



DIOCESE *of* CHRIST *our* HOPE

Parish Discernment Customary

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To those seeking ordination, Scripture lists certain qualifications (1 Timothy 3.1-16 and Titus 1.5-9) that should be noticeably present in the life of the inquirer. Particularly, they should be sound in the faith. They should have an ability to communicate the Gospel and to teach and disciple others in the faith. Their lives should reflect holiness and discipline which brings honor to Christ, and which causes them to be respected by those outside the church. They should demonstrate wisdom and discretion. There should be visible fruit of their faith as well as a public affirmation by their local congregation of their sense of call.

All inquirers will begin their discernment process in conversation with their rector. If, after conversations with the rector, the rector believes that there is good basis for the inquirer to further explore and test their sense of call, the rector will convene a Parish Discernment Committee (PDC). The role of the PDC is to further test the individual's call and to present the rector with a written summary of their findings and a recommended path forward for the inquirer. However, the PDC is not a decision-making body. It is the rector who makes the determination as to whether an inquirer will continue in the ordination discernment process.

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PDC PARAMETERS AND REQUIREMENTS

- It is recommended that parishes of DCOH establish a standing PDC that works with the rector to discern the call of all inquirers.
- Size of the PDC: 5-8 persons, chosen and trained by the rector. The rector may wish to include a vestry person as a member of the discernment committee.
- PDC Composition: all members of the PDC should be attendees/members of the parish for at least 1 year. Requests for non-church PDC members must be approved by the DCOH Office of Leadership Development.
- Frequency of meetings: no more than once/week, no less than once/month.
- Span of time: no less than 2 months and no more than 7 months.
- Committee Officers: the committee will need a chairperson and a recorder.
- Confidentiality: it should be made clear that for an effective process of discernment, the committee must create a climate for honest conversation and genuine care. Confidentiality is expected and required.

PERSONAL PRAYER AND REFLECTION

The ministry of the PDC is vital to the health and vitality of the body of Christ, to your congregation and to the inquirer who has submitted himself or herself to you to assist in the discernment of a call to Holy Orders. The conversation that will ensue over the course of several months is sensitive and requires the utmost care. Please keep the matters that come before you within the deliberations of the committee itself and the rector. Sharing beyond that circle is a violation of a sacred trust.

In addition, spiritual discernment is a weighty matter, and your own spiritual health is crucial for this process. Therefore, consider well:

1. Are you spiritually prepared to assist in the discernment of someone else's call to ordained ministry?
2. Is your walk with the Lord on a solid spiritual foundation?
3. Is there anything in your inmost being that you believe disqualifies you from participating?
4. Will you be able to give adequate time and attention to this process?
5. Is there any conflict of interest that would preclude you from serving the Lord in this way?

If you are not able with a clear conscience before the Lord to serve on this PDC, ask your rector/vicar to please excuse you.

UNITY ON ESSENTIALS

The PDC is functioning as a component of a discernment process established by this diocese, which is itself established under the authority of this Province. Therefore, it is important that all members of the PDC are working within the same theological and polity framework. To that end, before participating in a PDC, all potential members must read the following materials and be able to contribute in ways that are supportive of these positions in the context of the PDC.

- DCOH Constitution:
<https://adhope.org/article/diocesan-constitution-and-canons/>
 - Articles X and XI, and Appendices A and B
- DCOH Canons:
<https://adhope.org/article/diocesan-constitution-and-canons/>
 - Title II
 - Title III, Canons 1-4
- The Ordinal
- Ministry of the Saints, Holy Orders, and the Ministry of Women in the DCOH:
<https://adhope.org/article/ministry-of-saints-holy-orders-and-the-ministry-of-women-in-dch/>
 - Part I: Summary Vision and Foundational Principles
 - Part II: Convictions and Practices Concerning the Diaconate and Ordination
 - Part III: The Ministry of Women in the Church and the Ordination of Women as Deacons in the DCOH

Please note in particular: individuals on a PDC need not personally agree with the DCOH position on the ordination of women. What is required, however, is a clear understanding of the diocese's position, and a willingness to contribute to the discernment process in ways that honor and respect that position.

