



Finding Your Gifts

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

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These forms may also be obtained through the edwm.org website under Resources: Discernment

Steps in Parish Discernment for Ordination or Lay Ministry

1. Aspirant desires to spiritually explore a call within their community of faith.
2. Aspirant requests a meeting with the person canonically in charge of their parish to obtain recommendation to begin discernment process.
3. If the aspirant may be seeking ordination, the person canonically in charge ensures that the aspirant submits the completed Ordination Information Form (Appendix, Form 3) to the Commission on Ministry (COM). The COM will assign a liaison to serve as a resource for the aspirant and the Local Discernment Committee (LDC).
4. Members of the LDC shall be selected by the person canonically in charge and the aspirant 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 6–12 months). The aspirant, 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" (Appendix, Form 1) and a discernment narrative detailing the LDC's findings.
8. In the case of a recommendation for ordination the following shall be sent to the Bishop:
 - a. Statement of Recommendation (Appendix, Form 1)
 - b. A discernment narrative detailing the LDC's findings.
 - c. Certificate of Vestry Support, signed by two thirds of the vestry (Appendix, Form 2)
 - d. A letter of recommendation from the person canonically in charge.
9. Copies of all documents should be dated and be kept on file at the church and by the aspirant.

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 they are 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 person canonically in charge of the parish, recommended by the LDC and supported by the vestry of that parish or community.

When a faithful church member approaches the person canonically in charge and the members of a LDC, that person is offering to make themselves vulnerable by inviting others to consider some of the very deepest hopes, thoughts, works, gifts and limitations of their lives. 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 LDC 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 other 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)

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

Guidelines for Forming a Local Discernment Committee (LDC)

1. Members of the team should be selected collectively by the person canonically in charge and the aspirant with the assistance of the COM liaison.
2. Neither the person canonically in charge nor the COM liaison shall serve on the LDC.
3. The LDC should consist of 5 – 7 members, including the aspirant, who are committed to the goals of the discernment.
4. 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.
5. The LDC is expected to use "Finding Your Gifts" which follows as guidance for the discernment process.

Suggested Composition of the Local Discernment Committee (LDC)

The following are suggestions for the LDC. The COM liaison will assist in compiling the LDC membership.

1. Someone from outside the congregation, from another denomination or faith.
2. Someone from another Episcopal Church.
3. Someone who represents lay leadership within the congregation (not Vestry).
4. A clergy person other than the person canonically in charge.
5. Someone who does not know the applicant well.
6. A clergy person from another denomination.
7. Others as deemed appropriate by the LDC in consultation with the COM liaison.

It is important that LDC members be:

1. Persons of integrity who can keep confidentiality.
2. Persons who can articulate their own vocation and ministry in the context of the work of the Church.
3. Persons who have the gifts of frankness and courage.
4. Persons who will challenge the aspirant.
5. Persons who are open to God's movement in their lives, to prayer, humility, and the working of the Holy Spirit.
6. Persons who have the welfare of the larger Church in mind.

Procedures for the Local Discernment Committee (LDC)

1. The discernment process, using *Finding Your Gifts*, consists of six to eight sessions over a period of at least six months. The suggested amount of time for each session is 90 minutes and it may take more than one meeting to complete a session.
2. The person canonically in charge appoints a convener. The convener is responsible for conducting all meetings. This includes establishing meeting schedules, setting agendas, appointing a recording clerk for each session, maintaining updated LDC contact information, and consulting with the COM liaison as necessary. The convener is responsible for appointing a person to conduct meetings in his/her absence. The aspirant shall not act as convener or temporary convener.
3. The recording clerk keeps a record of each session and provides them to the LDC for use when writing the discernment narrative. Alternatively, each member may want to keep his/her own notes.
4. All LDC members are to be actively involved in the meetings.
5. The LDC shall open and close meetings with prayer. The LDC may share this role. Suggested Bible passages applicable to the discernment of gifts include:
 - a. Matthew 5: 1-11
 - b. 1 Corinthians 12: 1, 4-14
 - c. Ephesians 4: 7, 11-16
 - d. Romans 12: 1-8
 - e. Acts 4: 1-13
6. LDC members may use the Questions for Each Committee Member Regarding the Aspirant (p. 23) as a guideline for noting thoughts throughout the LDC sessions for future inclusion in the Discernment Narrative.
7. Close each session with an LDC check-in process to evaluate progress and adjust future session plans.
8. The LDC and the aspirant relationship provides an opportunity for mutual discernment.

