



— The Diocese of —
West Missouri

DISCERNMENT HANDBOOK

Commission On Ministry
The Diocese of West Missouri



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Discernment for Ministry in The Diocese of West Missouri

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Our Call to Ministry

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

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

This handbook provides a suggested outline for general vocational discernment, discernment for ministries that require specialized training and licensing, and discernment for those seeking ordination. The hope is that this guide can be a helpful resource for clergy, lay leaders, and others to discern all calls to ministry in the church and in the world.

What Do We Mean When We Talk About Ministry?

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

Q. Who are the ministers of the Church?

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

Q. What is the ministry of the laity?

A. The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.

Q. What is the ministry of a bishop?

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

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

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

Q. What is the ministry of a deacon?

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

Q. What is the duty of all Christians?

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

Licensed Lay Ministries

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

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

Sample Timeline for Licensed Lay Ministries

1. Member of the congregation meets with the priest-in-charge (or another leader exercising oversight of the faith community) and expresses an interest in the desired ministry.
2. Priest determines the discernment and training that is appropriate for the ministry being considered.
3. Upon successful completion of discernment and training, priest applies for a license on behalf of the member to the bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority of the diocese.
4. Member completes additional requirements of the diocese, including a background check if necessary.
5. Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority issues the license allowing the member to exercise the ministry per the appropriate canons and guidelines.

Ordained Ministries

Ordained vocations in the church are the following:

- **Deacon:** A person called to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a servant of those in need; and to assist bishops and priests in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.
- **Priest:** A person called to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a pastor to the people; to share with the bishop in the overseeing of the Church; to proclaim the Gospel; to administer the sacraments; and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God.

Discernment for ordained ministries occurs both within the local faith community (Congregational Discernment Committee or CDC) and on the diocesan level (Second Congregational Discernment Committee or SCDC). Refer to the website of The Diocese of West Missouri for an Overview of the Ordination Process.

The Episcopal Church does not discriminate based on race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation. For ordination, The Episcopal Church does not discriminate based on age, except that a Nominee must be an adult communicant in good standing, thus meaning at least 16 years of age, and no person may be ordained before reaching the age of twenty-four. There is no “type” of person who may or may not be ordained. It is essential that

persons who are discerning a call to ordained ministry possess the gift of leadership. The Episcopal Church ordains persons to serve as leaders in the Church. Thus, communities should only nominate persons for ordination who demonstrate gifts for leadership as well as the desire to lead.

Ordination Process Timeline Events and Activities

Ordination Process

The ordination process in The Diocese of West Missouri consists of a series of stages that are mostly prescribed by the Title III canons of The Episcopal Church. The canon governing the ordination of deacons is Canon 6, while the canon governing the ordination of priests is Canon 8. The canons may be found [here](#).

Individual Discernment

The aspirant meets with a spiritual director, sponsoring priest, and others for initial conversation. The rector/priest then agrees to form Congregational Discernment Committee (CDC). The clergy notifies the bishop that a CDC is being formed. The Vocations Missioner is notified and will help as needed.

Congregational Discernment

Aspirant meets with CDC for approximately six months to discern call for further ministry. The CDC provides a recommendation to Vestry. The priest and vestry may nominate the aspirant who, upon acceptance of the nomination, becomes a nominee.

Nomination

- The nominee completes a medical exam, psychological evaluation, and background check.
- The nominee meets with the Bishop.
- The nominee is invited to a Next Steps Retreat with the COM, Standing Committee, and Bishop.
- COM and Bishop give approval for further discernment. A COM mentor and liaison are assigned.

Diocesan Discernment

- The nominee explores ministry opportunities in a new congregation for approximately six months for a second congregational experience. They will meet with second congregation discernment committee (SCDC) to refine focus on further ministry direction.
- The SCDC makes a recommendation to COM.

Steps to Postulancy

- The nominee is invited to a second Next Steps Retreat with the COM, Standing Committee, and Bishop.
- COM sends a recommendation to the Bishop.
- The Bishop approves postulancy.

Postulancy

Formal seminary formation begins. With a few exceptions, students are expected to have completed a bachelor's degree prior to beginning seminary.

- **Diaconal Students** attend [The Bishop Kemper School for Ministry](#) (BKSM)
 - Two-Year Program of twenty courses.
 - Details are found on the BKSM website.
- **Presbyteral Students**
 - Typically, a three-year program for full-time students.
 - Postulants for the priesthood may attend one of the listed traditional seminaries, or BKSM.

Residential Seminary

Postulants for the priesthood who hope to work full-time for the church should plan to attend one of the listed seminaries and enroll in the Master of Divinity program.

- [Berkley Divinity School](#) at Yale. New Haven, CT. (Residential)
- [Bexley-Seabury](#), Chicago, IL. (Hybrid)
- [Church Divinity School of the Pacific](#). Berkley, CA. (Hybrid)
- [Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest](#). Austin, TX (Residential)
- [The School of Theology](#), University of the South. Sewanee, TN (Residential)
- [Virginia Theological Seminary](#). Alexandria, VA (Residential)

Regional Seminary

- [The Bishop Kemper School for Ministry](#) (BKSM)

For Postulants who expect to remain in Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, or Nebraska, and who expect their priestly ministries to be either part-time or non-stipendiary, BKSM might make sense as it is designed specifically for students who will remain in the diocese while continuing to work at secular employment. The BKSM curriculum for future priests consists of thirty courses taken over three years. Details of the curriculum are on the BKSM website.

The postulant continues with seminary education and formation.
Postulant applies for candidacy.

