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The Office of the Archdeacon
For
The Commission on Ministry
On Behalf Of
The Diocese of Arizona

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The Ordination of a Deacon

The Examination

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

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

From The Book of Common Prayer
Page 543
Servanthood - A Service Ministry

The modern Diaconate should serve to enable and encourage those in varied occupations and life situations to develop special ministries of service; e.g. helping and befriending the powerless who are in need, counseling the troubled, caring for the needs of the elderly and disabled, etc. Such service, enlightened and informed by the Spirit, is a diakonia of love and rises above the level of mere social service.

From The Diaconate – A Full and Equal Order
By James Monroe Barnett
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Dear Friends in Christ:

As part of the Bishop’s charge to oversee “the life and work of the Church” (BCP, 521), the Bishop is “to ordain…deacons” (BCP, 517) who are “to serve all people, particularly the poor, weak, the sick, and the lonely” (BCP, 543). The Commission on Ministry (COM) exists to serve the Bishop’s ministry and, among other duties, to help the Bishop raise up those with a Godly call to ordained ministry. Charged with the Spirit of mission, the COM hopes to encourage and nurture diaconal vocations so that the Church’s clergy, full of the Holy Spirit, can “empower the saints for the work of ministry.” (Ephesians 4:12)

Listening to God’s call and the discernment of a diaconal vocation always takes place within the context of community. Deacons are called as “one who serves” within Christian congregations and therefore the community must recognize not only an authentic voice that resonates with a Godly call, but also a person who has the possibility of having a gift for leading others into service as defined in “The Baptismal Covenant.” This process always involves some vulnerability for the Aspirants (the one discerning the call) because it involves sharing the deepest things in their lives — who they are at the core of their being, and who they believe God is calling them to be. Moreover, the possibility of being judged by others on these levels is the source of great anxiety for some. With this in mind, the COM hopes to work with a compassionate heart and a tenderly steady hand to help guide Aspirants through a discernment process so that, regardless of outcome, one will feel held in love, and affirmed as a brother or sister in Christ who is being called into some form of deeper service in the Lord’s name.

It is the purpose of this document to lay out the discernment process for ordination to the Diaconate so that Aspirants, clergy, their congregations, the COM, the Standing Committee, and Bishop can have a clear understanding of the way forward. Clarity and transparency in the process sets everyone free to listen to the mystery of God and to each other in a healthy way.

The COM is aware of the weighty nature of this undertaking and we enter into it with humility of heart, knowing that “it is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in this ministry.” (II Corinthians 4:1) We encourage feedback from all in the process so that we may ever improve upon the art of creating structures that catch the wind of the Spirit. For “we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.” (II Corinthians 4:7)

May God Bless You,

The Commission On Ministry
A Note on Process and Terms

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

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

1. **NOMINATION:** A confirmed adult communicant in good standing is nominated for ordination to the Diaconate by the person’s congregation or other community of faith.
2. **POSTULANCY:** Postulancy is the time between nomination and candidacy, and includes a process of exploration and decision on the Postulant’s call to the Diaconate.
3. **CANDIDACY:** A time, no less than one year in length, of formation in preparation for ordination to Diaconate, established by a formal commitment by the Candidate, the Bishop, the Commission, and the congregation or other community of faith.

The period of Postulancy and Candidacy must be at least 18 months but may vary in accordance to an individual’s formation needs.
A Theological Statement

The Theology of Diaconal Ministry

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shared leadership – Numbers 11:16-17, 24-45a. Deacons work as part of a leadership team with the bishop, priests, other deacons and lay leaders.

Call of Jeremiah – Jeremiah 1:4-10. It is God who works and speaks through the one whom God calls.