9. Confidentiality MUST be maintained. LDC members shall limit all discussions concerning the process to their meetings. Problems and concerns should be discussed as a group. No “parking lot” meetings.
10. If necessary, the COM liaison may be consulted.
11. Meetings are a time for open and honest questions. Personal agendas, remembrances, stories, advice, and so on, are not appropriate.
12. Questions should be brief and to the point. The aspirant shall not be subjected to inquisition or cross-examination.
13. LDC members trust that their intuitive questions, while not always in a traditional or strictly information seeking form, will be respected by the LDC.
14. It is the responsibility of the Convener to remind the LDC of the ground rules for conduct during meetings.
15. All questions may not necessarily be answered at the time of asking. The aspirant shall not be pressured to answer without allowing time for thought. All questions may not be answered in one meeting.
16. LDC time together shall be relaxed. Trust that silence is as important as talk. Time for reflection and assimilation is necessary for listening to the Spirit. The LDC and aspirant seek to hear what the Spirit is revealing through the discernment process.

Discernment Listening Guidelines

“Discernment means distinguishing the voice of God from other voices that speak to us.”

“Discernment is a prayerful, informed, and intentional attempt to sort through these other voices in order to hear God’s Spirit at work and to develop a sense of the direction in which the Spirit is leading.”

“Discernment is not about persuasion. It is about listening with one’s heart for the guidance of the Spirit.”

1. Take time to become settled in God’s presence.
2. Listen to others with your entire self: senses, feeling, intuition, and rational faculties.
3. Speak for yourself only. Express your own thoughts and feelings through your own experience. Avoid being hypothetical.
4. Do not challenge what others say.
5. Do not interrupt.
6. Do not formulate what you want to say while someone else is speaking.
7. Pause between speakers to absorb what has been said.
8. Listen to the group as a whole. Body language and facial expressions may say as much as the spoken word. Allow others opportunities to speak.

These are GUIDELINES. Discernment requires the safest possible environment for people to freely explore their deepest thoughts and feelings without being challenged.

Suggestions for SESSION ONE.

- The Convener or LDC member opens the meeting with prayer. Centering/silent time may help everyone become present to the meeting and the purpose. Refer to prayers in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), pages 832-833 and/or the following prayer.

Thomas Merton Prayer.

My Lord, 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.

- LDC introductions. Members share some things about their lives, work, things that are important to them, their relationship with the church, and why they are serving on this LDC and how it feels to them.
- The Convener reviews Procedures for Parish Discernment Committee (p. 6) to establish ground rules. Allow time for clarification and/or discussion.
- Convener reviews meeting times, procedures for necessary absences, confidentiality. Allow time for clarification and/or discussion around the LDC communicating what they are doing within the ground rules and what LDC needs to know about each other and the task to work effectively together.
- LDC members discuss what their sense of discernment is. The LDC is only the first of many discernment groups the aspirant will face.
- Ask each LDC member, including the Convener, to prepare a spiritual autobiography; a statement regarding their life in relationship with God; a description of some of the stepping stones in their faith journey. Assign one or two LDC members to share their story at each meeting.

Questions for Reflection before the next meeting.

All LDC members, without consulting other sources, write down responses to the following:

1. What is ordination?
 2. What is the ministry of a priest or presbyter?
 3. What is the ministry of a deacon?
 4. What is the duty of all Christians?
 5. What gifts and skills do you have to offer in ministry?
- Before closing the meeting, conduct an LDC check-in. Review the meeting, the process, what worked or not, what to consider for the next meeting. The Recorder should note the comments for the Convener's use in the next meeting.
 - Convener or LDC member closes in prayer.

Suggestions for SESSION TWO.

- The Convener or LDC member opens the meeting with prayer. Centering/silent time may help everyone become present to the meeting and the purpose.
- Convener allows time for LDC members to check-in with questions or concerns from previous meeting.
- Convener reminds members of Discernment Listening Guidelines. (p. 8)
- Aspirant shares their spiritual autobiography; how they arrived at this particular place in their lives.
--LDC members listen and do not interrupt this opportunity to learn about the aspirant and honor that person's journey. Further clarification may be sought with open-ended questions; e.g. "Could you tell me more about....?"

READING:

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 the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Ephesians 4: 11-13

- Read those portions of the Catechism concerning ministry and ordination.
Book of Common Prayer, pp. 856, 860.
--What gifts and skills are necessary for the kind of ministry a deacon is called to live?
--What gifts and skills are necessary for the kind of ministry a priest is called to live?
--How is the aspirant already, or not, exercising the ministry of a deacon or Priest?