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)

All persons pursuing ordination to the vocation diaconate or priesthood in the diocese of West Missouri are to complete CPE prior to ordination.

Candidacy Interview

- The postulant meets with the Standing Committee.
- COM and Standing Committee make a recommendation to the bishop.
- The bishop approves candidacy.

Candidacy

- Candidate completes seminary and sits for canonical exams.
- The candidate completes CPE
- Diocesan Board of Examining Chaplains makes a report to the COM and bishop.

Final Recommendation

- COM recommendation to Bishop.
- Candidate meets with the Standing Committee for consent to ordination.
- Bishop consents to ordination.

Ordination

- Diaconal ordination – vocational diaconate or transitional diaconate.
- For those called to be a priest, priestly ordination no fewer than six months later.

Additional Information – Prior to ordination

- All candidates for ordination will complete Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).
- All candidates will participate in field placement/internship.

Discernment in General

What is Spiritual Discernment?

The term 'discernment' appears in unlikely places, considering that its ancient roots are found in Christian spiritual

practice. A dictionary definition of discernment is: 1) The quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure. 2) The power to see what is not evident to the average mind. 3) The ability to distinguish and select what is true, appropriate, or excellent. Christian spiritual practice proclaims that there is a difference between simply discernment and spiritual discernment. Discernment comes from the Latin word *discernere* which means to separate, to distinguish, to sort out. In classical spirituality, discernment means identifying what spirit is at work in a situation - the Spirit of God or some other spirit. Discernment is “shifting through” interior and exterior experiences to determine their origin and to have a sense of where they may lead.

Discernment requires a focus to be authentic, such as “*Is it God’s will that I be ordained a deacon in the Episcopal Church at this time?*” Discernment is *not* to discover what a person or group wants, but rather what *God* currently desires for the ministry, the good of the church, and the Reign of God.

Spiritual discernment is a way of life, a spiritual practice, and a process. Spiritual discernment is reflective. It requires noticing differences. It is a spiritual form of sorting. To be authentic, discernment requires a sense of spiritual freedom, indifference, or ‘holding the reins loosely’ of possible options being considered. Spiritual discernment is both a gift and a skill that can be developed. Spiritual discernment is between several goods, choosing the better that is in harmony with God. A decision between good and evil is moral reasoning and practice and is not spiritual discernment. Spiritual discernment assumes that God is active, is accessible in our experience, cares about the choices we make, and is involved in our lives and in creation. Christian discernment always sits within a larger community of faith. Genuine spiritual discernment does not occur in isolation. It needs to occur within a community of faith. To be authentic, spiritual discernment requires dialogue and interaction with the community of faith. The process of discernment involves listening to and noticing others’ thoughts / opinions and our own inner experiences. Spiritual discernment is holistic. It involves feelings, thoughts, memories, past experiences, reasoning, and ‘gut instincts. Spiritual discernment is grounded in a sense of a loving God who is trustworthy and knowable within our human experience. Spiritual discernment needs to be nurtured and developed over time. Spiritual discernment requires a ‘contemplative stance’ towards life. It requires a sensitivity to notice the sacred in everyday life and experience. Spiritual discernment is dynamic. The discernment process may lead us to conclusions we might not have expected or even imagined. Authentic discernment may surprise us. Spiritual discernment is an important part of the Jewish-Christian faith, practice, and spiritual heritage.

Congregational Discernment

Spiritual discernment should be an ongoing event in the life of a healthy worshipping community. Every member of the Body of Christ is called to use his or her gifts to the glory of God and for the wellbeing of others. Not all are given the same gifts, and not all are called to the same vocations, but “each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (*Ephesians 4:7*).

There are times in our lives that lend themselves to considering vocational discernment, such as graduation, marriage, having children, relocating, and retirement. At other times, we may feel that God is calling us to engage in a new or different way to serve within the church, but we’re having a difficult time understanding what ministry might fit us best.

A congregation-based discernment group can be extremely beneficial in perceiving and comprehending the work that God is calling us to do in the world. By sharing our stories with other faithful members around us, we can be better equipped to discern those vocations in which our gifts are most needed.

This model of congregational discernment can be adapted for those seeking any Christian lay vocation, whether it is

a licensed ministry or not.

Overview

What is this all about & why?

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

Preparation

Establishing a congregational discernment group

- The group should consist of three to seven members.
- The group needs diversity in gender, age, personality, experience, occupation, etc.
- The group would benefit from having leaders who preferably have done congregational discernment before.
- If all members of the group are new, it is essential to seek an experienced coach to assist the group in the discernment process.
- For members who are new, they will be trained and learn the process from the more experienced members of the group by engaging in the process.

Setting the physical space for discernment

- The room being used should be comfortable (but not too comfortable--no sleeping), secure and free from distractions.
- It is helpful to arrange seating so participants can all see each other; a circle is usually best.
- Consider using a central focus: such as a lit candle, Bible, icon, flowers, or other, religious symbols; this helps remind the participants of the sacred spiritual nature of the task.
- Provide the needed materials such as pens/pencils, markers, self-stick notes, writing materials, etc.
- Ask all members to silence their electronic devices and not to use them during the session.

Setting the spiritual and emotional space for discernment

- Establish an agreement or covenant for the group (see Appendix A for an example of Respectful Communication Guidelines).
- Before starting, spend time for members to get to know each other; this can be anything from a brief autobiography to an ice-breaker game.
- Be sure to pay attention to nonverbal cues to see if anyone is getting anxious or uncomfortable; if so, stop and try to find the issue and resolve it.

