?
- Is there any person in the Bible with whom you particularly identify? Any story?
- How does God speak to you through Scripture, worship, prayer?
- Is formal worship life giving for you?
- How easy is spontaneous conversational prayer for you?
- Imagine that someone new to the church asked you who Jesus is. What would you say? Be specific and personal in your response.
- How do you use the Book of Common Prayer in your prayer life? Tell us of a time when you found the BCP to be uplifting, or challenging, or both.

- How often do you read the Bible? How do you read the Bible? How would you describe the Bible and its place in the Church's life?
- What questions do you still have about your faith? About Jesus? About the Church? What do you do with these questions?

4) How is God's Call Unfolding and What Practical Aspects Need to be Considered?

- Tell us the story of your call. When did it start? Who influenced it?
- Tell us about your experience as a layperson bearing witness to Christ to others and participating in the life of the Church. How has this been satisfying, or not?
- 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?

Gifts for Ministry

- What are your spiritual gifts and how have you recognized them and used your gifts for ministry? How have those gifts been received? By whom?

Leadership

- Tell us about a time you initiated and led a project in your parish. What was the greatest joy for you in this work, and the greatest challenge?
- Tell us of a time when you collaborated on a project or a ministry. What did you enjoy about that experience? What was difficult about it?
- Describe a time when you had to claim your authority, in school, work, or in ministry. Was that easy for you? Challenging?
- Describe a time when something you worked on failed. What did you learn from that experience?

Relationships

- What are the primary relationships that sustain you? How do you care for each other?
- Tell us about a difficult time for you in one of your relationships and how you handled it.
- How do you manage your relationships with people whose points of view are diametrically opposed to yours?
- Tell us 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?

Pastoral Abilities

- How do you respond to pain and joy and complexity in the lives of others?

- Tell us of a time when you provided pastoral care to someone in pain. What did you learn?

Growth and Maturity

- Tell us of a recent time when you learned something important about yourself. How did this realization occur? What impact did it have on your life?
- Describe a time in your life when you were under intense emotional stress. What were the circumstances? How did you pray about it? Where did you find support during this time?
- What are the practices you employ now for discipline and growth in your life of faith? How have those practices changed? Why is it important for you? Tell us about a time when you felt your practices supporting and transforming your life.
- How do you balance and integrate your work and free time now? Give us an example of when you had to make a difficult decision regarding this balance.
- How do you take care of yourself? What activities or practices feed your soul?
- How do you feel about making mistakes? How do you think God views your mistakes? Do you associate mistakes with disaster or opportunity?
- How do you respond when confronted with disappointment? Failure? Conflict? As you reflect back on times of difficulty or failure, do you see God working through them?
- What do you do regularly to take care of yourself? Are there any persistent struggles that affect your wellness?
- How do you experience God in times of success and prosperity?

What Practical Aspects Need to be Considered?

- How would ordination change the flow of your life? Your relationships, finances?
- What sacrifices would you and those close to you have to make?

5) How is God Calling this Aspirant to Serve in the Body of Christ?

- What does it mean to you to be a member of the Episcopal Church?
- If a newcomer to the Church asked you about Christian ministry, how would you describe it? How would you describe the ministry of the whole Body of Christ?
- What are some indications of being called? Where do you see that call moving forward?
- When you reflect on your current sense of call to ordained ministry, what are your fears? Why?
- How have people in your community responded when they hear that you are a discerning for ordination? Who has supported you? Has anyone been surprised? If so, why? Has anyone reacted negatively? If so, why?
- What is your vision of your life in ordained ministry? Who do you feel called to serve?

6) Reflective Review

After exploring these topics, the committee and aspirant should discuss whether there are any topics that require further discussion or any additional meetings. If the committee recommends that the aspirant pursues lay ministry, also ask the aspirant how the Parish Discernment Committee can support the aspirant in his or her discernment of how to live out his or her call in lay ministry.

This is also a time to celebrate! The Discernment Committee and the aspirant have undertaken this important and holy work for months now, and they should take the time to say thank you to each other and to God, enjoy this time together, and show their appreciation in the best way they know how.

7) Parish Discernment Committee Report

The committee meets without the aspirant to review their work together and come to a decision and recommendation about the call of the aspirant, as well as to finalize the statements for the written Parish Discernment Committee Report. If this is the first time that a parish has formed a Parish Discernment Committee and the committee feels they need help, they may invite the Discernment Facilitator from the Commission on Ministry to this meeting, though it is not required.