DISAGREEMENTS AND DIFFERING VIEWS

At times there will be a divergence of opinions among members of the PDC, whether on minor issues or on whether a call to holy orders exists at all. Two key principles must be put into practice in such scenarios:

1. Disagreements should be discussed in private by the PDC, with the assistance of the rector as needed, but never in the presence of the inquirer. As in any healthy leadership body that exercises authority, functioning with a clear sense of unity in support of the inquirer is very important.
2. While arriving at a united final recommendation as a PDC is certainly a prayerful aim, remember that it is not necessary or required for a healthy discernment process. The rector ultimately makes the determination regarding whether he will recommend the inquirer proceed in the discernment process. Therefore, the diocese requests and encourages any disagreements and differing opinions be clearly and fairly described in the PDC's report to the rector.
3. It is worth reminding PDC members that this is not a "rubber stamp" committee to simply ratify a decision that's already been made about whether someone should be ordained. This is a genuine discernment process, and the end result should reflect the nuanced and varied views of the committee.

DISCERNING A CALL

The Lord is pleased to reveal his leading through communal, prayerful discernment. However, an effective discernment process engages intentionally and consistently in the following two practices.

1. Full participation by all members of the PDC. Ensure that every member of the PDC has had ample opportunity to share their own thoughts, and their own sense of how the Lord is leading, as well as any questions, concerns, disagreements, or confirmations. Listen intently to one another.
2. Pray – together and individually.
 - a. Test your thoughts. Our own thoughts, opinions, and "gut sense" are not to be discounted. But they should always be submitted to the perfect wisdom of God. Therefore, test your inner thoughts. Ask the Holy Spirit to purify, clarify, confirm, or deny your own thoughts, regardless of how confident you may feel.
 - b. Listening prayer. Silence, patience, and waiting on the Lord are essential to hearing his still, small voice.
 - c. Pray for one another and pray for the inquirer and his/her spouse.

DISCERNING THE DIACONATE

Inquirers come to the ordination discernment process at different stages of life, from different backgrounds, and with differences in experience, gifting,

and clarity of calling. This should all be taken into account when discussing their call and the possibility of ordination. In some cases, a call to a particular office (whether the vocational diaconate or the presbyterate) will seem quite clear from the beginning. However, callings to a particular office should be held lightly in these early stages of discernment. If there exists a sense of call to the presbyterate, the formal discernment and testing of that call will be addressed after the inquirer has first been ordained a deacon and has demonstrated commitment to the nature and character of Christian leadership in the church that is embodied in diaconal ministry. The diaconal ministry will always be the foundation of ordained ministry, regardless of the order that may eventually emerge. As such discernment process, ordination to the diaconate, and the initial steps of ordained life are expressed by fully embracing ordained ministry as defined by the diaconal order. Therefore, at this time, what is being discerned is a call to the diaconate.

This means that, while a Parish Discernment Committee may note whether an inquirer expresses a call to the presbyterate and may comment on whether they believe that call may exist, their line of questioning should remain focused on ordained ministry as embodied in the office of the diaconate. The foundational question they are discerning is, "Is this person called to the office of deacon?"

PDC MEETING FORMAT AND PREPARATIONS

Inquirer Preparation

Inquirers should prepare and present a 10-minute biblical reflection at the beginning of meetings 1-5, including the first meeting. (These should not go beyond 10 minutes, as that reduces time in the meetings for other matters.) The texts for the five meetings are:

- First meeting, 2 Timothy 3.16-17
- Second meeting, John 3.16
- Third meeting, Ephesians 2.8-10
- Fourth meeting, Hebrews 4.15
- Fifth meeting, 1 Corinthians 10.31

Pre-meeting (30 minutes)

Each time the PDC meets there should be a pre-meeting with just the committee and not the inquirer.

1. Take time for a mutual check-in, prayer, and finalizing the evening's agenda.
2. Determine who will facilitate, who will record the notes, and who will open and close in prayer.

3. Determine which topics, assignments, or holdovers from the previous meeting need to be addressed and how those items will be handled.

Meeting with the inquirer (60-90 minutes)

1. Open in prayer.
2. Inquirer biblical reflection.
3. Provide an overview of the evening.
4. Begin the cycle of questions and answers.
5. Give feedback to the inquirer.
6. Remind everyone of the time and place of the next meeting.
7. Give the inquirer any homework assignments or tasks to be completed prior to the next meeting.
8. As needed, provide a plan for following up with the inquirer, e.g., provision of spiritual care, guidance, mentoring; assistance with assignments; and/or encouragement as may be needed.

Post-meeting debrief (30 minutes)

1. Quick check-in with the Committee to address comments and any concerns. This is the Committee's self-evaluation.
2. What went well? What areas need follow-up before the next meeting?
3. How did the process work?
4. Reminder of confidentiality.
5. Closing prayer.