Structure of a Congregational Discernment Session

General Session Plan

1. Opening prayer/worship
2. Checking in / How is everyone doing?
3. Session content and process (most of the session time is devoted to this)
4. Review the content of the session.
 - a. Where is/was God in this?
 - b. What have I learned about myself?
 - c. What have I learned about others in the group?
5. Review the process of the session.
 - a. What went well and was effective?
 - b. What could be improved?
6. Closing prayer/worship.

Discernment on the Congregational Level

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

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

Guidelines for a Congregational Discernment Committee (CDC)

- Prior to, during, or immediately after the work of the CDC, the Inquirer meets with the bishop.
- The priest-in-charge/rector contacts the Vocations Missioner.
- The CDC should comprise at least one member of the local clergy (ideally for the order being considered), at least one member of the vestry, and at least two other ministry leaders from the congregation. Suggested qualities of committee members are persons who:
 - Can hold and maintain confidentiality.
 - Have a sense of vocation rooted in their own baptisms.
 - Nurture their own spirituality in prayer and service.
 - Are mature, generative adults who wish the best for the inquirers and the church.
 - Are aware of their own limitations, failures, and gifts, and can note that in others with care and respect.
 - Can positively engage in a group process.
 - Are not "people pleasers" or "group thinkers;" they can appropriately raise challenging and uncomfortable questions on important or sensitive issues.
 - Are aware of the signs of the Spirit, and the signs of resistance to that Spirit in their own lives and those of others.
- The Aspirant and CDC members should all read the book **Listening Hearts** (Farnham, et al.) to familiarize themselves with this respected model of Christian group discernment. In addition, the book **Grounded in God** (Farnham, et al) is a helpful resource for group discernment.
- The CDC should meet with the Inquirer a minimum of six times, with each meeting covering one or more of the sessions as outlined below. The CDC should also meet with the spouse/partner of the Aspirant (if applicable) at least once.

- It is recommended to set aside some time at the end of each meeting to reflect on the content and process of the session.
- It is also recommended that the Aspirant keep a journal that focuses on the suggested topics of each session.
- Resources for the CDC include **The Book of Common Prayer** (particularly pages 832-33, the Catechism section concerning Ministry, the Baptismal Covenant, the Examination sections within the ordination services), I Corinthians 12:1, 4:14, Ephesians 4:7, 11-16, Romans 12:1-8, and Acts 4:13.

An Outline of CDC Sessions

Session I: Introductory Session

Orientation

At the first session, the COM liaison will meet with the CDC and the Aspirant to discuss the following:

1. General introductions are made of the whole group.
2. Give an overview of the CDC process and answer any initial questions.
3. Go over the “Respectful Communication Guidelines” and “Effective Group Guidelines” (see Appendix A). Consider adding to or modifying the guidelines to satisfy the concerns or interests of the group.
4. The following are appointed:
 - a) A **Convener** who schedules and notifies the members of the meetings, and who chairs and facilitates the meetings.
 - b) A **Recorder** who is responsible for the final report to the Vestry. This means that the Recorder will need to make sure that all appropriate areas are covered and that notes are kept about the work of the committee and the Inquirer’s responses.
 - c) A **Chaplain** who makes sure that meetings are opened and closed with prayer and appropriate Bible study is included in the work of the LDC. Should a conflict arise, the Chaplain should be willing to help the committee negotiate the tensions in healthy ways.
5. The COM liaison is not expected to attend further meetings but should be available to provide guidance to the CDC as needed.

Guidelines for a Spiritual Autobiography

The Aspirant is then assigned the task of writing a spiritual autobiography to be provided prior to the next scheduled meeting. It should be no longer than four pages, double-spaced.

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

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

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

Finally, write about the ways in which God is active in your life today. Through whom or what? What is your understanding of your relationship with Christ today? Say something about the commitments you have made as a result of your life's experiences and your sense, if any, of the Christian vocation you have developed as a result. Reflect on all this before you begin writing. Make notes for yourself, then begin writing. You may find that you have exceeded the four-page limit we have given you. If so, keep a copy of the entire spiritual autobiography you have written for yourself, and submit the edited version to the CDC.

Committee Member Spiritual Timelines

The focus of this discernment process is the Aspirant. Experience has shown that it may be very helpful for each member of the CDC to make a spiritual timeline of events in their own faith journey while the Aspirant is composing a more detailed spiritual autobiography. By doing so, committee members show that they are willing to disclose something of themselves to the group before they ask the Aspirant to do so in greater depth.

Suggested Journal Prompt

- Create a **discernment question** to make concrete the purpose of the group. For example, ***"Is it God's will that I be ordained a Deacon / Priest in the Episcopal Church at this time?"*** Coming up with this type of question can help put the process into the proper context: discernment is not to discover what you want, but rather what God desires for you at this time for the ministry and the good of the church. Only write the question in the journal, and then consider it throughout the process of discernment.
- We suggest that an Aspirant create and keep a journal that contains their written reflections and insights after each session. We also suggest that from time to time, the Aspirant reflects on their discernment question and writes their reflections in their journal throughout the process of discernment.

Session II: Getting Acquainted

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

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

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

Suggested Journal prompt for the Aspirant

What are your thoughts and feelings as you begin this discernment process?

Session III: Exploration of Gifts for Ministry

Scripture Selection

- Psalm 139:1-11

- 1 Corinthians 12:1,4-13
- Romans 12:1-12
- John 20:19-23

Meditation

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

Conversation

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

Suggested Journal Prompt

What did you learn about your gifts for ministry during this session?