The Discernment Committee Report may be written as an essay or as discrete responses to questions that arose in their conversations with the aspirant. The questions provided on the following Parish Discernment Committee Report are meant to serve as a guide to the kind of topics that the committee should address in its report. It is helpful to state the group's opinions – including reservations – clearly in the report and explain any difficulties in coming to the final decision. Explain how the committee understands the call, with both its challenges and areas of satisfaction. Reiterate the aspirant's talents as they have been revealed to the group and relate them to the call as the committee members have discerned it.

Parish Discernment Committee Report
Name of Parish/Faith Community
Address of Parish/Faith Community
Contact telephone numbers and e-mail address

TO: The priest of (Name of Parish/Faith Community)
FROM: Discernment Committee for (Name of Aspirant)
(Name, telephone number and e-mail address of Chair(s);
Names of Committee Members)
DATE: (Final date of report)
RE: Discernment Committee Report

Background Information:

- Who is the aspirant? How do members of the committee know him or her?
- How long has he or she been a member of the parish? Describe the aspirant's involvement in the life of the parish, community, and Church and for what period of time.
- How would parishioners describe this person's current ministry in the parish and community?
- What is your sense of the aspirant's level of commitment and faithfulness in connection with parish or Church work taken on?

Please give examples.

Relationship with God

- How have you heard him or her speak in a personal, thoughtful, and compelling way of his or her experience of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit?
- In what ways is the aspirant able to describe his or her spiritual journey and growing relationship with Christ? Give examples.
- Where is the Holy Spirit at work in the aspirant's life?
- Does the aspirant have the ability to express his or her faith theologically, to think reflectively, and to articulate his or her understanding within the Episcopal tradition, given his or her formation thus far?
- Give your impressions of the aspirant's prayer life, worship, and reception of the sacraments.
- Does faith ground and center the aspirant's work in and out of the Church?

How Is God's Call Unfolding?

How is the aspirant currently experiencing his or her call to ordained ministry? In what ways is the aspirant currently engaged in service to the church through leadership, pastoral care, community service or other specific involvement?

Gifts & Strengths

- What gifts and strengths do the aspirant bring to this ministry, and what unusual gifts, skills, experiences do the aspirant have that would serve the rapidly changing, increasingly diverse and missionary church?

Leadership, Collaboration & Communications

- Describe the qualities of effective leadership, collaboration, and communication that the aspirant brings to his or her current ministries. Does he or she articulate a clear vision and possess the capability to motivate others to share in that vision?
- What problems has the aspirant confronted in his or her involvement in parish or Church activities and how were they resolved?
- Has the aspirant initiated ministry and in what ways?

Pastoral Abilities

- Does the aspirant have a pastoral and kind presence? Give examples of what kind of presence you saw in the group's meetings. How have you seen the aspirant loving God, neighbor, and self? How does this life prepare him or her for life as an ordained person?
- What is your perception of the aspirant's sensitivity to pastoral issues in people's lives? How does he or she respond to pain and joy and complexity in others' lives?
- Is the aspirant able to claim his or her strengths?
- What is your sense of the aspirant's ability to recognize his or her own fears and conflicts? How do they impede or facilitate the aspirant's sensitivity or responses to other people and to situations of conflict?

Relationships

- What is the nature of the aspirant's significant relationships? Has the aspirant tested this call with family and friends?
- Describe the aspirant's relationship with his or her primary partner. Does the couple have a realistic picture of the gifts and challenges of the formation process and the ordained life? What support do they have or will they need to meet these challenges?

Growth and Maturity

- Is this aspirant mature enough to handle the challenges of the ordained life? Is he or she possessed of personal integrity, authenticity, and reliability? Does he or she display sound judgment? Why or why not? Give examples.
- Describe how the aspirant responded within the group, e.g. his or her willingness to share deep personal concerns and commitments, openness to differences of opinion, willingness to consider new insights.
- From your observation, are there any areas of growth that the Individual should pursue prior to or during theological education (other than the normal course of study)?
- How has the aspirant experienced and integrated loss, change or adversity?

- What is or has been the aspirant's major area of struggle? How is it resolving?
- What is your sense of the balance in this aspirant's life? How and how well does the aspirant balance his or her work or profession with parish and Church involvement? With family or social life? With avocational interests or hobbies?

How Is God Calling this Aspirant to Serve in the Body of Christ?

