

Finding your Gifts — Laity

A Process for Discerning a Call to Baptismal Ministry within the Parish
Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan

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In Thanksgiving for the work done previously by Commission on Ministry members Lynne Perrin and Janet Klumpp on Lay Ministry

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Introduction to Discernment

Like a seed buried in our hearts by God at our beginning, each of us carries a unique call that grows and develops, dies back and re-emerges through the seasons of our lives

This call is not an occupation but a vocation [from the Latin *vocare* – to call]. It springs forth from our essence or true nature and can be lived out by different occupations or vocations. For example the gift of healing may be lived out as a health professional, in your garden, or as an activist wanting to heal the earth. It is the gift and invitation of our Creator to each one of us to bring into being some distinct aspect of the reign of God here on earth.

During this time of discernment each participant will seek to name their call for ministry now.

Discernment means to distinguish among or between, to sift out, or to recognize the true call of God. Throughout the centuries, Christian traditions have recognized the discernment of spirits. They suggest three places for discernment: [1] the spirit of God; [2] the energy that drives our ego, comes from our wounding and lack of self knowledge, and [3] the spirit of evil.

It is part of the journey to our true self: All parts of the human person are called into play: our bodies, our hearts and minds; our deepest yearnings and our fears; the communities we are a part of. Consider the things that attract you or places to which you have been drawn. As a child what was your favorite thing to do? Who or what did you pretend to be as a child? What were your favorite parts of your school years? What is your favorite Bible story and why? What part of your vocation in your workplace, volunteer work, your church life or home life gives you joy? When do you weep or become angry at the suffering in the world? What are you afraid to undertake, but really long to do?

It is our hope that during this time of deep listening, with a group of fellow seekers, the life of the Spirit within you will guide you to a more profound awareness of your call.

Lay Ministry — What and Where

There are probably as many opportunities for lay ministry as there are people in the world. Opportunities for lay ministry exist everywhere, in your parish, in the diocese, and outside the institutional church. As with calls to ordained ministry, calls to lay ministry may be affirmed by the church or may not. Each of us must be prepared for that.

In the *Book of Common Prayer*, our church's catechism describes the ministry of lay persons as follows:

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. (BCP 855)

Thus, the fundamental ministry of the baptized is that which is expressed outside of the institutional church. These are the places where your life or work take you, places that are ripe with opportunities to represent Christ to the world. When we look around, we see everywhere there are the needs of people to be restored to relationship with God and others, needs waiting to be filled. It is not only in the helping professions that provide ministry to the world around us. In every occupation there will be ministries waiting to be explored.

After we understand our ministry as baptized Christians in the world, we are then able to move into those callings to practice ministry in the church; to, in the words of the catechism, take our place in its life, worship and governance. There is a myriad of opportunities in your parish alone. A boy who was interested in Youth Conventions and writing resolutions is now a deputy to General Convention. A young mother who had studied sociology followed a call to adopting 16 children in addition to her 4 naturally born children. Habitat for Humanity exists because people felt called to help families overcome poverty and homelessness. The Interfaith Hospitality group does the same thing in a different way, hosting homeless families in church buildings. One avenue for exploration for younger people among us is The Episcopal Service Corps (<http://episcopalservicecorps.org/>).

In your congregation you may find ways to assist with worship as an acolyte, reader, Eucharistic minister, choir member, altar guild member, or usher. There could be areas of faith formation and education in which you can lead. Hospitality is an important part of every congregation. Coffee hour hosts, pastoral care visitors, knitters, and those willing to do meal preparation are needed. Many parishes have a variety of groups who meet together regularly. Examine what your parish does for those who are not members. Food banks and meals are the most common. Ask your rector what is available in your congregation. Informed volunteers are needed to act as vestry members, on committees of the vestry, and as delegates to Diocesan Convention.

The Diocese of Western Michigan offers a great choice of opportunities for ministry. There are foreign and domestic mission trips, health ministries, reading camps, and our own diocesan youth and family camps. There are opportunities for ministry in the governance of the church. Parishes select delegates to Diocesan Convention. Members of the Standing Committee and the Diocesan Council are elected. Members of other boards and commissions are appointed. Diocesan Convention elects deputies to the Episcopal Church's General Convention.

NOTE ON DISCERNING A CALL TO ORDAINED MINISTRY

This guide is explicitly focused on the mutual discernment of lay persons to their baptized ministry and is not intended to fulfill the discernment expectations of someone who may have a call to ordained ministry.