Suggested Journal Prompt for Aspirant

What did you hear and discover about yourself in this session?

Session IV: The Mission of the Church

Scripture Selection – 2 Corinthians 5:4-21

Meditation

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

Conversation

- Talk about a time when you were in a relationship that was broken. How did it break? Did you seek reconciliation? If so, how? How did that work out?
- What are some ways that you have participated in the Church's mission of reconciliation?
- Frederick Buechner defines call as an intersection of "where our deepest gladness meets the world's deepest need." What is your deepest gladness? Where does your gladness meet a need in the world? How have you already been engaged in this call? Where do you see that intersection in the future?
- The Outline of the Faith also says that the duty of all Christians is "to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God" (BCP p. 856). How have you fulfilled these duties? How has that changed over time? Talk about your journey of stewardship – how you give your time, talent, and money.

- Review the promises all Christians make in the Baptismal Covenant (BCP p. 304-305). Looking at each of the five “discipleship questions,” give examples of how you have lived out those promises in your life so far. Which of the promises do you feel you’ve followed most faithfully? Which ones are most difficult for you? What are the things in your life that prevent you from being faithful to these promises?

Suggested Journal Prompt for Aspirant

How is God calling you to engage in the mission of the Church?

Session V: One Body, Many Members

Scripture Selection - 1 Corinthians 12: 4-28

Meditation

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

Conversation

- Talk about your experience as a layperson in the church. How have you “represented Christ and his Church,” bearing witness to Christ to others, participating in reconciling work in the world, and participating in the life of the church. How has this been satisfying, or not?
- Describe ways that you have been a servant to those in need. What were those experiences like? What did you learn?
- Talk about a time when you conflicted with someone who had authority over you. What was the problem? What did you do? How was the situation resolved? What did you learn?
- What are some indications of being called? Any particular vocation? To the ordained ministry?
- Talk about a time when you experienced grace – a gift that you did not deserve or earn but received anyway. What did you gain from that experience?
- When you reflect on your current sense of call to ordained ministry, what are your fears? Why?
- How might God use some of your “deficiencies” for good?
- How have people in your community responded when they hear that you are discerning for ordination? Who has supported you? Has anyone been surprised? If so, why? Has anyone reacted negatively? If so, why?
- Talk about your life in The Episcopal Church. If coming from another tradition, what drew you to The Episcopal Church? What do you see as the main differences with your former tradition? Have you participated in The Episcopal Church beyond your home?

Suggested Journal Prompt for Aspirant

Reflect on the Scripture passage and the subsequent discussion.

Session VI: Counting the Cost

Scripture Selection - Matthew 10:5-16

Meditation

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

Conversation

- Describe a time when you chose to make a significant change in your life. What was your goal? What did you sacrifice to achieve that goal? How did you manage the stress related to the change? What did you learn from that experience?
- What do you imagine you would have to give up in order to pursue ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church? How do you feel about those potential sacrifices?
- Talk about the potential roadblocks between you and the possibility of ordination (financial, health, relocation, etc.) How will you navigate these roadblocks?

- (If there is a spouse) How does your spouse feel about this call? In what ways is he/she supportive? Is he/she willing to make changes (financial, moving for seminary, etc.)?
- What is your educational background? How did you do as a student? How do you feel about going through an educational process again?
- Describe an experience when you were disappointed. What happened and how did you respond?
- Describe an experience of conflict. What happened and how did you respond?
- What do you do regularly to take care of yourself? Are there any persistent struggles that affect your wellness?

Suggested Journal Prompt for Aspirant

What are your fears and anxieties at this point in your life, and how do you respond to them?

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

Session VII – S: Session with Aspirant’s Spouse or Partner

This session could be used earlier in the process as the CDC discerns appropriate. Perhaps add a note in the introduction.

Experience has shown that Ordained ministry requires strong spousal / partner support. The following questions are suggested for a session with the Aspirant’s Spouse or Partner.

- What are your feelings concerning your spouse’s / partner’s considering ordained ministry in The Episcopal Church currently?
- How will your spouse’s / partner’s ordained life affect you and your family?
- How will your spouse’s / partner’s ordained life affect your couple relationship?
- How do you imagine supporting your spouse’s / partner’s ordained ministry?

Session VIII: Report of the Congregational Discernment Committee

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

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

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

Session IX: Final Meeting

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

Nomination of an Aspirant

The vestry nominates the aspirant for postulancy using the nomination template, found on the diocesan website. Once completed and signed by the priest (rector, priest-in-charge, or other presenting priest) and two thirds of the vestry, the letter is scanned and emailed to the bishop and the bishop’s assistant. See appendix F.

Discernment on the Diocesan Level

Next Steps Retreat

Nominees who have completed the following activities will be invited to attend the *Next Steps Retreat*. This one-day retreat includes opportunities for the nominee to meet in discussion groups with members of the Commission on Ministry and the Standing Committee. The spouses/partners of the nominees are strongly encouraged to attend and will meet with other spouses/partners in a retreat led by spouses and partners of diocesan clergy.

Following lunch, the nominees are excused. The COM, bishop, vocations missionary, and Standing Committee members meet to discuss the nominees. If approved to move forward, the nominee is assigned a clergy mentor and lay liaison from the COM. The nominee is then assigned to a second congregation for further discernment.

Second Congregation Experience – A time for self-discovery, exploration, and further discernment – See Appendix G, page 25.

Appendix A – Respectful Communication Guidelines

R = RESPONSIBILITY. Take responsibility for what you say and feel without blaming others.