- What new ministries does he or she envision undertaking in the future? Why is this the right time to pursue a call to ordained ministry?
- What is the vision of the ministry to which the aspirant feels called?
- Do you have any reservations about the individual? Please explain.
- In what specific ways does the aspirant believe that ordination would serve his or her sense of call? Does the aspirant understand that ordained ministry requires leaving the sponsoring congregation to serve the wider Church under the direction of bishops?
- Based on your own knowledge and observation, in what particular area do you see him or her ministering as a priest or deacon? In what particular area or areas would you not see the aspirant ministering? In both cases, why? Please give examples.
- What obstacles or weaknesses are present that may prevent this person from serving fully and fruitfully as an ordained minister of the Church? What additional training, skills, and resources does this person need to respond to this call?
- Does the committee feel the aspirant needs to be ordained to pursue this call to ministry? Why ordination rather than a disciplined and committed lay ministry?
- What do you believe has led the aspirant to pursue ordination?
- What are the aspirant's thoughts and attitudes about the vows required at ordination?
- If the aspirant is not invited into the ordination process, where might he or she be called to serve? What steps might he or she take to discern and prepare for these lay ministries?

The Parish Discernment Committee is encouraged to supplement the above categories with any additional information about the aspirant which they believe would be helpful.

We recommend that _____

_____ pursue Lay Ministry in the area(s) of _____

_____ enter the diocesan process for ordination to the Diaconate

_____ enter the diocesan process for ordination to the Priesthood

Additional Comments (*Please be specific*)

APPENDIX A:

THE CANONS OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Excerpts Regarding Qualifications for Entering the Formal Ministry Discernment Process

The following excerpts from the Canons of the Episcopal Church outline and define the requirements an individual must satisfy before entering the formal ministry discernment process in his or her parish:

Members of the Church: “All persons who have received the Sacrament of Holy Baptism with water in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, whether in this Church or in another Christian Church, and whose Baptisms have been duly recorded in this Church, are members thereof.” (I. 17.1.a)

Adult Members of the Church: “Members sixteen years of age and over are to be considered adult members.” (I.17.1.b)

Adult Members Confirmed or Received: “It is expected that all adult members of this Church, after appropriate instruction, will have made a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and will have been confirmed or received by the laying on of hands by a Bishop of this Church or by a Bishop of a Church in communion with this Church. Those who have previously made a mature public commitment in another Church may be received by the laying on of hands by a Bishop of this Church, rather than confirmed.” (I.17.1.c)

Adults Considered Baptized and Confirmed: “Any person who is baptized in this Church as an adult and receives the laying on of hands by the Bishop at Baptism is to be considered...as both baptized and confirmed; also, Any person who is baptized in this Church as an adult and at some time after the Baptism receives the laying on of hands by the Bishop in Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows is to be considered... as both baptized and confirmed; also, Any baptized person who received the laying on of hands at Confirmation (by any Bishop in apostolic succession) and is received into the Episcopal Church by a Bishop of this Church is to be considered...as both baptized and confirmed; and also, Any baptized person who received the laying on of hands by a Bishop of this Church at Confirmation or Reception is to be considered, ...as both baptized and confirmed.” (I.17.1.d)

Communicants of the Church: “All members of this Church who have received Holy Communion in this Church at least three times during the preceding year are to be considered communicants of this Church.” (I.17.2.a)

Adult Communicants: “.... communicants sixteen years of age and over are to be considered adult communicants.” (I.17.2.b)

Communicants in Good Standing: “All communicants of this Church who for the previous year have been faithful in corporate worship, unless for good cause prevented, and have been faithful in working, praying, and giving for the spread of the Kingdom of God, are to be considered communicants in good standing.” (I.17.3)

Nomination for Ordination to the Diaconate: “A confirmed adult communicant in good standing, may be nominated for ordination to the diaconate by the person's congregation or other community of faith.” (III.2)

Nomination for Ordination to the Priesthood: “A confirmed adult communicant in good standing may be nominated for ordination to the Priesthood by the person's congregation or other community of faith.” (III,8.2)

To review or download the full CANONS OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH on the web, go to:
<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/15057>

APPENDIX B:

Priest's Letter Recommending an Aspirant for the Priesthood

In the Episcopal Diocese of New York, a letter of recommendation to the bishop from an aspirant's rector or immediate pastor initiates the application process for Holy Orders. The term used in the Canons of the Episcopal Church for a person who has been nominated for postulancy is nominee. At a bare minimum, a nominee must have been confirmed in (or formally received into) the Episcopal Church and a communicant in good standing in the sponsoring parish for at least one year prior to beginning the process. However, given the priest's critical role of discernment in this process, the recommendation should occur only after a focused period of inquiry, service, and exploration, lasting several months to a year or more, which results in the priest's belief, shared with the parish community, that the nominee possesses apt gifts and character for ordained ministry.