THE PROCESS

The PDC will meet a minimum of 7 times, as described below. This discernment process should be unrushed and with ample time and space for prayer, reflection, and deliberation. If additional meetings would be helpful, please schedule them.

Each meeting below lists a variety of questions. While additional questions are welcome, please ensure that all listed questions are asked and answered throughout each meeting, or in subsequent meetings.

During each meeting of the discernment committee, notes should be taken on the findings and insights learned by the committee relative to the questions in this customary. These notes should then be summarized in writing on a meeting-by-meeting basis and prepared to be sent to the rector at the end of the process.

Finally, in addition to the individual meeting summaries, a written general summary of the discernment committee's work along with their recommendation will be presented to the inquirer and to the rector. With this

information in hand, the rector will make a decision as to whether the inquirer should move forward in the process.

If the rector decides to recommend the inquirer proceed in the ordination discernment process, the summaries of the parish discernment committee, as well as the rector's letter of recommendation will be submitted to the Canon to the Ordinary at the Office of Leadership Development.

If the rector feels that the inquirer should not proceed with the process, notice of this decision should be given to the Canon to the Ordinary. It will also be necessary for the rector to assist the inquirer to discover and engage in a challenging, satisfying form of lay ministry in his/her areas of gifting.

MEETING 1: ORIENTATION

This should be an introductory meeting in which the rector introduces the inquirer and, if married, his/her spouse to the parish discernment committee. The following elements should be a part of this first meeting:

1. The rector should introduce the inquirer, spouse, and parish discernment participants to each other. He should give an overview of the discernment process, giving particular attention to our Anglican understanding of ordination as well as the role and responsibility of the parish discernment committee.
2. Exploration vs. inquisition – get a clear understanding of the difference. (Some of the questions asked throughout this process may seem intrusive but are a necessary part of the process).
3. Discuss any questions about the exploration process.
4. Arrange a schedule of meetings so that all participants are able to be present.
5. Nominate a chairperson for the committee who will be tasked with overseeing scheduling and leading meetings.
6. Nominate a recorder who will keep written minutes of each meeting and transmit the final report to the rector.
7. Have the inquirer distribute their Spiritual Autobiography, which they will have already completed for the Diocese, at least 3 days prior to the next meeting.

MEETING 2: SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

At this meeting, the inquirer should verbally present their Spiritual Autobiography. The committee should be listening for the inquirer's ability to clearly articulate their conversion to Christ and a simple presentation of the Gospel.

Based on the Spiritual Autobiography, please ask the following questions.

1. In what ways has Christ shown himself sufficient in your life?
2. What challenges have you faced? What challenges currently exist in your life? How does your faith inform your understanding of these challenges?
3. How do you respond to pressure?
4. What ministry experiences have you had? How have those experiences shaped your understanding of the Christian faith?
5. What ministries are you currently involved in? What joys and challenges are presented by those ministries?
6. How do you tie together the "secular and sacred" realms of life?

MEETING 3: FOLLOWING JESUS, DISCIPLESHIP, AND LEADERSHIP

Following Jesus

1. What does it mean for you to be a disciple of Jesus? How are you currently living this out in your daily life and work?
2. What are your spiritual disciplines? Describe your life of prayer, Bible study, and other disciplines.
3. What are your strengths as a follower of Jesus Christ? What are your weaknesses? Where do you want to experience further spiritual maturity?
4. In Mark 8 Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (v. 34). What has following Jesus cost you so far? What more might it cost you as an ordained minister in the Anglican Church?
5. After Jesus washes his disciples' feet in John 13, he says to them, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (v. 14). How do Jesus' words apply to ordained ministry? How might this be difficult for you?
6. What things have given you joy so far in your ministry to others? Why do you think these things give you such joy?

Discipleship

1. From whom did you learn about being a disciple of Jesus? What are the most important lessons you learned from this person about following Jesus?
2. How would you summarize the basics of the Christian faith (the Creeds and the Jerusalem Declaration)? What has been the extent of your catechesis a) in general, and b) in the Anglican tradition. Have you studied To Be a Christian, the catechism of the ACNA?