E = EMPATHY. Use empathic listening.

S = SENSITIVE. Be sensitive to differences in communication styles.

P = PONDER. Ponder what you heard, and what you feel before you speak.

E = EXAMINE. Examine your own assumptions and perceptions.

C = CONFIDENTIALITY. Keep confidentiality of what is said.

T = TRUST. Trust ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong.

Effective Group Guidelines

In addition to the above, the following group guidelines should be observed:

- All cellphones should be silenced or turned off.
- Take time to become settled in God's presence at the beginning of every session. We suggest that you take a moment and start with prayer.
- Listen to others with your entire self (senses, feelings, intuition, imagination, and rational faculties)
- Do not interrupt.
- Pause between speakers, allow space for holy silence so that you may absorb what has been said.
- Do not formulate what you want to say while someone else is speaking.
- Speak for yourself only, expressing your own thoughts and feelings, referring to your own experiences; avoid being hypothetical; steer away from broad generalizations.
- Do not challenge what others say.
- Listen to the group as a whole--to those who have not spoken aloud as well as to those who have.
- Generally, leave space for anyone who may want to speak a first time before speaking a second time yourself.
- Hold your desires and opinions--even your convictions—lightly.

Appendix B

Sample report of the Congregational Discernment Committee to the Priest and Vestry

Date: _____

Name of the Aspirant: _____

Name of Congregation: _____

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

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

Recommendation of the CDC _____

Signed _____

Chair of the CDC

Appendix C

Sample report of the secondary discernment congregation to the vestry/priest

Date _____

Name of the Aspirant: _____

Name of Congregation: _____

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

- What is this person's understanding of Christian ministry?
- How is this person growing in the Christian faith?
- Describe the current and past ministries of this person.
- What is this person's capacity to learn?
- What is the status of this person's physical and emotional health?
- Describe this person's leadership style and roles.
- How do you experience this person's ministry?
- What do you believe is this person's call to ministry?
- Do you believe the call is to ordained ministry, and if yes, to which order?
- What evidence do you see in this person's life to support your conclusion?
- 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?

Recommendation of the CDC _____

Signed _____

Chair of the CDC

Appendix D - Glossary

ASPIRANT (discerner, interested person): a person who begins the discernment process with their home congregation and rector for either lay or ordained ministry.

BEGINNING WELL: A support group for newly ordained and new clergy in the diocese. It is facilitated by the Transition Missioner, the Mentor subcommittee, and a group facilitator.

BKSM (Bishop Kemper School for Ministry. Topeka Kansas): The school provides theological education in partnership with Episcopal Dioceses of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, West Missouri, and Western Kansas. The education provided is sufficient for certificates of priesthood, the diaconate, and licensed lay ministries.

CANDIDATE: A person who has completed at least half of seminary and other requirements as a postulant, fulfilling all canonical and discernment requirements.

COM (Commission on Ministry): A group of lay and ordained members from the diocese who shepherd discerners through the multi-year discernment and formation process and make recommendations to the bishop on advancement through the process.

CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education): This training is required of all persons in the ordination process and is often completed in a hospital, long-term care facility, or other setting.

DEACON: a person called to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a servant of those in need and to assist bishops and priests in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

DIACONATE: Pertaining to deacons.

EMBER DAYS: Three days which occur four times a year: the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after St. Lucy's Day (Dec. 13), Ash Wednesday, the Day of Pentecost, and Holy Cross Day (Sept. 14). The name comes from the Latin title *Quattuor tempora*, meaning "four times." In ancient Italy, the times (originally three) were associated with sowing, harvest, and vintage, for which one prayed, fasted, and gave alms. Later the four times became occasions for ordination, for which the Christian community prayed, and the candidates prepared themselves by prayer and retreat. The BCP appoints proper collects and readings for this observance under the title "For the Ministry (Ember Days), including propers "For those to be ordained," "For the choice of fit persons for the ministry," and "For all Christians in their vocation" (BCP, pp. 256-257, 929).

EMBER LETTERS: Every postulant or candidate for holy orders in the Episcopal Church is required by canon to report to the bishop four times a year, during the Ember Weeks. The report must be made in person or by letter (sent via email or USPS) and must include reflection on the person's academic experience as well as personal and spiritual development. See Ember Days.

GOE (General Ordination Examinations): Written examinations taken toward the end of seminary on subjects laid out in Canon III.7

INTERNSHIP: Also called field education. This is a seminary course which includes time spent weekly in a congregation other than the sponsoring congregation.

LETTERS DIMISSORY: Clergy may transfer canonical residence from one diocesan jurisdiction to another by

presentation of Letters Dimissory from the ecclesiastical authority of the former diocese to the ecclesiastical authority of the new diocese. It is a testimonial by the ecclesiastical authority of the former diocese (typically a bishop) that the clergyperson has not “been justly liable to evil report, for error in religion or for viciousness of life, for the last three years.” The transfer of canonical residence is dated from the acceptance of Letters Dimissory by the ecclesiastical authority. Letters Dimissory shall be presented if a member of the clergy has been called to a cure in another diocese and shall be accepted unless credible information is received concerning the character of the clergyperson that would call for a canonical inquiry and presentment.

LICENSED LAY MINISTRIES: There are seven forms of licensed lay ministries as described by the Canons of the Episcopal Church. They include Pastoral Leader, Worship Leader, Preacher, Catechist, Eucharistic Minister, Eucharistic Visitor and Evangelist.

