



— The Diocese of —
West Missouri

DISCERNMENT HANDBOOK

Commission on Ministry

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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 rector, 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 prescribed by the Title III canons of The Episcopal Church and/or the policies of the diocese. 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 clergy notifies the bishop that a person desires to begin discernment and facilitates a meeting between the aspirant and the bishop and the aspirant and the Canon for Vocations. If needed, the canon for vocations works with the clergy to form Congregational Discernment Committee (CDC).

Congregational Discernment

Aspirant meets with CDC for approximately six months to discern call to 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 may meet with the bishop again.
- 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 four to six months in a second congregational experience. They will meet with a second congregation discernment committee (SCDC) to refine focus on further ministry direction. The manual for the SCDC is found in Appendix G of this handbook.
- The SCDC makes a recommendation to the bishop and 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 regarding postulancy to the bishop.
- The bishop may approve postulancy.

Postulancy

Formal seminary formation begins. Most students will have completed a bachelor's degree prior to beginning seminary, though this is not a requirement.

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 seminaries, or BKSM.

Residential/Hybrid Seminary (MDiv degree)

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.

Hybrid Seminary Programs – these programs are considered on an individual basis.

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

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)

All persons pursuing ordination to the vocational diaconate or priesthood in The Diocese of West Missouri are to complete CPE prior to ordination.

Candidacy Interview

- The COM makes their recommendation to the bishop.
- If the bishop agrees with the COM recommendation, they request the consent of the Standing Committee.
- The Standing Committee interviews the postulant and may offer consent.
- 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 bishop and the COM.
- Field education continues, if not previously completed.

Final Recommendation

- COM recommends the candidate for ordination.
- The bishop requests that the Standing Committee consent to the 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, Canon for Vocations 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. Review 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 Canon for Vocations is not expected to attend further meetings but will be available to provide guidance to the CDC as needed.

Guidelines for a Spiritual Autobiography

The Aspirant is 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 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.
- The Aspirant is to create and keep a journal that contains their written reflections and insights after each session. It is also suggested 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 them.
- 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: Session with Aspirant's Spouse or Partner

This session could be used earlier in the process as the CDC discerns appropriate.

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 or bishop's committee, 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 participation of spouses/partners of the nominees is under construction. An update will be shared when this work is complete.]

Following lunch, the nominees are excused. The COM, bishop, vocations missionary, and Standing Committee members meet to discuss the nominees. If recommended by the COM and approved by the bishop 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.

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 Congregational Discernment Committee Report 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

*Recommendation choices -

Nomination for postulancy – presbyterate

Nomination for postulancy – diaconate

Further discernment

Discernment of lay ministry

Appendix C

Second Congregation Discernment Committee Report

Date:

Name of the Nominee:

Name of Congregation:

The findings of the Second Congregation Discernment Committee are the following (short answers of just a few words are appropriate. Please do not exceed 300 words for any answer).

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. Describe this person's leadership style and roles.
6. How do you experience this person's ministry?
7. What do you believe is this person's call to ministry?
8. Do you believe the call is to the ordained ministry, and if yes, to which order?
9. What evidence do you see in this person's life to support your conclusion?
10. What obstacles or weaknesses are present that may prevent this person from serving fully and fruitfully as an ordained minister of the Church?

Recommendation of the SCDC:

Please make one of the following recommendations –

- Assent to nomination for postulancy
- Assent to nomination with reservations (please include reason for reservations)
- Do not assent to nomination (please include reasons not assenting to nomination)

Signed,

Representative of the SCDC

Rector/Priest-in-Charge

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.

PASTORAL DIRECTIVE or LETTER: The bishop may issue a pastoral directive or letter with specific instructions for a person in the ordination process. The actions outlined in such a letter are required and any deviation from the directive is to be discussed with the bishop.

OATH of CONFORMITY: The promise made and signed at the time of ordination promising to be loyal to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of Christ as this Church has received them... see page 538 (deacon) and page 526 (priest).