Leadership

1. Have you ever led someone to Christ? Have you personally discipled anyone? Give examples.
2. How have you exercised leadership? How do you motivate others? Can you give any examples?
3. Are you able to identify a variety of leadership styles? What is your preferred leadership style? What are some circumstances that challenge you as a leader?
4. How do you function in a small group setting? In a large group setting? Amongst peers?
5. What positive experiences have you had with those in positions of leadership? What negative experiences have you had with those in positions of leadership?
6. How do you exercise leadership in school, work, or church settings?
7. Tell us about some personal/professional failures. How did you, practically, handle those failures? What insights did you learn from those failures? What leadership skills were developed in response to your failures?

MEETING 4: EMOTIONAL, RELATIONAL, AND MARITAL HEALTH

The purpose of this meeting is to explore aspects of the inquirer's emotional, relational, and marital (if applicable) health. The spouse or fiancé should be present at this meeting as well.

1. Describe your family life – family of origin as well as your current family situation. What joys and sorrows emerge? How do you deal with family conflict? Do you come from a divorced family? If so, how have you processed the emotional disruption of divorce? How is your relationship with your parents, siblings, spouse, children?
2. Describe your relational life with your friends, neighbors, classmates, colleagues. Is it easy or difficult for you to make friends? Do you have a mixture of old and new friends? How would you say you are perceived by others?
3. Do you identify yourself as a “feeler” or a “thinker”? How are your thoughts and feelings expressed in a family, ministry, school or work setting?
4. Have you identified significant areas of emotional brokenness in your life? How have you sought healing and addressed those?
5. Have you ever sought personal or marital counseling? For what matters? In what ways did counseling benefit you? What did you learn about yourself, and your spouse if applicable?

Questions to be answered by the spouse or fiancé.

1. Briefly tell us your spiritual autobiography, including your faith background. In what ways have you seen God at work in your life from the beginning until now?
2. Recount your courtship, your marriage and your family life. What difficulties have you faced? What joys have you experienced? What challenges do you face? How did the decision to explore ordination arise? What are your thoughts and concerns regarding the possibility of ordination for your spouse? In what ways are you supportive of that calling, and how would that support play out in your own spiritual life and church involvement?
3. Tell us about what God has called you to do with your life. How would that call for you fit in with your spouse's possible call to ordained ministry in the Anglican Church?
4. Ordained ministry can be costly for a spouse and family. What costs do you foresee for yourself and your family in future ministry? What benefits?
5. Tell us about how you pray, study the Bible, and provide spiritual leadership in your family. Are there other spiritual disciplines you find helpful for your growth in Christ?
6. Tell us about your strengths and weaknesses as a follower of Jesus Christ. Where do you want to grow in the next year?

MEETING 5: CALLING, PART I

The following dimensions of calling are to be explored:

1. What is your understanding of the Christian ministry?
 - a. How do you view the ministry of the whole Body of Christ?
 - b. How do you differentiate between the ministries of lay and ordained persons?
 - c. What is pastoral care?
 - d. Why do you believe that you are called to be ordained?
2. What further intellectual growth do you need and do you have the capacity to achieve such growth?
 - a. What is your academic record?
 - b. How are you continuing to learn and grow intellectually?
3. What is your understanding of holy orders in the Anglican tradition?
 - a. To the best of your ability, describe each of the ordained offices, the nature of their call, and their responsibilities and duties.
 - b. What are the Scriptural warrants for these offices?
 - c. What is the relationship between these offices?
4. To which office do you sense a call? Why?
5. What kind of ministry work comes to mind when you imagine yourself as an ordained person?

6. Are you willing to joyfully serve under spiritual authority?
 - a. How have you exhibited this kind of submission in your life? Have you struggled with authority figures in the past? If so, how?
 - b. Have you experienced humble obedience when in strong disagreement with your leader (assuming nothing immoral, unethical, or unbiblical was asked of you)?

MEETING 6: CALLING, PART II

This meeting is for the committee only. The committee will decide what their recommendation to the rector will be. In addition to the interactions and questions of the previous meetings the committee should consider the following evaluative questions:

1. Is the person confusing a calling to Christian ministry with a calling to ordination?
2. Are his/her primary interests congruent with the foundational calling and function of an ordained person – that of humble service?
3. Are his/her innate abilities commensurate with the demands of the ordained ministry?
4. The discernment committee should consider whether they can envision this person as a deacon in the church? Can they envision this person as their own deacon?
5. How aware is the inquirer of his/her own feelings?
6. How aware is the inquirer of his/her effect on those around them?
7. How does this person experience and express strong feelings?
8. To what extent is the person aware of and comfortable with his/her own sexuality? How well integrated is his/her sexual identity with other aspects of life?
9. Are there any indications that the person aspires to the ordained ministry as a way of solving his/her personal or vocational problems/disappointments?
10. Does the person have a level of maturity and ability to adapt that is commensurate with his/her age level?
11. Does he/she show initiative, self-confidence and enthusiasm?