LIAISON: A lay member of the COM who provides support to nominees, postulants and candidates and reports to COM on their progress.

MENTOR: A clergy member on the COM who acts as a mentor during the nominee, postulant, and candidate phases of the discernment process. In general, they stay in contact with their mentee, offering support and formation, reporting to the COM on the status of the discerner.

MIDDLER YEAR: The second of three years in the seminary program for priests.

NEXT STEP RETREAT: A full day retreat of COM and members of the Standing Committee with nominees. It is an opportunity to interview people who have completed congregational discernment, been nominated for postulancy, and have accepted the nomination. The Nominee may be recommended for Postulancy or Lay leadership. A meeting of family members (spouses/partners) is also offered.

NOMINEE: A person who has been nominated for postulancy by a faith community, completed a congregational discernment and has accepted their nomination to the ordination process, but has not yet been accepted as a postulant to either the Diaconate or Priesthood.

POSTULANT: A person who has been accepted into the ordination process meeting certain canonical and diocesan requirements. This generally covers the years in seminary.

PRESBYTERATE: pertaining to priests.

RELEASE: Priests, deacons, postulants, and candidates are in relationship with the diocese in which they have discerned for ordained ministry, from which they have been sent forward to seminary, and within which they will, Lord willing, be ordained. Before a newly ordained priest or deacon, a postulant, or a candidate may move their relationship to a different diocese they must first be released by the bishop (or the ecclesiastical authority) of their original diocese. This process begins with a conversation between the person who desires to be released and the bishop or ecclesiastical authority (the Standing Committee in the absence of a sitting bishop) in the original diocese. It is up to the discretion of the bishop (or ecclesiastical authority) of the original diocese whether or not the person will be released to another diocese.

SECOND CONGREGATION DISCERNMENT: A time of ministry and discernment in a congregation different from the person’s sponsoring congregation meant to help the aspirant test and discern the nature of the call to ministry. The person should play an active role in lay ministry, learn more about being a deacon or priest and have a second congregational discernment committee (SCDC). The new church will send a letter to the bishop at the end of the SCDC reporting the process to the bishop.

SPONSORING PRIEST: The priest, usually of the home church of an aspirant. In the event the aspirant's congregation does not have a priest, the sponsoring priest may be from a different congregation. They offer spiritual direction and form a CDC to discern a calling to ministry, The vestry/bishop's committee of the home church approves a letter of recommendation to send the bishop.

STANDING COMMITTEE (SC): The body of the Diocese that must consent to ordination before the candidate becomes eligible for ordination. Their consent is necessary before the bishop acts.

TRANSITIONAL DEACON: Candidates for the Priesthood are ordained first into the diaconate for a period of at least 6 months before their ordination as a priest.

VOCATIONAL DEACON: A deacon whose final vocation and calling is to permanently serve the church and the world as a deacon.

VOCATIONS MISSIONER: a person employed by the diocese to oversee the vocations program and ordination process, working closely with the bishop (or ecclesiastical authority) and the COM. This is the primary contact for those in the ordination process to complete the work needed at each stage toward ordination. Email – vocations@diowestmo.org.

Appendix E – On Hold Option

“On Hold” Option During Congregational Discernment

Should the CDC, Aspirant, and the Rector/Priest-in-Charge/Presenting Priest decide this is not the best time to pursue ordination, there is the option of being placed “On Hold.” The reasons can vary due to family situations, job changes, or other extenuating circumstances. This is an acceptable option that should be treated with compassionate understanding by all. Part of the Aspirant being placed “On Hold” recommendation is a written report from the committee and the Aspirant briefly explaining the choice. This report should be kept on file at the sponsoring congregation for future reference. A final copy should be given to the Aspirant, Rector, and Vestry, but not passed on to the Commission on Ministry (COM) unless requested by the president of COM or the Bishop’s office.

When the Aspirant decides to reactive the discernment process, the written report is available to assist in resuming congregational discernment. There are numerous formation options for the Aspirant in Lay License Certification offered by the diocese, as well as Educational for Ministry (EfM) or other approved Christian Formation Courses that an aspirant may pursue during the On Hold phase of discernment.

“On Hold” Option Following Nomination

Once an individual is a Nominee, Postulant, or Candidate in the ordination process the bishop or the individual, in consultation with the bishop, may choose “on hold” status.

This change is considered with prayerful discernment by all parties and is to be communicated to the COM. The formations opportunities, listed above, will be recommended, as appropriate.

Appendix F – Nomination Process

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

Electronic versions of the forms mentioned below may be found on the website of The Diocese of West Missouri under “Overview of the Ordination Process.”

1. If not already completed, arrange for the potential Nominee to interview with the bishop.
2. A Nominee must be an adult communicant in good standing of the congregation.
3. The Rector/Vicar/Priest-in-Charge/Presenting Priest plus at least two-thirds of the Vestry or Bishop’s Committee must sign a letter of nomination (template available on the website).
4. The nomination may be specific for the priesthood or the diaconate, or to be determined.
5. The Nominee must accept the nomination in writing (template available on the website).
6. The Nominee must fill out the Nominee Information Form (template available on the website) and send this form to the diocesan office along with resume, transcripts, and photo. Items are emailed to BishopsAssistant@diowestmo.org, cc vocations@diowestmo.org.
7. The Nominee must provide an updated copy of the spiritual autobiography and the final reflection on the discernment process.
8. The Nominee will be sent various forms to complete related to medical, financial, and psychological evaluation, as well as information release documents necessary for background assessment.
 - a. After the above information is sent to the Bishop’s Office and the person is admitted as a Nominee, the Commission on Ministry (COM) for the diocese, in concert with the Vocations Missioner, begins the next stage of discernment.

