



# *The* EPISCOPAL DIOCESE *of* **WESTERN MICHIGAN**

## **STEPS IN LOCAL DISCERNMENT FOR ORDINATION OR LAY MINISTRY**

1. The aspirant desires to spiritually explore a call within their community of faith.
2. The aspirant requests a meeting with the person canonically in charge of their parish for recommendation to begin discernment process.
3. The person canonically in charge notifies the chair of the Commission on Ministry (COM) who will assign a liaison from the COM to serve as a resource for the process.
4. The person canonically in charge and the aspirant should select members of the team with the assistance of the COM liaison,
5. The person canonically in charge names a convener who in turn outlines the process, appoints a recorder, and, in coordination with the committee, sets the meeting schedule.
6. Local discernment: This initial phase of discernment should not be rushed (usually about one year in length). The individual, with the assistance of the LDC, looks closely at their life calling, reflecting thoughtfully and prayerfully while experiencing the input and support of the LDC.
7. At the end of the discernment process, the LDC makes a determination on the aspirant's call completing a "Statement of Recommendation" (Form 1) and a discernment narrative detailing the LDC's findings.
8. In the case of a recommendation for lay ministry, the "Statement of Recommendation" and a copy of the discernment narrative shall be sent to the person canonically in charge and the COM.
9. In the case of a recommendation for ordination the following shall be sent to the Bishop:
  - a. "Statement of Recommendation" (Form 1).
  - b. A discernment narrative detailing the LDC's findings.
  - c. Certificate of Vestry Support, signed by two thirds of the vestry (Form 2).
  - d. A letter of recommendation from the person canonically in charge.
10. Copies of all documents should be kept on file at the church and by the aspirant.

For more specific information on the steps of the ordination process for diaconal ministry, please see **“A Guide to the Diaconal Ordination Process and its Requirements in the Diocese of Western Michigan”** which may be found at [edwm.org/resources/discernment](http://edwm.org/resources/discernment).

For more specific information on the steps of the ordination process for priestly ministry, please see **“A Guide to the Priestly Ordination Process and its Requirements in the Diocese of Western Michigan”** which may be found at [edwm.org/resources/discernment](http://edwm.org/resources/discernment).

## **Establishing a Local Discernment Committee (LDC)**

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 does not always lead to ordination; many opportunities exist within the church that allow for the expression of one's valuable gifts. Some require licensing by the diocese such as Eucharistic Ministers, Eucharistic Visitors and Worship Leaders. Other ministries do not require official sanctioning or ordination.

When an active member in a parish begins to sense that she or he is called to ministry, we look to the community - the congregation - to affirm the calling. Anyone who wishes to discern a call must first be an active member of a parish or ministry community and must be sponsored for ordination by the priest, recommended by the Local Discernment and supported by the vestry of that parish or community.

When a faithful church member approaches their priest and the members of a Local Discernment Committee, that person is offering to make him or herself vulnerable by inviting others to consider some of the very deepest hopes, thoughts, works, gifts and limitations of their life. Making such an offering takes great courage, and the person who does so must be treated with the utmost respect and care.

The role of the LDC is to test how a particular aspirant's gifts can be best used within the Church. The LDC is NOT a support group or an advocacy group lobbying for the Aspirant. The committee is rather a group interested, not only in the Aspirant, but also in the life and ministry of the Episcopal Church.

All ministries make use of our gifts. Ordained ministry requires certain specific gifts and abilities, including insight, openness, patience, compassion, strength to endure in difficult times, teaching, prophecy, leadership, guiding others to awareness of the presence of God in their lives, and skill in developing a congregation. Each individual brings different combinations of gifts, including some which are unique. Members of the LDC are asked to engage in a journey with the aspirant to both identify those gifts and consider how they can be used to empower the Church.

The end result of this journey may be either an affirmation of the call to ordained ministry or to the continuation of the call to lay ministry. Helping an individual recognize and embrace a genuine lay ministry, originating from baptismal vows, is of equal or greater importance than guiding a person to ordination.

## **Purpose of a Local Discernment Committee (LDC)**

- To help the aspirant hear more clearly God's call and how this call is played out in the Aspirant's spiritual journey.
- To walk with the Aspirant; to support and encourage the questions.
- To be a sounding board for the thoughts and questions being raised.
- To know the person, their background, their present ministry, their understanding of a call and where they feels led by this call.

## **Guidelines for Forming a Local Discernment Committee (LDC)**

- The person canonically in charge and the aspirant should select members of the LDC with the assistance of the COM liaison. Neither the person canonically in charge nor the COM liaison shall serve on the parish discernment team.
- The LDC should consist of 5-7 members, including the aspirant, who are committed to the goals of the discernment.
- The LDC should meet a minimum of seven times over a period of six months or more until they have collectively reached a spiritual conclusion.
- The LCD is expected to use "Finding your Gifts," which follows, as guidance for the discernment process.

## **Suggested Composition of the Local Discernment Committee (LDC)**

The COM liaison will assist with including some of the following in the LDC:

- Someone from outside the congregation, another denomination or faith.
- Someone from another Episcopal Church.
- Someone who knows the aspirant from other areas of their lives.
- Someone who represents lay leadership within the congregation (not Vestry).
- Clergy person other than the person canonically in charge.
- Someone who doesn't know the aspirant well.
- A clergy person from another denomination.

It is important that LDC members are:

- Persons of integrity who can keep confidentiality.
- Persons who can articulate their own vocation and ministry in the work of the Church.
- Persons who have the gifts of frankness and courage.
- Persons who will challenge the aspirant.
- Persons open to the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives, to prayer and humility
- Persons who have the welfare of the larger Church in mind.