The Great Commission of Service – Act 6:1-6. Deacons continue the tradition of Stephen and six others to “wait at tables” as an outward sign of service. The same “service Christ put on his ministry and of servant on those who minister. He is the embodiment of the first principle of this ministry: sent to serve.” (from The Diaconate by James Barnett)

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

The whole Church is responsible for raising up ordained leaders of the highest quality with the particular gifts necessary for leading faith communities into the future. Both the individual and the community are simultaneously participating in a process of discernment and affirmation. To that end, the COM, with the direction of the Bishop, is being proactive in its efforts to invite individuals into further discernment about the call to Holy Orders. The COM is prayerful about its active steps to seek out entrepreneurial and holy leaders. Relying on the Holy Spirit and healthy congregations to identify potential priests, deacons or lay ministers, the COM will systematically visit congregations in order to hear the people—interviewing parishioners, members of the vestry and priests—to encourage them to discern who within their midst exhibits the characteristics or potential associated with these ministries. The Bishop and members of the COM hope this process will present occasions when parishioners lead the visitation team to encounter the unexpected.

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

At the beginning of each year, the Bishop will notify clergy within the Diocese of the plan for two-person COM visitation teams to visit designated congregations between February 1 and April 30. Any congregations not on the designated schedule who have identified individuals they believe to be potential ordained leaders may request a special visitation from a COM team as a part of this process.

It is the intention of the Bishop and the COM to then invite individuals into a time of discernment in order to hear if God is truly calling them into the process as an Aspirant. Following the visitation, the COM team members will follow up with individuals identified during the visitation to discuss their interest in entering into the discernment process. Individuals interested in exploring a call to ordained ministry will be invited to enter into the discernment process by attending the Holy Orders Day of Discernment and Information.
Step 1 – Invitation to Discernment

The *Holy Orders Day of Discernment and Information* will be held in May. Individuals interested in exploring a call to ordained ministry will be invited to attend along with their spouses/partners. Participation in this *Holy Orders Day of Discernment and Information* is by invitation only.

It is important to note that according to the Canons of the Episcopal Church, in order for a person to enter the ordination process, he or she must be a communicant in good standing in a parish or affiliate ministry of the Diocese of Arizona for at least one year before beginning the ordination process. Any individual who has been refused Candidacy or dismissed from formation by other dioceses will not generally be eligible for consideration in this diocese without receipt of a letter from the Bishop of that diocese declaring cause of refusal or dismissal. A decision in this matter will be made on a case-by-case basis.

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

> No one shall be denied access to the selection process for ordination in this Church because of race, color, ethnic origin, sex, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, disabilities or age, except as otherwise specified by these canons. No right to ordination is hereby established. Title III, Canon 1, Section 2.

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

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

- **Moses’ Call** – Exodus 4:10-17. Understanding a call to leadership begins with an honest self-discernment of gifts, vulnerabilities and prayer with God.


- **Elizabeth and Mary** – Luke 1:39-45. Others, including friends and family, also assist in affirming one’s call.

- **Matthias’ Call** – Acts 2:21-26. The Community establishes criteria for selection and is guided by prayer and the Holy Spirit.

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

It is recommended that individuals interested in exploring a call to ordained ministry seek a qualified spiritual director. If you need some guidance in finding a spiritual director, please call Archdeacon
Step 2 - Attend *Holy Orders Day of Discernment and Information*

Invitees in contact with the COM will be invited to attend the *Holy Orders Day of Discernment and Information* along with their spouses/partners (and the Chair and/or a member of her/his Parish Discernment Committee, if a committee has been appointed). The purpose of this day is to orient individuals interested in exploring a call, along with their spouses/partners, to the ordination process and to help them with further discernment. The hope is to clarify the differences between lay, diaconal, priestly ministries and religious orders, and to explore the nature of discernment and formation in the ordination process.

After the *Holy Orders Day of Discernment and Information*, the invitee who wishes to proceed must complete and submit the “Declaration of Intent to Seek Postulancy” (Form #1). The “Declaration of Intent” should be addressed to the Bishop and the COM.