ORDINAL: The Ordinal in The Episcopal Church refers to the formal rites and prayers used for the ordination and consecration of deacons, priests, and bishops, as found within the Book of Common Prayer. It establishes the form and manner for ordaining and consecrating these orders.

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 CONGREGATIONAL EXPERIENCE: 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.

CANON FOR VOCATIONS: a person employed by the diocese as an assistant to the bishop to oversee the vocations program and ordination process. This canon works 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 reactivate 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 formation 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. The potential Nominee may have another 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 canon for vocations, begins the next stage of discernment.

Appendix G

Second Congregation Experience – A time for self-discovery, exploration, and further discernment

The Commission on Ministry of The Diocese of West Missouri offers the Second Congregational Experience as a structured season of continued discernment for those who have been nominated for ordination and who have completed the Next Steps Retreat.

This experience is designed to broaden the nominee's perspective beyond their sponsoring congregation and to provide space for deeper self-reflection, vocational clarity, and communal discernment. It is not evaluative in a purely academic sense, nor is it a repetition of the first congregational discernment process. Rather, it is an opportunity for prayerful listening—to God, to the Church, and to one another.

Purpose of the Second Congregational Experience

The Second Congregational Experience serves several purposes:

- To immerse the nominee in the life of a congregation other than their own.
- To invite the nominee into new contexts of worship, leadership, and service.
- To provide a fresh community lens through which gifts, growing edges, and vocational call may be discerned.
- To encourage continued spiritual formation and self-awareness.

During this period—minimum of four months—the nominee participates fully in the life of the assigned congregation. This includes regular worship attendance and active engagement in parish life. The nominee may serve in appropriate liturgical roles, attend a vestry meeting and, when appropriate, shadow clergy or a Eucharistic Visitor in pastoral settings.

The Second Congregational Experience is a time of exploration, not performance. It invites authenticity, curiosity, and openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit. The nominee, in consultation with the rector or priest in charge and the SCDC, will create and implement a small project. This could be something related to an identified spiritual gift which the nominee would like to explore further; it could be related to a specific interest or skill; or it could address a specific need within the congregation that the nominee would like to address. Examples of past projects include teaching a class on a specific topic (e.g. Franciscan Spirituality), developing a church service related to a social concern (e.g. Gun Violence Awareness), or planning a special parish wide event (e.g. a Pentecost party). The project provides an opportunity for the nominee to be creative, to explore an area of interest, and to engage with the congregation.

The Role of the Second Congregation Discernment Committee

Each host congregation forms a Second Congregation Discernment Committee (SCDC). While similar in structure to the Congregational Discernment Committee (CDC), the SCDC is not identical in function. Some elements of the original process are streamlined, and session prompts are provided as guides rather than rigid requirements. Not every prompt must be used; flexibility allows the Spirit to lead the conversation.

The SCDC should include a mix of laity and clergy (active or retired), and reflect the maturity and diversity outlined for CDC members. Members of the SCDC are expected to:

- Maintain strict confidentiality.
- Possess a grounded sense of baptismal vocation.
- Nurture their own spiritual lives through prayer and service.
- Engage respectfully and constructively in group process.
- Ask honest and, when necessary, challenging questions.
- Demonstrate awareness of the movements of the Spirit—both consolation and resistance—in themselves and others.
- Approach the nominee with generosity, humility, and care.

24 The SCDC may meet with the nominee's spouse or partner, if applicable, though such meetings are

optional. The nominee's family may continue worshiping in their home congregation during this season.

Preparation and Process

Before beginning formal sessions, members of the SCDC should be provided with:

- The nominee's spiritual autobiography.

In preparation for their work together, the SCDC should:

- Review the relevant sections of the Discernment Handbook.
- Establish a prayerful and welcoming environment for meetings.
- Spend time in prayer before gathering with the nominee.
- Review and, if needed, adapt the Respectful Communication and Effective Group Guidelines.
- Maintain individual journals to record reflections and spiritual impressions throughout the process.