While the Commission on Ministry recognizes that there are times when a sponsor may feel obligated, for a variety of reasons, to recommend an aspirant about whom s/he feels major doubts, it strongly urges that those doubts be spelled out clearly, either in the letter of recommendation itself, or less formally with the Chair of the Commission or with the Canon for Ministry. Even as to a "probably qualified" aspirant, any questions, reservations, or doubts should be raised so that they may be resolved as early in the process as possible.

When the priest and aspirant agree that it is appropriate to begin the application process, the priest must send a formal letter to:

Bishop of New York
The Episcopal Diocese of New York
1047 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10025

sponsoring the aspirant for postulancy for ordination to the priesthood. (Please send a copy of this letter to the Canon for Ministry.)

The priest's letter should address each of the categories listed below as they apply to the nominee. Please be as specific as possible, noting that a generalized letter of support will not serve the nominee well. If the period of discernment has been less than one year for a nominee, briefly describe the factors which resulted in a determination that a lesser period of time was appropriate in this instance.

Note: Please include with your letter a description of your parish Committee on Ministry or Discernment Committee. Discuss the membership and the way the work of the committee is organized as it meets with persons seeking the parish's nomination to the bishop as applicants for Holy Orders. Include such information as the number and frequency of meetings with a nominee; a description of the content of the program used over a period of time which allows for reasonable observation, involvement, and discernment.

If you have any questions, please contact the **Canon for Ministry**.

Guidelines for the Priest's Letter Recommending an Aspirant for the Priesthood

At the beginning of your letter, please indicate that this is a recommendation for the priesthood, and include the following information. We must have it in order to communicate with the nominee:

NAME

ADDRESS

PHONE NUMBER(S)

EMAIL ADDRESS(S)

In the letter, please address the following categories:

1. Background Information

First, provide the nominee's name, address, phone number, and, if applicable, e-mail address. Then describe the nominee's involvement in the life of the parish, community, and Church. How long has s/he been a member of the parish? How long have you known the nominee? Do you know the nominee well? In what activities has s/he been involved and for what period of time? How would the parishioners describe this person's current ministry in the parish or community? What is your sense of the nominee's level of commitment and faithfulness in connection with parish or Church work taken on? Please give examples.

2. Spirituality

Give your impressions of the nominee's spirituality with specific reference to her/his prayer life, worship, reception of the sacraments? Discuss his/her knowledge of Scripture and the Church. Do you have confidence in the application's articulation of his/her own faith? Is that articulation enthusiastic, coherent, and compelling? Does faith ground and center the nominee's work in and out of the Church? Does it direct the nominee's sense of social responsibility? Please be as descriptive as possible. Do the nominee's co-workers know that s/he is Christian? What image, story, or passage of scripture does the nominee use to describe her or his sense of call to ministry? What is your impression of the nominee's overall spiritual health?

3. Leadership

What is your perception of the nominee's leadership style? Be as expansive as possible. In what ways has the nominee exercised leadership in the sponsoring parish? What responsibilities has s/he assumed? Is s/he respected and relied upon by other parishioners or co-workers in Church or parish activities? by outreach or pastoral clients? by you? What problems has the nominee confronted in his/her involvement in parish or Church activities and how were they resolved? Has the nominee initiated ministry and in what ways?

4. Pastoral Abilities

What is her/his pastoral style and how have you seen it demonstrated? Does the nominee exercise a pastoral ministry now? What is your perception of the nominee's sensitivity to pastoral issues in people's lives, e.g., how does s/he respond to pain and joy and complexity in others' lives? Is the nominee able to claim his or her strengths? What is your sense of the nominee's ability to recognize her/his own fears and conflicts? How do they impede or facilitate the nominee's sensitivity or responses to other people and to situations of conflict?

5. Gifts and Strengths

What special strengths and talents has the nominee demonstrated which you believe would enhance his/her ordained ministry? Based upon your own knowledge and observation of the nominee, in what particular area do you see him/her ministering as a priest or deacon? In what particular area or areas would you not see the nominee ministering? In both cases, why? Please give examples.

6. Growth and Discipline

In what areas does the nominee need further growth or discipline? personally, spiritually, intellectually? Does the nominee agree? What is or has been the nominee's major area of struggle? How is it resolving?