**NOTE:** Form #1 must be submitted by the Declaration Deadline of June 15. Once the “Declaration of Intent” has been submitted, the individual exploring a call is now considered an Aspirant.

The *Holy Orders Day of Discernment and Information* is held each May and is coordinated with the remainder of the discernment process. If a discernment committee has been established prior to the *Holy Orders Day of Discernment and Information*, the invitee is encouraged to bring the chair or another member of the discernment committee with to the *Holy Orders Day of Discernment and Information*. Participation in the *Holy Orders Day of Discernment and Information* is by invitation only.

After the *Holy Orders Day of Discernment and Information*, in preparation for Discernment at the Parish Level, the Priest-in-Charge works with the Aspirant to appoint a Parish Discernment Committee of not less than five and not more than seven mature Christians to discuss the call with the Aspirant. Initial appointment of five members is a wise practice, as circumstances sometimes require a group member to withdraw before the process is completed. Appointment of a Parish Discernment Committee Chair from outside the Aspirant’s parish and trained by the Diocese is highly recommended. The COM will have a list of trained discernment leaders from various geographic locations in the Diocese available to act as PDC Chairs or to provide training to a PDC. In addition, ideally one member of the discernment group is also a member of the Vestry. Sponsoring Priests have also reported in their experience that an Aspirant is better prepared to meet with the COM if the PDC includes members who did not know the Aspirant before the PDC was convened. The COM does not recommend that the Priest-in-Charge be a member of the PDC; although it is helpful if the Priest-in-Charge attends the first meeting of the PDC along with the COM Shepherd, if assigned prior to the first meeting of the PDC to accompany the Aspirant through the process. The COM Shepherd and/or a Discernment Committee Chair trained by the COM will provide training for the PDC at its first meeting.

The primary tasks of the PDC are to help discern God’s call, to refine the individual’s ability to articulate the reason/s he/she believes he/she is called to the priesthood, and to be a support for the Aspirant whether or not the ordination process continues. It is important to remember that this PDC does
not function as a gatekeeper to pass final judgment on the Aspirant’s sense of call, nor is it an advocacy group whose mission is to push the Aspirant toward ordination. The COM finds the book *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community* by Suzanne Farnham et al, to be a valuable resource to understanding effective dynamics in a PDC. The COM also recommends *Let Your Life Speak* by Parker Palmer as a succinct articulation of the experience of discernment. We urge all Aspirants and PDC members to utilize these texts.

**Step 3 – Discernment at the Parish Level**

The Aspirant will meet with the Bishop and COM members in September. At this meeting, the Aspirant will be provided with a schedule, a list of deadlines and information about the role of the assigned COM Shepherd to be appointed following the September meeting. The COM Shepherd will help the Aspirant through the discernment process and will be the Aspirant’s primary contact with the COM. The hope is to put a personal connection at the heart of the group process. The COM Shepherd will come to know the Aspirant in a deeper way than the rest of the members of the COM. As a dedicated facilitator, the COM Shepherd will help the COM with its deliberations about a particular Aspirant and the COM Shepherd will help inform the Aspirant about the process. If appropriate and possible, it is recommended that the Shepherd also meet with the Aspirant’s spouse or partner to answer any questions.

By November 1, the PDC will make a written recommendation to the Priest-in-Charge about the Aspirant’s call to priestly/diaconal ministry (Form #2 – page 2). The PDC should meet a minimum of four times about two weeks apart prior to preparing this report. This recommendation is based on the observation by the COM that Aspirants who have this depth in discernment are generally better prepared to articulate their sense of call than others who have been in conversation with a PDC for a briefer period. (Please see the guidelines for the organization of the PDC and the content of the PDC report in Appendix A of this Guidebook.)

During the discernment process, the priest provides support and feedback, discerns for him/herself whether individuals presenting themselves for discernment are called and enters into conversation with the COM about the potential for a call to the priesthood or diaconate. Pastoral guidance and possible redirection in the discernment process may occur at this point. As difficult as it is to say and hear that one is not called to the priesthood or diaconate, it is almost always easier to have this conversation earlier rather than later.