The SCDC should designate a Convener, Recorder, and Chaplain, consistent with CDC practices. It is also recommended that both the nominee and SCDC members familiarize themselves with Listening Hearts (Farnham et al.) as a shared framework for Christian discernment.

A Spirit of Holy Listening

The Second Congregational Experience is grounded in holy listening. It is an intentional space in which the Church listens for evidence of God's call, observes the unfolding of gifts, and gently names areas for growth. It is not about proving worthiness, but about discerning faithfulness.

This portion of the Handbook continues to be shaped by the lived experience of congregations participating in this process. As we learn together, we remain committed to fostering discernment that is prayerful, honest, and rooted in the life of the Church.

May this season be one of grace, clarity, and deepening trust in the One who calls.

Journaling

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.

Journaling is private, though a summary may be shared with the SCDC. Journaling prompts are to be used following the session. The overarching journal prompt should be returned to frequently. What am I hearing about God's call for me in this SCDC experience?

The SCDC Sessions

Four to five sessions are highlighted here. The nominee or the SCDC may suggest a longer timeframe or more sessions during the Second Congregational Experience.

Session I Introductions and Getting Acquainted

Scripture SCDC members select one passage listed below to discuss with nominee.

Mt 16:13-23 "Who do people say that I am?"

Acts 6:1-6 *The selection of the first deacons.*

Acts 13: 2-4 *Paul and Barnabas selected by the Holy Spirit to go and preach.*

Rom 12:1-2 "Do not conform yourself to this age...that you may discern what is the will of God."

1 Cor 2: 7-12 "This God has revealed to us...so that we may understand."

Meditation Based on chosen Scripture

- Conversation** The SCDC members introduce themselves briefly. The nominee introduces themselves in more depth. The nominee's spiritual autobiography is discussed.
- Journal prompt** What are some ways I see God working in my life and moving through others' lives?
- Assignment** Before Session II the SCDC members are asked to take one or both spiritual gifts inventories found in Appendix J of this handbook. The nominee will take both. The nominee's results will be the focus of Session II. The committee takes the inventory only to become familiar with the process. These are pencil and paper inventories which may also have an online option.

Session II Spiritual Gifts Inventory

- Scripture** 1 Corinthians 12 *Variety of gifts*
- Conversation** Discuss the nominee's spiritual inventory results paying attention to how they are using these gifts and/or how they anticipate using them as an ordained person.
- Assignment** Begin or continue planned project. See description, page one.
- Journal prompt** What spiritual gifts do I know I possess?
What has God revealed to me about my spiritual gifts?

Session III: Further Exploration of Gifts for Ministry Using the Inventory Results and Scriptures

- Scripture** Choose from suggestions at the end of this document.
- Meditation** Use questions from the chosen scripture as a guide.
- Conversation** Discuss the nominee's experience of the congregation and this portion of the discernment process. Perhaps including the nominee's role(s) in the congregation, and the project they have undertaken.
- Assignment** Continue working with clergy and congregational leaders on chosen project.
- Journal prompt** How can I use my particular gifts to further the kingdom of God, and in the vocation I am discerning?

Session IV: Look at how we use what we've learned

- Scripture** Choose from suggestions at the end of this document.
- Meditation** Use questions associated with chosen Scripture.
- Conversation** The nominee gives a report of their time in the congregation and the ministry in which they have participated.
- Journal Prompt** Considering past discussion and journal prompts, how do you see yourself participating in the mission of the Church, as its mission is defined in the catechism? BCP p. 855

Session V: Report of the Second Congregational Discernment Committee

Scripture Choose from suggestions at the end of this document.

Mediation Use questions associated with chosen Scripture.

The SCDC meets **without the nominee** to complete the report. It will be shared with the priest. This session may be held immediately following Session IV.

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 on the process, should be provided to all at least one week prior to the meeting.