ASPIRANT ASSIGNMENT FOR REFLECTION PRIOR TO NEXT MEETING.

- Prior to the group's next meeting the aspirant should interview a deacon and a priest, neither of whom should serve in the aspirant's congregation. The aspirant should explain how the interviews will be used when making interview appointments and then be prepared to reflect to the LDC what was learned.

Use the following interview questions:

1. How did you experience your call to ordained ministry and how has your understanding and experience of that call changed, grown, or focused over time?
2. Describe the ministry of a deacon as you understand it?
3. Describe the ministry of a priest as you understand it?
4. Describe the process of vocational discernment that led to your ordination. What during that process helped clarify for you and the Church that your call to ordained ministry was that of the diaconate or the priesthood?
5. Tell me about a few of your experiences of greatest learning and growth while you were preparing for ordination?
6. Tell me about a few of your experiences of greatest learning and growth since you were ordained?
7. What is the most difficult aspect of ordained ministry for you? For your household?
8. What has been the cost of ordination for you and your household? What have you and your household sacrificed in order to respond to this vocational call?

LDC QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION PRIOR TO NEXT MEETING.

- One or two volunteers share their spiritual autobiography.
- Before closing the meeting, conduct an LDC check-in. Review the meeting, the process, what worked or not, what to consider for the next meeting. The Recorder should note the comments for the Convener's use in the next meeting.

- Convener or LDC member closes in prayer.

Suggestions for SESSION THREE.

- The Convener or LDC member opens the meeting with prayer. Centering/silent time may help everyone become present to the meeting and the purpose.
- Convener allows time for LDC members to check-in with questions or concerns from previous meeting.
- Convener reminds members of Discernment Listening Guidelines. (p. 8)

READINGS:

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way. But not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

II Corinthians 4: 1, 5-12

- Aspirant reflects (not reports) on their interview. What was stirred up as they listened and remembered the interview?
--LDC listen only. Pause for silent reflection.
- LDC members share their own reflections on what the Aspirant has said.
--Open ended questions, i.e. "What stood out for me in what you said was...?"

- Explore what the economic, personal and emotional impact would be for the aspirant and their household should they be ordained.
- Aspirant considers the following:
 - What will be the effect of ordination on their household's income during training and preparation for ordination, during working life, and after retirement?
 - What will be the stresses caused by ordination and the public nature of the role on yourself and on your household?
 - What will be the effects, positive and/or negative, caused by the aspirant's age for ordination.

LDC QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION PRIOR TO NEXT MEETING.

- One or two volunteers share some aspect of their faith journey.
- In closing, spend some time reflecting back to the applicant what stood out for you in the course of your time together. Then take a couple of minutes to review how your time together was. Ask each person what was good and what was not so good about how the group worked. Ask what helped and what hindered, what to continue doing, what to delete and what to add to how you work together. (Recorder should note the comments and the Convener should use these in the next meeting.)
- Convener or LDC member closes in prayer.

Suggestions for SESSION FOUR.

- The Convener or LDC member opens the meeting with prayer. Centering/silent time may help everyone become present to the meeting and the purpose.
- Convener allows time for LDC members to check-in with questions or concerns from previous meeting.
- Convener reminds members of Discernment Listening Guidelines. (p. 8)

READING:

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.

Mark 6: 30-31

- Aspirant shares about four aspects of their relationship with God.
 1. Describe your prayer life.
 2. How has your relationship with God changed over time?
 3. Who is Christ in your life?
 4. Who has been an important role model for you in the faith?
- Pause for silence and reflection.
- LDC members share their own reflections on what the aspirant has said.
--Open ended questions, i.e. "What stood out for me in what you said was...?"
- Aspirant continues to share about the intersection of their faith and daily life.
 1. How, specifically, do you care for yourself physically, emotionally and spiritually?
 2. How are you still questioning, searching and probing the mysteries of your faith?
 3. How do you understand:
 - stewardship
 - personal financial responsibility
 - tithing
 - personal stewardship of time and leisure?

- LDC members share their own reflections on what the aspirant has said.
--Open ended questions, i.e. “What stood out for me in what you said was...?”
- LDC questions for consideration:
 - How is the aspirant growing in the Christian faith?
 - How well does the aspirant understand the basics of the Christian faith?
 - Does the aspirant give evidence of having a personal relationship with God?
 - Is the aspirant conversant with the persons of the Trinity; the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

LDC QUESTIONS FOR EVERYONE PRIOR TO NEXT MEETING.