At the same time, following your work with this process, it is possible that a member of your group may sense a calling to ordained ministry. If that is the case, then the rector should be contacted so that this separate discernment process could begin, using “Finding Your Gifts” as the guide for that discernment. The Rector and Vestry can determine (with the candidate) the membership in that discernment group.

Establishing a Covenant Community Committee

As Saint Paul teaches, there are many roles to be performed within the Church and the world and many gifts dispersed among us that may equip us to perform those roles. Each of us, if we make the effort to become aware of our abilities and gifts and are intentionally open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will discover that we have been given specific ways through which we can live out our part in the common ministry. Being open to God's call leads to many opportunities that exist within the church that allow for the expression of one's valuable gifts.

When someone in a parish begins to sense a call to ministry, we look to the community to affirm the calling. This document assists lay people who seek to discern their gifts. This process may begin with consultation with a clergy person who may assist in forming groups and navigating the course set out in this document.

The role of the group is to examine members' gifts and skills and assist them in determining where their paths for ministry may lead. Participants in the covenant Group may be offering themselves as vulnerable by revealing some of the very deepest hopes, thoughts, works, gifts and limitations of their lives. Making such an offering takes great courage, and all who do so must be treated with the utmost respect and care.

At the same time, the role of the Covenant Community is to discern how gifts can be best used within the Church and the world. All ministries make use of our gifts. Each individual brings different combinations of gifts, including some which are unique or nearly so. Members of a Community Covenant Group are asked to engage in a journey with each other both to identify those gifts and to consider how they can be used to empower ministry. Helping an individual recognize and embrace a genuine lay ministry, originating from baptismal vows, is a significant gift to a person.

Purpose of a Community Covenant Group

- To help the each other hear more clearly God's call.
- To walk with each other, to support and encourage the questions.
- To be a sounding board for the thoughts and questions being raised.

Recommended Organizational Guidelines

- A. A Community Covenant Group should consist of 5 – 7 members.
- B. Members should be committed to the goals of discernment.
- C. The discernment team will meet a minimum of six times over a period of several months, or until they have collectively reached a spiritual conclusion.
- D. Members of the Community Covenant Group should be comfortable expressing their faith journey verbally.
- E. Meetings will begin and end with prayer and start with spiritual meditation through scripture.

Steps in Discernment for Lay Ministry & Formation of Community Covenant Groups

This process is designed for lay people who wish to examine opportunities to be of Christian service in a spiritual way.

1. An individual or group seeks to spiritually define or explore a call within their community of faith or the rector of a parish may encourage exploration by a group of parishioners.
2. A group of lay people may be called together to form a Community Covenant Group* in a parish or across parish boundaries who would meet together to explore the possibilities for lay ministry.
3. The group forms itself, its style of leadership, its need for conveners and those responsible for other necessities, including regular prayer with the group. The rotating of some leadership is encouraged with the advice of the rector.
4. What follows in the group is then a process by which lay people may examine where their call may lie.
5. Some kind of reporting at the end of the process is encouraged. We suggest a few paragraphs about the usefulness of the process be sent to the parish clergy and the Commission on Ministry.

* Community Covenant Groups are small groups created for the purpose of developing a deeper intimacy with and understanding of God. These groups which meet regularly are formed for the sole purpose of mutual discernment, accountability and prayerful support for living as a disciple in the world. Each meeting is structured using a discerning Bible study model such as Lectio Divina as a catalyst for group discussion. This is not a traditional Bible study model but rather one that focuses on reading a scriptural passages and allowing people to be open to that passage speaking to them from where they are at that moment in their lives. Through a regular commitment to the group, members become more aware of God's grace in their lives and find new ways to serve God and neighbor. This exercise is intended to help people examine how they go through their lives on a typical day and to reflect on whether this is how they want to live through a day. It addresses how they treat themselves and others and how their daily living can be ministry.

Procedures for Community Covenant Groups

The following outline is designed to assist in the discernment process. It consists of 8 meetings that can be scheduled at the preference of the group.