Once this work has been completed, the SCDC will prepare its report using the nomination template, found as Appendix C of this handbook. The form is signed by the committee chair and the priest (rector, priest-in-charge, or other assisting priest), then scanned and emailed to the bishop and the bishop's assistant. This report will offer the following –

Assent to the prior nomination

Assent with reservations – which will be illuminated for the bishop and COM

Do not assent to the nomination – If the SCDC and/or priest do not give assent to the nomination, a letter outlining the concerns of the SCDC and priest is shared with the nominee. Following the final session, the letter is sent to the bishop who will provide pastoral direction to the nominee.

Final Session

The SCDC, nominee, and the rector/priest-in-charge/presenting priest meet to discuss the nominee's time with the congregation and to review the final report (Appendix C).

Revisions may be made using feedback from anyone involved in the process.

The report is shared with the bishop and the COM.

A final copy should be given to the nominee and the priest.

The congregational discernment process is then concluded.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES AND QUESTIONS FOR USE BY THE SCDC

You will find additional scriptures, by topic, in Appendix I at the back of The Diocese of West Missouri Discernment Handbook.

Jeremiah 20:7-9

You duped me O Lord and I let myself be duped. You were too strong for me, and you triumphed. It seemed like a fire burning in my heart.

1. How do you discern when to speak prophetically and when to remain quiet or listen?
2. How does this scripture help you understand the actuality of suffering in a faith-filled world?

Matthew 4:18-22

Jesus calls his first disciples: "Come after me and I will make you fishers of men."

1. How do you understand evangelism within the Episcopal tradition, and how might you invite others into relationship with Christ in ways that are *authentic* and *respectful*?
2. In what ways do you help people encounter Christ through relationship rather than persuasion?
3. When you felt Jesus' call, did a new purpose emerge that revealed your God-given gifts?

Matthew 9:35-38

Pray for priestly vocations: "The harvest is rich, but the laborers are few; beg the harvest master to send out laborers for his harvest."

1. What kinds of human need evoke the strongest response in you, and how do you interpret that response as part of your vocational discernment and emerging gifts for ministry?

Luke 4:18

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind."

1. In this passage, Jesus names specific groups and needs— the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed. Which of these echoes most deeply with your sense of call?
2. Symbolically, this scripture addresses spiritual, emotional and social needs. Which do you find more challenging, and why?

John 15:9-17

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide."

1. If this passage describes the heart of ordained ministry, what part of it feels most stretching or challenging?
2. Which of your personal gifts most help you love others in tangible ways, especially in difficult or pastoral situations?

Diocese of West Missouri
Commission on Ministry Second Congregational Experience Report

(Please use this format. Report to be completed by the Second Congregational Discernment Committee)

Date _____ Name of Nominee _____
Name of Congregation _____

Purpose of This Report

This report reflects the congregation's experience of the nominee over the past four to six months. The committee is asked to offer thoughtful, prayerful, and specific reflections on how the nominee has lived into their discernment process, demonstrated growth, and engaged in ministry within this community.

Responses may be concise but should provide meaningful insight.

Committee Reflections

1. Understanding of Ministry - How does the nominee articulate and embody their understanding of Christian ministry and their call to possible ordination as a priest or deacon at this stage of discernment?
2. Spiritual Growth - What evidence of spiritual maturity and growth have you observed in the nominee during the past four to six months?
3. Engagement in Ministry - In what ways has the nominee participated in and contributed to the life and ministry of the congregation? What fruit have you seen?
4. Formation and Teachability - How does the nominee receive feedback, engage learning opportunities, and demonstrate openness to formation?
5. Emotional and Relational Health - Based on your experience, how does the nominee demonstrate emotional awareness, healthy boundaries, and relational maturity?
6. Leadership and Collaboration - What leadership qualities have emerged? How does the nominee function within teams and under authority?
7. Sense of Call - How has the nominee's sense of call deepened, clarified, or shifted during this period? How does the congregation experience or affirm that call?
8. Gifts for Ordained Ministry - What gifts for ordained ministry are evident? If applicable, how do these gifts align with a particular order?
9. Areas for Growth - What growing edges, challenges, or concerns should be noted for continued formation?
10. Overall Assessment - Reflecting on this season of shared discernment, how has this experience shaped your understanding of the nominee's readiness to continue in the ordination process?