Appendix G – DRAFT* Second Congregation Experience – A time for self-discovery, exploration, and further discernment

Once a person has been nominated for ordination and has participated in the Next Steps Retreat, the vocations missionary, in concert with the transition missionary and bishop will arrange a Second Congregational Experience. The Nominee will be placed in another congregation for up to six months. The Nominee should attend the assigned congregation for services and take part in the life of the assigned congregation. During this time, the Nominee should worship in the second congregation and partake in liturgical roles (reader, sub deacon, etc.). It is also recommended that the Nominee be allowed to teach at least one class. If possible, it is also recommended that the Nominee shadows a clergy person or Eucharist Visitor on a few pastoral calls or visits, when appropriate.

**This portion of the Handbook is being evaluated by congregations with nominees in the second congregation experienced. September 2024*

General Suggestions for the Second Congregation Discernment Committee (SCDC)

- The SCDC must include a mix of clergy and laity, and ideally be composed of the same types of individuals as outlined in the Congregational Discernment Committee (CDC):
 - Can hold and maintain confidentiality.
 - Have a sense of vocation rooted in their own baptisms.
 - Nurtures their own spirituality in prayer and service.
 - Are mature, generative adults who wish the best for the inquirers and the church.
 - Are aware of their own limitations, failures, and gifts, and can note that in others with care and respect.
 - Can positively engage in a group process.
 - Are not “people pleasers” or “group thinkers;” they can appropriately raise challenging and uncomfortable questions on important or sensitive issues.
 - Are aware of the signs of the Spirit, and the signs of resistance to that Spirit in their own lives and those of others.

Suggestions for the processes of the SCDC

- The SCDC should assign a Convener, Recorder, and Chaplain as discussed in the CDC section.
- The Nominee and SCDC members should all read the book Listening Hearts (Farnham, et al.) to familiarize themselves with this respected model of Christian group discernment.
- The SCDC may meet with the spouse/partner of the Nominee (if applicable) during this process. Note- the nominee’s spouse/partner may or may not be attending the second congregation. The nominee’s family may continue their worship life in the home congregation. Either way, the meeting with the nominee’s spouse/partner is optional during the second congregational experience.
- **The SCDC sessions are like the CDC sessions in many ways, but are not identical, and some sessions have been eliminated.**
- **The meditation and conversation prompts are guides to help the SCDC with a fruitful session. It is not expected that every prompt will be used.**

Before the first session, the following should be provided to all members of the SCDC:

- The report of the CDC from the congregation in which this person was nominated.
- The spiritual autobiography created by the Nominee.

Preparation

- Review the Congregational Discernment Committee (CDC) portion of the Discernment Handbook, especially pages 7-10.
- Create a space for discernment. See the Preparation Section on Vocational Discernment earlier in this document for suggestions on how to do this.
- Before meeting with the Nominee, spend a few minutes together in prayer as a group.
- Go over the “Respectful Communication Guidelines” and “Effective Group Guidelines” (see Appendix A). Consider adding to or modifying the guidelines to satisfy the concerns or interests of the group.

Provide the members of the SCDC with a journal in which to record their thoughts & impressions during the sessions.

Structure of a Congregational Discernment Session

General Session Plan

7. Opening prayer/worship
8. Checking in / How is everyone doing?
9. Session content and process (most of the session time is devoted to this)
10. Review the content of the session.
 - a. Where is/was God in this?
 - b. What have I learned about myself?
 - c. What have I learned about others in the group?
11. Review the process of the session.
 - a. What went well and was effective?
 - b. What could be improved?
12. Closing prayer/worship.

An Outline of SCDC Sessions

Session I: Introductory Session

Orientation

At the first session, the SCDC will meet with the nominee to discuss the following:

6. General introductions are made of the whole group.
7. Give an overview of the SCDC process and answer any initial questions.
8. Go over the “Respectful Communication Guidelines” and “Effective Group Guidelines” (see Appendix A). Consider adding to or modifying the guidelines to satisfy the concerns or interests of the group.
9. The following are appointed:
 - d) A **Convener** who schedules and notifies the members of the meetings, and who chairs and facilitates the meetings.
 - e) A **Recorder** who is responsible for the final report to the Vestry. This means that the Recorder will need to make sure that all appropriate areas are covered and that notes are kept about the work of the committee and the Inquirer’s responses.
 - f) A **Chaplain** who makes sure that meetings are opened and closed with prayer and appropriate Bible study is included in the work of the LDC. Should a conflict arise, the Chaplain should be willing to help the committee negotiate the tensions in healthy ways.
10. The VM is not required to attend the first meeting but will be available to provide guidance to the SCDC and will join the first session, as needed. Request for assistance may be sent to vocations@diowestmo.org.
11. The nominee is given an overview of the congregation, including worship life, formation, mission/outreach, and structure (vestry/bishop’s committee, staff, etc.)
12. The nominee and the SCDC discuss plans for the nominee’s time with the congregation. These plans have begun with the rector/priest-in-charge and will be further developed during this meeting.

Conversation

- Talk about your life in The Episcopal Church. If coming from another tradition, what drew you to The Episcopal Church? What do you see as the main differences with your former tradition? Have you participated in The Episcopal Church beyond your home?
- Talk about your experience as a layperson in the church. How have you “represented Christ and his Church,” bearing witness to Christ to others, participating in reconciling work in the world, and participating in the life of the church. How has this been satisfying, or not?
- Describe ways that you have been a servant to those in need. What were those experiences like? What did you learn?