1. Discernment is primarily about listening to the Holy Spirit. We let go of the pretense that we know best for one another and we learn to trust the inner stirrings and wisdom of the Spirit in our own lives and lives of others. You are not looking for the right answers. You are seeking to listen to what the Spirit is saying.
2. A convener conducts meetings, keeps the group on task, and begins and ends on time. A convener may be chosen to conduct all meetings, or that position may be rotated among members.
3. The suggested length of time for each session is 90 minutes.
4. All members are involved in this exploration.
5. It is important that each meeting begins and ends with prayer.
6. You may want to use some of the following Bible passages to inform your journey: Matthew 5: 1-11; 1 Corinthians 12: 4-14; Ephesians 4: 7, 11-16; Romans 12: 1-8; Acts 4:1-13. They may point the way toward discernment of spiritual gifts.
7. It is important to keep track of how the group is working together. There are a few questions that can be discussed at the end of each meeting. Does everyone participate? What is working? Not working? What was the most helpful? Least helpful?
8. This process needs to be confidential. Problems or concerns about the group should be discussed in the group. Things shared by members should not be repeated elsewhere.
9. Questions asked of one another should be honest and open. This means giving no advice, even cloaked as a question. Feedback offered could begin with, "what I hear you saying is..." It is the responsibility of the whole group to work toward this standard
10. Group meetings are best when they are relaxed and gentle. Leave time between questions for reflection and assimilation. Do not be afraid of silence in the group.

A Few Discernment Resources

Mutual Invitation:

In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, we will proceed in the following way:

- The leader or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share.
- If you are not ready to share yet, say "I pass for now" and we will invite you to share later on. If you don't want to say anything at all, simply say "pass" and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.
- We invite you to listen and not to respond to someone's sharing immediately. There will be time to respond and to ask clarifying questions after everyone has had an opportunity to share.

Lectio Divina in a Group:

Step One: Read the passage, encouraging everyone to listen with the "ear of their heart." What phrase, sentence or even one word stands out to you?

Step Two: Read the passage again and reflect on the word of God. Encourage everyone to be aware of what touches them, a thought or reflection that is meaningful. Allow a minute or two of silence.

Step Three: Read the passage again and Respond spontaneously to the word of God. Be aware of any prayer that rises up within that expresses the experience. Allow a minute or two of silence.

Step Four: Read the passage a final time and Rest in the word, reflect or pray and allow God to speak in the silence. Allow three or four minutes of silence.

African Bible Study:

1. One individual reads passages slowly.
2. Each person identifies the word or phrase that catches their attention.
3. Each shares the word or phrase around the group.
4. Another person reads the passage slowly.
5. Each person identifies where this passage touches their life today.
6. Each shares.
7. Passage is read a third time.
8. Each person names or writes: "From what I've heard and shared, what do I believe God wants me to do or be? Is God inviting me to change in any way?"
9. Each shares their answer.
10. Each prays for the person on their right, naming what was shared in other steps.

Further resources specific to sections are shared in the appendices at the end.

Discernment Listening Guidelines

Discernment is distinguishing the voice of God from other voices that speak to us. It is also a prayerful and intentional attempt to get in touch with God's Spirit and to develop a sense of the direction in which the Spirit is leading.

1. What is said in Community Covenant Groups should be kept confidential.
2. Take time to become settled in God's presence.
3. Listen to others with your whole self (feelings, senses, intuition, and rational faculties).
4. Avoid thinking about what you will say while another person is talking.
5. Speak for yourself only using "I" statements, expressing your own ideas, thoughts or feelings.
6. Do not interrupt or challenge another speaker.
7. A pause between speakers can be helpful.
8. Discussion in covenant groups needs to include everyone. If this does not happen naturally, some device to encourage participation of all may be used. A "talking stick" may be used. An object is passed from person to person. Only the holder of the "stick" may speak. The stick is passed from person to person. No one must speak; the option of passing exists.

These are guidelines and not hard and fast rules. They are suggested as a way to make Covenant Groups safe for all participants.

*Adapted from *Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations*, Suzanne G. Farnham, Stephanie A. Hull, R. Taylor McLean, Morehouse Publishing, 1996, pp. 55-56*

(You may find that you will need two meetings to get through a session. It is important to take your time and not hurry through this process. Rushing the process is not discernment!)

Suggestions for SESSION ONE

The Convener for the meeting begins with prayer. The task of prayer should rotate among members of the covenant group. You may want to begin with some centering/silent time to enable everyone to make the transition from where they have been up to that moment and to become present to the task at hand. (See prayers in BCP pages 832-833 and/or the following prayer.)