Recommendation of the SCDC

☐ Assent to Nomination

The committee affirms, without reservation, that the nominee demonstrates gifts, maturity, and a sustained call to ordained ministry. The congregation supports the nominee's continued movement in the diocesan discernment and formation process.

☐ Assent with Reservations

The committee affirms the nominee's call and gifts but identifies specific concerns, growth areas, or conditions that should be addressed during continued formation. These reservations should be clearly articulated below, with constructive guidance offered.

☐ Do Not Assent to Nomination

The committee does not believe the nominee is ready to continue toward ordained ministry at this time. This may reflect concerns regarding readiness, clarity of call, formation needs, or other significant factors. Specific reasons must be clearly stated, with pastoral sensitivity and honesty.

Explanation of Recommendation (required):

Signed:

Chair, Second Congregational Discernment Committee

Rector / Priest-in-Charge

Appendix H

Canonical Responsibilities of a Sponsoring Congregation and Presenting Priest

In nominating a person for postulancy to the priesthood or diaconate, the congregation is making a commitment to support that person in various ways throughout the process. The canons of the Episcopal Church (III.6.2.a / III.8.2.a) require that, in nominating someone for postulancy, the nominating congregation do two specific things:

- “involve itself in the Nominee’s preparation for ordination” and
- “pledge to contribute financially to that preparation”

The specifics of involvement and financial support are decided by the congregation via the vestry and rector/priest-in-charge.

The priest or a representative of the vestry is to communicate with the Nominee regarding the support that will be provided. A vestry representative should inform the Nominee of the specific details of the financial support that has been committed toward their formation and how it will be disbursed.

Congregations/vestries may find it useful to involve the Nominee in determining what forms of financial and/or participatory support would be most helpful, as individual needs will vary. An opportune time for such a conversation is after the vestry has signed the congregational nomination form, when requesting the person's signature to accept the nomination

Costs associated with the ordination process upon nomination are listed below. These costs are shared equally by the Nominee, the congregation, and the diocese.

Psychological Exam -	\$1,175
Oxford Documents -	\$123
Verified First	<u>\$23.50</u>
Total	\$1,318.50

One third of the cost is the responsibility of the congregation – \$439.00

The cost to the nominee is also \$439.00

Prior to Ordination a psychological re-evaluation may be required which costs \$150.

Appendix I

Scripture Selections for Those with Questions

I'm not holy enough: Isa 6:1-9; Lk 5:1-11

I'm afraid I will fail: Ex 14: 10-31; Lk 15

I've made mistakes and I'm a sinner: Jn 21:15-23; Mt 9:9-13; Lk 7:36-50

I'm too young: 1 Sam 3:1-18; 1 Sam 16:1-13; Jer. 1:4-10; Lk 1:26-3

I'm not talented enough: 1 Sam 17:32-51; Lk 1: 26-38

I want to have a family: Gen 12:1-3; Mt 12:46-50; Mk 10:28-30

I want "the good life": Mk 10:17-31; 1 Cor 2:9; Mt 13:44-46; Jn 10:10; Mt 16:24-27

I'm afraid of making a permanent commitment: Ruth 1:15-17; Mt 28:16-20; 1 Cor 12:5-10

I'm afraid of public speaking: Ex 4:10-17; Jer 1:4-10; Jer 1: 9-10

I'm not smart enough: 2 Cor 4:7-18; Ex 4:10-17

I'm afraid of being alone: Ex 3:4-22; Lk 1:28-38; Mt 28:20

I want to be happy: Ps 37:4; Mt 5: 1-12; Jn 10:10; Mk 10:28-31; 1 Cor 2:9

I'm filled with fear: 1Jn 4:18 "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."

Appendix J

Spiritual Gifts Inventories

Nominees in the Second Congregational Experience will take two spiritual gifts inventories. Members of the Second Congregational Discernment Committee will choose one inventory to complete.

Please contact the canon for vocations to access the tools. Vocations@diowestmo.org.



The **Diocese of**
West Missouri