The Spiritual Autobiography – see pages 11-12 of the Discernment Handbook

The Nominee will have written a spiritual autobiography during their congregational discernment committee (CDC) work. A copy will be provided to the SCDC for the members to read. The spiritual autobiography will be discussed at the next meeting.

Committee Member Spiritual Timelines

The focus of this discernment process is the Nominee. Experience has shown that it may be very helpful for each member of the SCDC to make a spiritual timeline of events in their own faith journey while the Nominee is composing a more detailed spiritual autobiography. By doing so, committee members show that they are willing to disclose something of themselves to the group before they ask the Nominee to do so in greater depth. Committee members who have already completed this step, may use their existing timeline, or create a new one.

Suggested Journal Prompt

- Create a **discernment question** to make concrete the purpose of the group. For example, ***“Is it God’s will that I be ordained a Deacon / Priest in the Episcopal Church at this time?”*** Producing this type of question can help put the process into the proper context: discernment is not to discover what you want, but rather what God desires for you at this time for the ministry and the good of the church. Only write the question in the journal, and then consider it throughout the process of discernment.
- We suggest that the Nominee continue the journal, which was started during their CDC, which contains their written reflections and insights after each session. We also suggest that from time to time, the Nominee reflects on their discernment question and writes their reflections in their journal throughout the process of discernment.

Session II: Getting Acquainted

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

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

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

Suggested Journal prompt for the Nominee

What are your thoughts and feelings as you begin this second discernment process?

Session III: Exploration of Gifts for Ministry

Scripture Selection

- Psalm 139:1-11
- 1 Corinthians 12:1,4-13
- Romans 12:1-12
- John 20:19-23

Meditation

- What do you hear?
- What insights does this passage offer us?
- What are your spiritual gifts? How have you identified those gifts?
- Think about a time you did something well and it brought you great joy.
- Think about a time you engaged in a task so deeply that you lost all sense of time.
- Think about a time when you used one of your spiritual gifts. What was the need, and what was your action? How did your use of this spiritual gift impact others? Who benefited?

- Think about a time when you enabled another's spiritual gifts.
- How have you used your spiritual gifts to help build the Church?
- How have you been a leader? How would others describe your leadership style? What has it been like to get others to follow your leadership?
- Think about a time when you created something new, such as a new ministry or group or project. Whose idea was it? Did you get help from others? How did it turn out?
- What are the gifts that you know you do not possess? What are the gifts that you think are there, but that you would like to develop further?

Conversation

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

Suggested Journal Prompt

What did you learn about your gifts for ministry during this session?

Suggested Journal Prompt for Nominee

What did you hear and discover about yourself in this session?

Session IV: The Mission of the Church as One Body with Many Members

Scripture Selection – 2 Corinthians 5:4-21 and 1 Corinthians 12: 4-28

Meditation

- What do you hear?
- What insights do these passages offer us for this meeting?

Conversation

- Frederick Buechner defines call as an intersection of “where our deepest gladness meets the world’s deepest need.” What is your deepest gladness? Where does your gladness meet a need in the world? How have you already been engaged in this call? Where do you see that intersection in the future?
- The Outline of the Faith also says that the duty of all Christians is “to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God” (BCP p. 856). How have you fulfilled these duties? How has that changed over time? Talk about your journey of stewardship – how you give your time, talent, and money.
- Review the promises all Christians make in the Baptismal Covenant (BCP p. 304-305). Looking at each of the five “discipleship questions,” give examples of how you have lived out those promises in your life so far. Which of the promises do you feel you have followed most faithfully? Which ones are most difficult for you? What are the things in your life that prevent you from being faithful to these promises?
- Talk about a time when you conflicted with someone who had authority over you. What was the problem? What did you do? How was the situation resolved? What did you learn?
- What are some indications of being called to the ordained ministry?

- Talk about a time when you experienced grace – a gift that you did not deserve or earn but received anyway. What did you gain from that experience?
- When you reflect on your current sense of call to ordained ministry, what are your fears? Why?
- How might God use some of your “deficiencies” for good?
- How have people in your community responded when they hear that you are discerning for ordination? Who has supported you? Has anyone been surprised? If so, why? Has anyone reacted negatively? If so, why?

Suggested Journal Prompts for Nominee

Reflect on the Scripture passage and the subsequent discussion.
How is God calling you to engage in the mission of the Church?

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

Session V: Report of the Second Congregational Discernment Committee

The SCDC meets without the Nominee to complete the report to the Vestry and Priest. This session may be held immediately following Session IV. See Appendix B of the Discernment Handbook for letters that may be helpful in creating the report.

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

Session VI: Final Meeting

The SCDC, Nominee, and the Rector or Priest-in-Charge meet to review the Report to the Vestry. This report will either assent to the prior nomination or address any concerns related to the nomination. Revisions may be made using feedback from anyone involved in the process. A final copy should be given to the Nominee, Rector, and Vestry. The congregational discernment process is then brought to closure.

Assent to the Nomination

If the vestry assents to the nomination, the nomination template, found on the diocesan website is used for this purpose. Once completed and signed by the priest (rector, priest-in-charge, or other presenting priest) and two thirds of the vestry, the letter is scanned and emailed to the bishop and the bishop’s assistant. See appendix F.

If the vestry does not give assent to the nomination, a letter outlining the concerns of the SCDC is prepared and sent to the bishop.



The **Diocese of**
West Missouri