- ***Thomas Merton Prayer***

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen

- Each meeting begins with check-in. Each person makes a short statement about their life at the time. This gives each person a chance to speak in an unchallenged way.
- Introduce yourselves. Share some things about your life, your work, things that are important to you, your relationship with the church, etc. Please be sure to share why you are a member of this Community Covenant Group and how it feels.
- Go through the Procedures for Community Covenant Groups so everyone understands the “ground-rules” for your time together. (You may want to do that at each meeting as a reminder.) Spend some time clarifying/discussing these procedures so they become part of the group’s thinking and acting.)
- Discuss other things the group thinks important: meeting times, necessary absences, confidentiality, how to tell others what you are doing without “feeling secretive” to parishioners and still maintain confidentiality. In general, what do we need to know about each other and about the task in order to work together?
- Discuss what your sense is of discernment.
- Ask each member to prepare a faith pilgrimage statement, a brief statement made by each individual regarding his/her life in relationship with God. Identify and describe some of the stepping stones you have taken in your faith journey. One or two people could share at each meeting. See Appendix A for resources to help you in this work.
- Take a couple of minutes to review how your time together was. Ask each person what was the most helpful and what was the least helpful about the way you worked together.
- Make assignments for next time: Who will lead prayers, be convener, bring snacks, or whatever is decided to include. The group will need Books of Common Prayer next week.

End with prayer.

Questions for Reflection for all the members of the group before next meeting: Without consulting other sources, write down your responses to the following questions:

1. What is ministry?
2. What opportunities for ministry exist in your community?
3. What opportunities for ministry exist in your parish?
4. What is the duty of all Christians?
5. What gifts and skills do you have to offer for ministry?

Suggestions for SESSION TWO

Begin the meeting with a form of prayer.

- Check in for a few minutes about how people are doing.
- Remind people of the listening guidelines for your time together.
- Reading (concluded with a time of quiet reflection)

Ephesians 4:4-13

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

- Ask one group member to share with the group his/her spiritual autobiography. How s/he got to this particular place in life. (Listen quietly and do not interrupt the sharing. You are learning about the member's life and it is important to honor that person's journey. If you would like clarification about something, at the end of the presentation you might ask, "Could you tell me more about . . .?" Offering feedback is helpful and appropriate.
- Spend some time as a group discussing the reflection questions given last week. How does the group view the ministry of the whole Body of Christ?
- Read those portions of the Catechism "Our duty as Christians" and "Concerning Ministry", found in The Book of Common Prayer, pp. 847,848 and 854-6.
- Ask for one or two volunteers to share some aspect of his/her faith journey at the next meeting.
- Take a couple of minutes to review how your time together was. Ask each person what was the most helpful and what was the least helpful about the way you worked together.
- Make assignments for next time: Who will lead prayers, be convener, bring snacks, or whatever is decided to include.

End with prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION for next meeting

Prior to the next meeting, the group members should interview a person with a distinct lay ministry either in the world or in the church.

Suggested questions are listed below. At the next meeting members will reflect on what they learned. Answers will not be shared with the group but rather the member's reflections on what was learned. It would be good to explain how the interviews are being used when making arrangements for the interviews. The time needed will range from one to two hours.

Interview Questions:

1. How did you experience your call to the ministry(ies) you have?
2. Describe your ministry as you see it?
3. How did you prepare for the ministry you do? Were you mentored in any way?
4. Describe the process of your discernment. What helped clarify your call?
5. How do you manage the expectations, demands, and/or pressures?
6. How do you renew yourself emotionally, physically, and spiritually?
7. What gifts do you receive in this ministry? What challenges?
8. How does your practice of Christian faith and/or the congregation's life help or hinder the processes of your renewal? Do you feel pressure to have a certain Christian view?

Suggestions for SESSION THREE

Begin the meeting with a form of prayer.

- Check in for a few minutes about how people are doing.
- Remind people of the listening guidelines for your time together.
- Ask those that volunteered to share an aspect of their faith journey.
- Reading (concluded with the African Bible study method of reflection)

Mark 6:30–37a

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them.

As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.' But he answered them, 'You give them something to eat.'

- Group members reflect on the interviews they conducted. What moved them about the stories they heard? What feelings arose from the interviews? This might best be done one person at a time, with others listening and then supplying feedback "I heard you say..." or "What stood out for me in what you said..."
- Ask one group member to share with the group his/her spiritual autobiography. How s/he got to this particular place in life. (Listen quietly and do not interrupt the sharing. You are learning about the member's life and it is important to honor that person's journey. If you would like clarification about something, you might ask, "could you tell me more about . . .?" at the end of the presentation. Offering feedback is helpful and appropriate.
- Take a couple of minutes to review how your time together was. Ask each person what was the most helpful and what was the least helpful about the way you worked together.
- Make assignments for next time: Who will lead prayers, be convener, bring snacks, or whatever is decided to include.