During the final meeting of the PDC, the COM Shepherd and/or the Discernment Committee Chair will provide guidance in writing the PDC report. The recommendation of the PDC is shared with the Priest-in-Charge and the Vestry, although it is recommended that the PDC not share the entire report with the Vestry. If the Aspirant, the Discernment Committee, Rector and Vestry agree, the person enters the Application/Formation Process. The authority to move an Aspirant forward in the ordination process rests fully with the Priest-in-Charge. After Vestry review of the PDC recommendation and Nomination of the Aspirant, Form #2 is signed and submitted to the Bishop no later than November 15. If the Aspirant is nominated by the Vestry and makes an application to the Bishop for admission to Postulancy, the Priest-in-Charge will send the Bishop a confidential letter of recommendation by December 15 that includes a copy of the report of the Parish Discernment Committee. Once Form #2 has been submitted, the Aspirant exploring a call is now considered a Nominee. It is the hope of the COM that the PDC will continue to meet with the Nominee regularly for as long as he or she continues in the Application/Formation Process.
The COM wishes to remind all those participating in the discernment process as well as members of a Vestry/Bishop’s Committee that confidentiality is to be strictly adhered to by all who will be involved with an Aspirant’s journey in seeking ordained ministry. The COM Shepherd will be emphasizing this important effort frequently to everyone participating in the discernment of a potential call by an Aspirant.

[See Appendix A for more detail on the Parish Discernment process.]
Step 4 – Nomination and Application for Postulancy

Completion of the Application process includes:

- The Nominee completes the “Application for Postulancy/Detailed Information” with form #5. This form includes the following information in accordance to the Canons plus additional information as requested by the Commission on Ministry:
  1) Full Name and date of birth
  2) Length of time, resident in the Diocese
  3) Evidence of Baptism and Confirmation
  4) Whether an application has been made previously for Postulancy or the person has been nominated in any other Diocese.
  5) A description of the process of discernment by which the Nominee has been identified for ordination to the Diaconate.
  6) The level of education attained and, if any, the degrees earned, and areas of specialization, together with copies of official transcripts.

The submission of Form #5 also includes the responses to a series of short essay questions as listed on the form.

- The Nominee will submit the $650.00 “Application Fee” with the “Application for Postulancy.” Canon Law requires sponsoring congregations to provide financial support to applicants, and a contribution toward the application fee is an appropriate beginning in this regard. The Vestry is responsible for determining the amount of the Parish’s contribution, if any. If financial assistance is required by a parish, a letter to the Bishop requesting waiver of the Application Fee should accompany the Application in lieu of a check.

Step 5 – Health Related Process

The following actions must occur:

- The Nominee should send a copy of the “Waiver of Confidentiality and Permission to Share Information” form (#3). The Nominee should keep two copies, one for the medical doctor and one for the psychologist.
- The Nominee must have a medical exam by his or her physician. The doctor must complete the Medical Examination Form in the back of the book. A summary of the results are to be sent to the Bishop. The Nominee must bring a “Waiver of Confidentiality and Permission to Share Information” form (#3) to the doctor.
- A psychological exam must be completed by a professional named by the Diocese. The fee for the examination should be paid by the Nominee to the Diocese; when possible, it is advisable for parishes to help defray the cost. It is important to note that the Diocese is the client and the Diocese receives the written feedback. The Nominee must bring a “Waiver of Confidentiality and Permission to Share Information” (Form 3) to the interview with the psychologist.
- The Nominee must complete the “HIPAA Compliant Authorization for Release Medical, Psychological/Psychiatric Records” (Form 4) and send it to the Bishop.
- A background check will be completed for the Nominee which is generated through the Diocesan Office.
Step 6 – Nominee Meets the COM

The COM will direct the Nominee to schedule a pre-interview meeting with the Bishop; and, notify the Nominee of the specific day and time of the COM interview. The COM will review the written application prior to meeting with the Nominee.