7. Character and Mental Health

What are your impressions of the nominee's character and mental health generally? What is your sense of the nominee's level of maturity and judgment? intelligence? warmth and humor? ability to make long-term commitments to people or projects? What is your sense of the balance in this nominee's life, e.g., how and how well does the nominee balance her/his work or profession with parish and Church involvement? with family or social life? with avocational interests or hobbies?

8. Motivation for Ministry

What do you believe has led the nominee to pursue ordination? Please offer your reflections on how the nominee, should he/she be ordained, will function as part of a college of presbyters, within a diocesan structure, and within the larger church. What are the nominee's thoughts and attitudes about the vows required at ordination?

A sponsor is encouraged to supplement the above categories with any additional information about the nominee which he or she believes would be helpful.

Ministry Office Contact:

The Rev. Canon Charles W. Simmons, *Canon for Ministry*
Email: csimmons@dioceseny.org Phone: 212-316-7416

APPENDIX C:

Priest's Letter Recommending an Aspirant for the Diaconate

The diaconate was a ministry of great importance in the earliest years of the Christian Church. Recently it is being revived in the Episcopal Church and other denominations as an ordained ministry which expresses aspects of service, outreach, concern for human needs and advocacy for social justice within the Christian community.

Ideally, a parish community first discerns the characteristics of a “deacon in our midst” and calls forth that person to be recommended for ordination. Sometimes a parishioner perceives a vocation in himself or herself and asks to be recommended. For a parish to identify and raise up suitable persons for this ministry requires a time of discernment with the parishioner and affirmation by the gathered community.

The rector, vicar, or priest-in-charge initiates the application process for Holy Orders. (During the time an interim is serving in the parish, parishioners should not be recommended for Holy Orders.) A priest recommends a parishioner to the bishop only after a focused period of inquiry, service, and exploration, which results in the priest's conviction that the parishioner possesses apt gifts and character for ordained ministry. Members of the congregation become involved in the discernment through a parish committee on ministry, which meets with the parishioner over a period of time and makes a recommendation to the sponsoring priest. The term used in the Canons of the Episcopal Church for a person who has been recommended for postulancy is nominee.

A nominee for the diaconate must have been confirmed in (or formally received into) the Episcopal Church and a communicant in good standing in the sponsoring parish for at least one year prior to being recommended to the bishop for postulancy.

When the priest and parishioner agree that it is appropriate to make an application to the diocese, the priest writes a formal letter of recommendation to the diocesan bishop:

Bishop of New York
The Episcopal Diocese of New York
1047 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10025

sponsoring the nominee for postulancy for ordination to the diaconate. (Please be sure a copy of this letter is emailed to the Canon for Ministry.)

The letter should address each of the categories listed below as they apply to the nominee. Please be as specific as possible noting that a generalized letter of support will not serve the nominee well. If the period of discernment has been less than one year for a

nominee, briefly describe the factors which resulted in a determination that a lesser period of time was appropriate in this instance.

The letter should address fully each of the categories listed in this document, giving any additional pertinent information. A letter of support will not serve the nominee well unless it is specific and addresses these areas and any others that are relevant. It is the bishop's expectation that the letter of recommendation will be kept confidential and not shared with the person being recommended.

While the Commission on Ministry recognizes that there are times when, for a variety of reasons, a sponsor may feel obligated to recommend a parishioner about whom s/he feels major doubts, it strongly urges that those doubts be spelled out clearly, either in the letter of recommendation itself, or less formally with the Chair of the Commission on Ministry or with the Canon for Ministry. Even for a "probably qualified" nominee, any questions, reservations, or doubts should be raised at the beginning so that they may be resolved as early as possible during the time of Diocesan discernment.

Note: Please include with your letter a description of your parish Committee on Ministry or Discernment Committee. Discuss the membership and the way the work of the committee is organized as it meets with persons seeking the parish's nomination to the bishop as applicants for Holy Orders. Include such information as the number and frequency of meetings with a prospective nominee; a description of the content of the program used over a period of time which allows for reasonable observation, involvement, and discernment. If you have received a written report or recommendation from the committee regarding the person you are nominating, please include a copy.

Guidelines for the Priest's Letter Recommending an Aspirant for the Diaconate

At the beginning of your letter, please indicate that this is a recommendation for postulancy for the diaconate, and include the following information. We must have it in order to communicate with the nominee:

NAME
ADDRESS
PHONE NUMBER(S)
EMAIL ADDRESS

In the letter, please address the following categories:

1. Background Information

Describe the nominee's involvement in the life of the parish, community, and Church. How long have you known the nominee? How long has s/he been a member of the parish? Do you know the nominee well? In what activities has s/he been involved and for what period of

time? How would the parishioners describe this person's ministry in the parish or community? What is your sense of the nominee's level of commitment and faithfulness in connection with parish or Church work taken on? Please give examples.