End with prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION for next meeting

1. Who is God for you right now?
2. How do you relate to God?
3. How has this changed over time?
4. How is Jesus a part of your life?

Suggestions for SESSION FOUR

Begin the meeting with a form of prayer.

- Check in for a few minutes about how people are doing.
- Remind people of the listening guidelines for your time together.
- Ask those that volunteered to share an aspect of their faith journey.
- Reading (concluded with a time of quiet reflection)
Matthew 16: 13-16
Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'
- Members will begin the conversation by sharing about four aspects of their relationship with God as assigned at the end of the last meeting. Each question will be answered by all group members before going to the next question.
- After each question there is a period of silence and reflection. The group members share their reflections on the process by addressing what was meaningful for them and then supplying feedback "I heard you say..." or "What stood out for me in what you said..."
- After a period of silence and reflection, group members then discuss the intersection of their faith and daily life. Share how, specifically, you take care of yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Share how you are still questioning, searching and probing the mysteries of the faith. Share how you understand stewardship; personal financial responsibility; tithing; personal stewardship of time and leisure. One member speaks to all the questions and the group supplies feedback as described above. This is not a time for judging but for clarification.
- Ask for one or two volunteers to be ready to share some aspect of his/her faith journey at the next meeting.
- Take a couple of minutes to review how your time together was. Ask each person what was the most helpful and what was the least helpful about the way you worked together.
- Make assignments for next time: Who will lead prayers, be convener, bring snacks, or whatever is decided to include.

End with prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION for next meeting

1. Make a list of your strengths and weaknesses.
2. Make a list of your “growing edges”.
3. What do you find difficult in your relationships with others?
4. How do you react to being in a position of power and authority?

Suggestions for SESSION FIVE

Begin the meeting with a form of prayer.

- Check in for a few minutes about how people are doing.
- Remind people of the listening guidelines for your time together.
- Ask those that volunteered to share an aspect of their faith journey.
- Reading: Read the psalm aloud. Each person may choose one verse to reflect upon silently.

Psalm 139

1 Lord you have searched me out and know me;
you know my sitting down and my rising up; you know my thoughts from afar.

2 You trace my journeys and my resting places
and are acquainted with all my ways.

3 Indeed there is not a word on my lips,
but you, O Lord, know it all together.

4 You press upon me behind and before
and lay your hand upon me.

5 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I can not attain to it.

6 Where can I go then from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?

7 If I climb up to heaven, you are there;
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.

8 If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

9 Even there your hand will lead me
and your right hand hold me fast.

10 If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me,
and the light around me turn to night,"

11 Darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day;
darkness and light to you are both alike.

- Group members are invited to share what has emerged as they reflected on each of the questions for reflection from the last session. Each person speaks to each area before moving on to another area.
- Ask for one or two volunteers to be ready to share some aspect of his/her faith journey at the next meeting. The next meeting is the last one in which faith journeys are shared.
- Take a couple of minutes to review how your time together was. Ask each person what was the most helpful and what was the least helpful about the way you worked together.
- Make assignments for next time: Who will lead prayers, be convener, bring snacks, or whatever is decided to include. The group will need Books of Common Prayer next week.

End with prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION for next meeting

Reflect on these two statements:

- In the Baptismal Covenant we promise “to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves” and “to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.”
 - Frederick Buechner, a well-loved contemporary theologian, says this: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”
1. Consider your baptismal promises and Buechner’s statement in relationship to your own desire to serve.
 2. What ministry gives you joy? What places of need draw you.
 3. Who is someone you admire for their service in the world and why? Perhaps someone from history: ex. Mother Theresa or Martin Luther King, a contemporary group or person – Doctors Without Borders, or someone you know.
 4. Where does the world’s need call to you? What are you passionate about? The environment, children, hunger, the elderly, racism, schools, political action, etc. What touches your heart, makes you angry or brings tears to your eyes?
 5. Consider your present life outside of the church: home, workplace, volunteer work, or wider community. Is there a need you might address? Consider how this is, or can be, a place of ministry for you. Read the story of one woman’s ministry in her workplace (see Appendix B)

Suggestions for SESSION SIX

Begin the meeting with a form of prayer.