At the end of the day of interviews, the Bishop will join the COM to continue the process of communal discernment and recommend whether or not the Nominee is to continue in the diaconal process as a Postulant. The final decision is also based upon the results of the background check and the psychological examination which only the Bishop reviews. The result is followed up by an official letter from the COM about the decision.

If the Nominee is named a Postulant, his or her name and the date of admission are recorded in the Diocesan Register. The Bishop then informs the Postulant, the Postulant’s rector (or faith community) exercising oversight, the COM, and the Standing Committee.

If the Nominee is not named a Postulant, the Archdeacon or COM representative will contact the Nominee and the clergy (or faith community) exercising oversight. NOTE: There is a two (2) year waiting period before applying again.

Step 7 – Postulancy: Transforming One’s Voice

After the Nominee is named a Postulant, his or her name and the date of admission are recorded in the Diocesan Register. The Bishop then informs the Postulant, the member of the clergy (or faith community) exercising oversight, the COM, and the Standing Committee. After the Nominee is named a Postulant, he/she will receive a letter notification of the requirement for a background check. Payment of the $160.00 fee will be extracted from a portion of the Formation Fee submitted by the Postulant. As with the psychological examination, the Diocese is the client.

The named Postulant will attend an Orientation Day in June, and participate in a Postulancy program entitled Transforming One’s Voice. The program’s description is:

The definition of one’s ministry is important. As a continuance of discernment under the umbrella of Postulancy, four (4) intensive months is spent by the Postulant to refine and strengthen their “voice” for presenting and defining their ministry to the world and to the church. The Postulant is assigned to a Deacon mentor. During the fourth month the Postulant presents their ministry to Deacon and Commission on Ministry representatives. Following the presentations these representatives make an official recommendation to the Bishop concerning the Postulant’s progression to Candidacy.

From The Deacon Formation Academy – Curriculum Definitions
The Office of the Archdeacon
Step 8 – Candidacy

At the completion of *Transforming One’s Voice*, the COM representative(s), Deacon mentor(s) and/or Deacons’ Council members make the recommendation to the Bishop concerning the Postulant’s progression to Candidacy. The recommendation is based upon the results of the ministry presentation. The Bishop, along with the Standing Committee, must also obtain in writing:

- An application from the Postulant requesting Candidacy with Form #6.
- A letter of financial and preparation support from the sponsoring congregation (or other faith community) signed and dated by two-thirds of the Vestry and the member of Clergy exercising oversight with Form #7.
- A report outlining the review results of the ministry presentation.

Before admittance to Candidacy the Postulant will meet with the Standing Committee. If the Bishop admits the Postulant as a Candidate, the Bishop records the Candidate's name and date of admission in the Diocesan Register. The Bishop then informs the Candidate, the member of Clergy exercising oversight of the congregation (or other faith community), the COM, and the Standing Committee.

The Candidate then enters the Deacon Formation Academy. This 16-month curriculum is in compliance with the Canon’s areas of study, and there is a *Formation Fee* of $1,800.00.

Step 9 – Ordination

The Standing Committee of the Diocese must certify that all canonical requirements have been met and make a recommendation. To do so the Standing Committee must obtain:

- The application for ordination with Form #8
- Accompanying letter of support from the congregation or other faith community with Form #9.
- A certificate from the Bishop giving dates of admission to Postulancy and Candidacy.
- A letter from the COM giving a recommendation regarding ordination.

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

Step 10 – Post-Ordination

Within a year of ordination a formation session is conducted as “follow-up”.
Appendix A
Discernment Committee Organization

Composition of the Committee

The COM Shepherd/trained PDC Chair will contact the Priest-in-Charge. The COM representative will provide the Priest-in-Charge with this document. This discussion should include the composition of the PDC and potential dates for the first meeting.