FINAL EVALUATION AND REPORT

Finally, the committee should evaluate the inquirer with respect to the following categories, which form the structure for the committee's final report and recommendation to the rector.

No inquirer will fulfill all these categories perfectly. There will be areas of weakness and possibly lack of clarity in some areas. We are all in process.

Therefore, not all of these categories need to be fully met for the PDC to recommend the inquirer proceed in the ordination discernment process. What you are seeking is an honest assessment in these areas, and how they all ultimately inform your sense of calling to holy orders upon the inquirer's life.

Character

Is the fruit of conversion evidenced in their life? Please read the following Scripture passages and consider the accompanying prompts.

1. John 15:1-11
 - a. Does the inquirer show marks of a growing intimacy with the Lord?
2. Gal. 5:22-23, as well as v. 24
 - a. Is there evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in the life of the inquirer?
3. Heb. 11
 - a. Are there examples of "by faith" moments in the life of the inquirer?
4. Phil. 2:1-8
 - a. Is self-less, sacrificial love being evidenced in the life of the inquirer?
5. 1 Cor. 18-31 and Prov. 3:1-18
 - a. Does the inquirer show marks of growing in wisdom?
6. Matt. 5:1-11
 - a. Does the inquirer show marks of the Kingdom of God as described by Christ?
7. 2 Cor. 12:7-10 and Phil. 3:4b-11
 - a. Is there evidence of the inquirer leading from a place of weakness and humility?
8. 1 Tim. 3:8-13
 - a. Does the inquirer exhibit the qualifications for deacons?

Charisms

1. What spiritual gifts does the inquirer possess? Please consider the following Scripture passages:
 - a. Rom. 12:6-8
 - b. 1 Cor. 12:4-11, 28
 - c. Eph. 4:11-12
2. Do you believe his/her gifts to be a fit for ordained ministry?

Capacity

1. Have they already been serving in ministry, doing the work of ordained ministry? If so, how?
2. Do they evidence the ability or power to do, experience, and understand what is needed for ordained ministry?
3. Do they have the time, energy, and focus required to engage wholeheartedly in ordained ministry?

Competency

1. Do they evidence the skills and intellect necessary for ordained ministry? Please describe.

Calling

1. Can they articulate a sense of call?
2. How has their sense of call been affirmed by other significant parties or events in the life of the inquirer?
3. Is there evidence of the Lord directing the inquirer's path toward ordained ministry?
4. Do you discern a call?

MEETING 7: REVIEW

Depending on the outcomes and recommendations of the committee (especially if they are not recommending the inquirer move forward in the process), the PDC may wish to process their findings with the rector ahead of time.

As for this final meeting, the inquirer should be present, as this is an opportunity for the PDC to process their findings with him/her. The written report should be printed and in hand for all at the meeting. It may be helpful for the rector to also be present at this meeting. Findings should be explained clearly to the inquirer and any questions he/she may have should be addressed at this meeting.

Every inquirer is unique and therefore every PDC recommendation will be different in some way. However, as a general guide, most final recommendations will approximate one of the following options.

- Recommendation to proceed in the discernment process with a few qualifications.
- Recommendation to proceed in the discernment process with some concerns and recommendations for further work.
- Recommendation to pause the discernment process, including recommendations for work to be done before proceeding.
- Recommendation not to proceed in the discernment process with clear rationale provided.

Should there arise any additional findings or changes to the original findings during the course of this final meeting, those should be incorporated into a final report to be submitted to the rector and the inquirer (see below).

CONCLUDING STEPS

Finally, in addition to the individual meeting summaries, a written summary – thematically arranged, but with sufficient detail and examples as needed – of the discernment committee’s work along with their recommendation will be presented to the inquirer and to the rector. With this information in hand, the rector will make a decision as to whether the inquirer should move forward in the process.

If the rector decides to recommend the inquirer proceed in the ordination discernment process, [the summary of the parish discernment committee, as well as the rector’s recommendation will be submitted](#) to the Canon to the Ordinary at the Office of Leadership Development.

If the rector feels that the inquirer should not proceed with the process, it will be necessary for him to assist the inquirer to discover and engage in a challenging, satisfying form of lay ministry in his/her areas of gifting.