- Check in for a few minutes about how people are doing.
- Remind people of the listening guidelines for your time together.
- Ask those that volunteered to share an aspect of their faith journey.
- Reading (concluded with a time of quiet reflection)
Matthew 25:37–40
“Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?”
And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”
- The group shares their responses to homework of the last session and considering their own callings to ministry. Each person offers their insights and reflections. Care should be taken that each person has time to make their response. Others may respond. For example: “What stood out for me was...” or “I wonder about...”
- Take a couple of minutes to review how your time together was. Ask each person what was the most helpful and what was the least helpful about the way you worked together.
- Make assignments for Session 8: Who will lead prayers, be convener, bring snacks, or whatever is decided to include. This will be your last time together. You may want to plan a celebration.

End with prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION for next meeting
Session 7 is a time of private reflection on the last six sessions in preparation for Session 8. There will be no meeting. See Suggestions for Session 7 on the following page.

Suggestions for SESSION SEVEN

Suggestions for Preparing For Your Last Group Meeting

- This session happens individually. Rather than the regular meeting, each member of the group is invited to use that time to prayerfully recollect and reflect on the time the group has been meeting.
- Find a comfortable and quiet place where you won't be interrupted. Spend some time quietly being present to God. Ask God to guide your recollections and reflections.
- Read the notes recorded from every session and spend some time reflecting on that session and its revelations in the greater light of the sessions taken as a whole. Jot down any insights, images, thoughts, concerns, etc. that arise as you remember and reflect on each session in turn. If a phrase or a passage of scripture comes to mind, find it in your Bible and spend some time asking how the passage might be related to the discernment work at hand. At all times, seek to do this work with an attitude of complete openness to God's possibilities.
- Once you have finished your work of recollection and reflection, stop for a moment and pay attention to your inner state. You may want to set the work aside for a time before continuing your preparation work. When you are ready, turn to the questions that will guide you through the process of writing a Discernment Narrative. Write a one-page summary of your experience through this time of discernment.
- Some questions that might help you:
 1. What things that you know about yourself have been affirmed?
 2. What insights have you discovered about yourself?
 3. About your relationship with God?
 4. About your relationship with the church?
 5. Do you have a sense of call to a particular ministry either continuing or new?
 6. Choose a symbol [an object that you might bring, an image or song] for your sense of call that you can share at the next meeting
- When you have completed your Discernment Narrative, set your work aside. Think of each person in the group and give thanks for their gifts to you and to the group.

Suggestions for SESSION EIGHT

As this is your last session together the group may want to plan a celebration of some sort, perhaps a meal together. But begin with the following

Begin the meeting with a form of prayer.

- Check in for a few minutes about how people are doing.
- Remind people of the listening guidelines for your time together.
- Reading (in the form of Lectio Divina)

John 15:12-17

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because a servant does not know what the master is doing; but I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appoint you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you will love one another.

- Each person shares something from their discernment narrative. Others may respond.
- The group considers the time they have spent together reflecting on:
 1. The gifts they have received.
 2. The struggles they have encountered individually and as a group.
 3. What they have learned.

Concluding Prayer: The Lord's Prayer, pausing to reflect after each line.

Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your Name,
 your kingdom come,
 your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
Forgives us our sins
 as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial'
 and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
 now and forever. Amen

CELEBRATE!

Appendix A – Reflecting on Your Spiritual Journey

As you begin this program for discernment of your gifts you might find it helpful to reflect on your spiritual journey so far. At each of the meetings of the group one or two people will be asked to share their spiritual journey story. The format offered is called the “Unfolding Tapestry of My Life.” Read this story.

An Image of Journey

The Old Navaho Woman sits silently in front of her loom weaving as generations before her have done. Outside her hogan she works with the upright loom swiftly forming the natural yarns into a sacred rug. Her rug seemingly forms by itself. She has done this for so many years that habit, not thought, guides her hands. The familiar action quiets her mind allowing images to form within her. The images carry her thoughts into a daydream.

“Our lives are like this rug. We are formed by the Cosmic Woman who makes this world on her loom. Each of us comes into being as she weaves us into the Earth Tapestry. The various colors and textures interrelate to tell a story. Each has a place. Each contributes to the whole. Nothing is unintended. All have purpose.”