2. Spiritual Life

What are your impressions of the nominee's spirituality? Discuss her/his prayer life, worship, reception of the sacraments. Does s/he have knowledge of Scripture and the Church? Describe the nominee's articulation of his/her own faith? Is it enthusiastic, coherent and compelling? How does faith ground and center the nominee's work in and out of the Church? Does it direct the nominee's sense of social responsibility? Please be as descriptive as possible. Do the nominee's co-workers know that s/he is Christian? What image, story, or passage of scripture does the nominee use to describe her or his sense of call to ministry? What is your impression of the nominee's overall spiritual health?

3. Spiritual Maturity

Is this nominee a person of spiritual maturity? Does s/he show the ability to exercise a ministry characterized by a continually enlarging vision?

4. Prophetic Obedience

Among the particularities of the order of deacons is the call to prophetic obedience. How does this person speak prophetically to the Church about the needs of the world? Is s/he a person of courage and tenacity in raising issues the Church would prefer to ignore? And, at the same time, is s/he capable of being obedient (to parish authorities, to the rector, to the bishop)? Can s/he be a self-starter in recognizing needs in the community and being creative in seeking out proposals to meet those needs?

5. Interpersonal Skills

What is your perception of the nominee's sensitivity to pastoral issues in people's lives, e.g., how does s/he respond to pain in others' lives? What is your sense of the nominee's ability to recognize his or her own fears and conflicts, and in what ways do those fears and conflicts impede or facilitate her or his sensitivity to others? Is the nominee a good active listener, i.e., able to hear out the other and be perceptive about what is both spoken and unspoken in the other? Is s/he open to new ideas and approaches arising from others? Is the nominee good at organizing others to meet needs for mission, and delegating authority to others? Is s/he capable of organizing an institutional response to an issue or need, not only a one-on-one response to an individual need? Please provide examples of this critically important ability to organize and delegate.

6. Educational Background

While there is no educational prerequisite for ordination to the diaconate, please describe the nominee's academic background, i.e., high school? some college? More? Is s/he aware of general areas of study which will be necessary in preparation for the ministry of a deacon and that the program will offer appropriate flexibility for individual differences? Please give your sense of the nominee's facility with language, both spoken and written.

7. Liturgical Function

While the principal focus for the deacon is on servant ministry, the diaconal role as icon of servant ministry is reflected in the liturgy. Is the nominee aware that there are liturgical responsibilities connected to this ministry? That these responsibilities are important signs for the whole Church of the call of all baptized persons to servant ministry? Nominees who seem to be focused primarily on the liturgy probably are not well suited for this ministry.

8. Ministry in the Church and the World

Describe ways this nominee is motivated to reach out to people in need in the parish and beyond. Is s/he one who recognizes needs in the community and is capable of being a self-starter and creative in seeking out ways to help meet them? Has s/he participated in local or global opportunities for mission beyond the parish? Please give examples. What experience does this nominee have of the diversity of our Diocese, The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion? How does s/he view the role of the Church with regard to issues of social justice?

9. Character and Mental Health

What are your impressions of the nominee's character and mental health generally? What is your sense of the nominee's level of maturity and judgment? intelligence? warmth and humor? ability to make long-term commitments to people or projects? What is your sense of the balance in this nominee's life, e.g., how and how well does the nominee balance her/his work or profession with parish and Church involvement? with family or social life? with vocational interests or hobbies? How strongly does the nominee's family support his/her sense of a vocation to Holy Orders?

10. Future Ministry

Have you discussed with the nominee and does s/he understand that, although it may not occur immediately after ordination, a deacon should expect to be assigned to a ministry in a place other than the sponsoring congregation? Does s/he understand that at the time the priest leaves a parish and new priest is called, the deacon will be reassigned? Should you request and the bishop approve the assignment of this nominee as a deacon in the sponsoring parish, how do you envision his/her ministry with you and your congregation in the following areas: Christian education, pastoral care, outreach ministries.

A sponsor is encouraged to supplement the above categories with any additional information about the nominee which he or she believes would be helpful.

Ministry Office Contact:

The Rev. Canon Charles W. Simmons, *Canon for Ministry*
Email: csimmons@diocesenyny.org Phone: 212-316-7416