The Priest-in-Charge will meet with the Aspirant to select the PDC. Working together the two should form a PDC that includes people who know the Aspirant at some level and those who do not know the Aspirant.

The PDC should consist of five to seven members; one person should be a member of the Vestry/Bishop’s committee. One of the PDC members will be designated as the convener or chairperson. Another member of the PDC should be appointed scribe so as to keep highlights (not copious notes) and be prepared to construct the first draft of the letter of response to the Priest-in-Charge. The Priest-in-Charge should not serve on the PDC so as to avail herself/himself to be available as consultant/priest for the PDC or Aspirant.

Meeting Organization

The PDC will meet a minimum of four times. Additional meetings could be called if needed, but only in consultation with the Priest-in-Charge and the COM Shepherd. The meetings should be held about two weeks apart and should last no longer than 90 minutes.

Meeting Construction

First meeting – This is an organizational meeting only. The COM Shepherd/trained PDC Chair will meet with the PDC to provide instruction and guidance for the structure of the meetings. The convener and scribe should be appointed. The COM representative will outline the meeting organization and construction, provide information regarding discernment and answer any question from the PDC or the Aspirant.

It is recommended that the Aspirant, Priest-in-Charge and PDC use the priestly/diaconal examination as the baseline, foundation and touchtone for discernment. All parties should answer the question, how does this charge resonate with the Aspirant’s sense of call?

Second meeting – Each member of the PDC, excluding the Aspirant, will be prepared to share his or her personal spiritual journey and/or autobiography (no more than eight minutes). The convener must keep everyone to the time constraints. It will be helpful to the aspirant if the PDC members focus their autobiography on their personal spirituality and journey.

Third meeting – This meeting is dedicated to the Aspirant telling her/his spiritual autobiography to the PDC. The spiritual autobiography should be written but not read. After the telling of the story, then copies are distributed. These can be used as reference for later questioning and reflection. The Aspirant, if he/she moves forward, will have to submit several essay questions, and the spiritual autobiography will be helpful in preparing written responses for presentation to the COM.
At the fourth or final meeting of the PDC, the Shepherd from the COM will attend. This meeting should be a time for the PDC members to ask open-ended questions allowing the Aspirant to experience self-discovery regarding their “call.” Some examples of questions to be asked include:

1. Are you well acquainted with the Aspirant’s experience in the Episcopal Church?
2. Does the Aspirant have a sense of the Holy present in her/his life? How does she/he listen and attend the presence of God? What do you know about the person’s prayer life? What are the person’s spiritual resources?
3. What emotional responses do you have when you meet and talk with this person?
4. How is the Aspirant viewed by others in the congregation?
5. How does the Aspirant understand ministry; the different functions of the laity, deacons, priests, and bishops?
6. Does the Aspirant listen? Take initiative? Is the Aspirant open, honest, giving?
7. Does the Aspirant have a sense of clear boundaries?
8. How has the Aspirant demonstrated leadership?
9. Is the Aspirant eager to learn and excited about new ideas? Is she/he able to reflect, to ponder, and to be challenged?
10. Does the Aspirant have a balance of life interests? Does the aspirant have hobbies? Does this person exercise, and take time for rest?
11. When the Aspirant has been in trouble, how did she/he seek help?
12. How does the Aspirant relate to those in authority? How does the Aspirant respond to conflict?
13. Does the Aspirant have a sense of the world beyond her/his particular location? Is there a sense of connectedness with the wider world, community and diocese?
14. Is the Aspirant aware of the potential financial demands of seminary education, if required?
15. Is the PDC aware of anything that would significantly enhance or impede the Aspirant’s ministry?