The old woman wakes from her daydream. She discovered that the Cosmic Woman’s Earth Rug story has been woven into her rug. Her rug now tells of her people and their history. Her rug tells also her own story for she knows now that her story is part of greater history too.

[Source unknown]

The process suggested begins with the division of your life into five or ten year segments. For each time segment you are asked to identify certain relevant information:

- The place you were [geographic location and socio-economic situation]
- Key relationships [who, nature of relationship, how they influenced you]
- Ways time has been spent [study, service, work, & play activities]
- Milestone events in your life [critical incidents, turning points]
- Religious atmosphere [denomination, active/inactive, significant to you]
- Events and conditions in the world [your journey exists within a life context]
- Your key focus [priorities, what was important to you]
- Moment closest to God [the experience and circumstance, where you were, alone or with others, etc.]

In order to see the threads of the tapestry of your life you may want to organize your response on the form attached or you may want to work in a different way. This is for your use only and doesn’t need to be elaborate. When you have completed the work, you are asked to weave together the threads into a few pages that you can use when it is your turn to share. Ask yourself:

- Are there any patterns that have been repeated throughout your life? What are they?
- Are there some things that haven’t changed – some continuities in your life?
- Have any milestone events changed your sense of meaning or purpose?
- What people have been important to you at what times?
- Can you see a pattern that has led you to this moment in your life?

The Unfolding Tapestry of My Life – Possible Form for Exploration

Years since Birth (by decade or other form of measurement)				
Place (socio- economic or geographic)				
Key relationships				
Ways time has been spent				
Milestone events in my life				
Events or conditions in the world				
My key focus				
Moment Closest to God				

Appendix B – A Story of ministry in the workplace

Supplement for homework for session 6

Carol worked in the insurance department of a large metropolitan hospital. She learned that in six months the ownership of the hospital would be transferred to a large for-profit organization and that many administrative jobs would be terminated including hers.

The atmosphere in the hospital became extremely tense, anxious, and angry as other cuts in staff in the medical departments were learned. It became so bad in her department that the staff was ordered not to talk to each other about anything but business. Even at meals in the cafeteria the talk was angry and resentful.

Carol and a friend decided to eat by themselves. They agreed not to talk about the merger but rather to tell each other the good things that were happening in their lives or that they noticed in the hospital. Soon a couple of others asked to join them. Eventually they had to get a larger table and word spread until there were three large tables that someone named the good news tables.

As in most hospital cafeterias people came and went from the tables so the news spread. And the atmosphere of support grew. Job networking started. Carol eventually found a job from a tip someone gave her and she left before the merger took place but she continued to meet with some of her friends for many years because of the bonds built during their time at the good news tables.

Form for Feedback on Discernment Guide

To the Community Covenant Group: please give us your feedback!

This discernment guide is a new piece designed to help parishes through the intense process of helping fellow Christians more clearly understand the call that God is making to them. Your comments on this guide will help us make it better and improve future outcomes.

Your Name _____ Parish _____ Date _____

1. Did this piece help you accomplish what your committee had set out to do?

2. Which elements of this piece were most useful?

3. What elements of this piece were least useful?

4. What do you think should be added or changed?

5. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?

When completed please mail to: Commission on Ministry

c/o Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan
535 S. Burdick St., Suite 1
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Thanks!

Resources Used in Preparation of this Guide

Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community by Suzanne Farnham
ISBN 13:978081922446

Alive and Loose in the Ordinary by Martha Sterne
ISBN 13:9780891221551

Call to Commitment by Elizabeth O'Connor
ISBN 13:9780060663292

Discerning Life Transitions: Listening Together in Spiritual Direction by Dwight H Judy
ISBN 13:9780819224071

Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church by Danny E Morris and Charles M. Olsen
ISBN 13:978156699425

Becoming Who I Am: Reflections on Wholeness and Embracing Our Divine Stories by Beth-Sarah Wright
ISBN 13:9780819231766

Spiritual Heroes Small Group Discussions on Being American by Public Media
ISBN 13:9781606740767

Healing the Purposes of Your Life by Dennis Lynn, Sheila F. Lynn, & Matthew Lynn
ISBN 13:9780809138531

Hungry Souls Holy Companions by Patricia Hendricks
ISBN 13:9780819221964

The Inner Journey: Views from the Christian Tradition edited by Lorraine Kisly
ISBN 13:9781596750081

Tickle Your Soul: The Playful Adult by Sue Baldwin
ISBN 13:9780965443920

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