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

Next to the last meeting – At some point the PDC will want to meet without the Aspirant to arrive at a decision about their findings to be included in their report. Several options are available to the PDC:

1. The PDC believes the Aspirant is called to the priesthood/diaconate and is ready to write their report to the Priest-in-Charge. The report needs to be written, approved by all members and signed by all members of the PDC.
2. The PDC is unsure or divided about the Aspirant’s call to the priesthood/diaconate. A report should be constructed to portray the full spectrum of the PDC’s observations, concerns, unanswered questions and conclusions. A subsequent meeting of the PDC with the Priest-in-Charge, and in absence of the Aspirant, needs to be held. How the results of the PDC’s conclusions will be dispersed to the Aspirant is at the Priest-in-Charge’s discretion.
3. The PDC does not believe the Aspirant is prepared to move forward for a variety of reasons. A subsequent meeting of the PDC and the Priest-in-Charge needs to be held to discuss next steps and how this information will be given to the Aspirant.

Subsequent meetings could be held with or without the Aspirant depending upon the discretion of the Priest-in-Charge. The PDC could be called upon to continue to meet with the Aspirant for support as the person moves through the process. That decision must be made in consultation with the Priest-in-Charge and may be directed by the COM, the Shepherd and/or the Bishop. The final report may or may not be shared with the Aspirant at the discretion of the Priest-in-Charge.
The PDC’s report will be shared with the Priest-in-Charge on or before November 1 by the facilitator of the PDC. Only the portions of the PDC report selected by the Priest-in-Charge to omit inappropriate information for dissemination, if any, will be shared with the Vestry, and after Nomination by the Vestry, FORM 2 will be signed and submitted to the Bishop and the COM by November 15. If the Vestry approves the Aspirant, the discernment report will be sent forward with the Priest-in-Charge’s letter of recommendation to the COM by December 15.
Discernment: The Unspoken Questions – Soul Vulnerability

Committee Preparation

*The COM recommends that each member of the PDC review the following questions prior to the first meeting in preparation for deliberations.*

Discernment is an act of the community, which is manifested in a slice of that community through a discernment committee. Together this committee listens to the Holy Spirit speak into the soul of one in their midst not only for the sake of one person but for the entire community. While the members of the PDC often find themselves focused on the vocational call of one individual, the concomitant results of such work manifest as the personal discernment of each participant within the committee.

Following is a list of questions that are unavoidable for consideration of personal discernment. Obviously, this is not the definitive or complete list of questions:

1. What do I really want to do with the remainder of my life?
2. Who is God to me?
3. How do I experience each facet of God in the Trinity?
4. How would I describe my prayer life?
5. How best do I relate to people? How would I describe my best/worst relationships?
6. How do I feel about the authority placed over me?
7. How do I reflect? Do I journal? Do I have a spiritual director? Do I seek counseling? What impact have these had on my life and being?
8. What do I read and why would someone care what I am reading?

Individual as well as group dynamics always will factor into the “success” of a PDC. Here are some items to consider as we journey through the discernment process:

Silence — How long can any individual hold the group in silence? How much reflection is offered before any particular committee member responds?

Who is in the room that is not physically present?

What is not being said?

What is being communicated through body language?

What is being communicated through voice inflection, tone and volume?

What is behind the story? What is underneath the story?
Report Content

The content of the report should include:

- A statement indicating how often the committee (PDC) met, a list of the committee members, and a line or two of what each member does (inside/outside the church) and how long they’ve known (or not known) the potential nominee
- The actual recommendation text for the potential nominee should be reflective upon information “heard” by the committee during the meetings – the use of responses to the question prompts on pages 13 and 20 of the “A Guide for Discernment – Vocational Diaconate” are optional but highly recommended.
- This recommendation is for the Vocational Diaconate, NOT Priesthood; another resource to interpret what is being heard can be found within “The Examination – Ordination: Deacon” on pages 543 and 544 in the Book of Common Prayer.

An additional thought comes from The Diaconate – A Full and Equal Order by James Barnett on page168:

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

As a committee, does the potential nominee have the “Heart to serve”, “Hands to Prayer”, and the “Voice to lead”? (per Veronica Ritson, Archdeacon)

The structure of the report:

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