1. Make a list of your strengths.
 2. Make a list of your weaknesses.
 3. Make a list of your “growing edges”.
 4. What do you find difficult in your relationships with others?
 5. How do you react to people in positions of power and authority?
 6. How do react to being in a position of power and authority?
 7. How do you react to being in a powerless situation?
- One or two volunteers share some aspect of their faith journey.
 - Before closing the meeting, conduct an LDC check-in. Review the meeting, the process, what worked or not, what to consider for the next meeting. The Recorder should note the comments for the Convener’s use in the next meeting.
 - Convener or LDC member closes in prayer.

Suggestions for SESSION FIVE.

- The Convener or LDC member opens the meeting with prayer. Centering/silent time may help everyone become present to the meeting and the purpose.
- Convener allows time for LDC members to check-in with questions or concerns from previous meeting.
- Convener reminds members of Discernment Listening Guidelines. (p. 8)

READINGS:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand.

Romans 7: 15, 21

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8: 38-39

- Reflection Questions from Session Four.
 - Committee Members are invited to share some of their insights into the questions., e.g., "Take the one that was the most challenging for you."
 - Aspirant shares what has emerged as they reflected on their strengths and weaknesses.
- Pause for silence and reflection.
- LDC members share their own reflections on what the aspirant has said.
 - Open ended questions, i.e. "What stood out for me in what you said was...?"
- The aspirant responds to the following questions:
 1. What are your "growing edges"?
 2. What are your goals for further spiritual growth?
 3. What skills do you already have and what skills would you like to develop?
 4. How do you learn best?
- Pause for silence and reflection.

- LDC members respond by sharing their own reflections on what the aspirant has said.
--Open ended questions, i.e. “What stood out for me in what you said was...?”
- The aspirant responds to the following questions:
 1. What “pushes your buttons” or makes you really angry?
 2. What conflicts have you had in your life and how have you handled them?
 3. What frustrates you?
 4. What delights you?
 5. Share a time in life when you felt like a failure. Have you found grace in that experience?
- LDC members share their own reflections on what the aspirant has said.
--Open ended questions, i.e. “What stood out for me in what you said was...?”
- LDC questions for consideration.
 - How aware is the aspirant of their feelings?
 - How well do they express strong positive and negative feelings?
 - When dealing with their feelings, does their body language match the words that are spoken?
 - To what extent are they aware of and comfortable with their own sexuality?
 - Are there any indications that they aspire to the ordained ministry as a way of solving their personal problems?
 - Do they have a level of maturity and ability to adapt which is commensurate with their age level?
- One or two volunteers share some aspect of their faith journey.
- Before closing the meeting, conduct an LDC check-in. Review the meeting, the process, what worked or not, what to consider for the next meeting. The Recorder should note the comments for the Convener’s use in the next meeting.
- Convener or LDC member closes in prayer.

Suggestions for SESSION SIX.

- The Convener or LDC member opens the meeting with prayer. Centering/silent time may help everyone become present to the meeting and the purpose.
- Convener allows time for LDC members to check-in with questions or concerns from previous meeting.
- Convener reminds members of Discernment Listening Guidelines. (p. 8)

READING:

A dispute arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."

Luke 22: 24-27

- The aspirant responds to the following questions:
 1. What kind of ministry are you presently doing in your current parish?
--In your former parishes?
 2. What is your leadership role in your current parish?
--In your former parishes?
--In the community in which you presently live?
--In former communities in which you have lived?
 3. Describe your relationship with people in your life who have authority over you.
--Share a situation that has been tense and/or difficult.
--Share a situation that has been respectful and/or mutual.
- Pause for silence and reflection.
- LDC members share their own reflections on what the aspirant has said.
--Open ended questions, i.e. "What stood out for me in what you said was...?"

- The aspirant responds to the following questions:
 1. As you consider ordination, how do you understand the power and authority that come with that office?
 2. What might it be like to claim and use that authority appropriately?
 3. How could that authority be claimed and used inappropriately?

- LDC members share their own reflections on what the aspirant has said.
 - Open ended questions, i.e. "What stood out for me in what you said was...?"

- LDC questions for consideration.
 - Does the aspirant show initiative, self-confidence, enthusiasm?
 - Can they motivate others?
 - Are they aware of and at ease with a variety of leadership styles and able to use them as the situation indicates?
 - How do they function in interpersonal relationships?
 - How comfortable are they being with a person in whom authority rests?
 - To what extent are they ready to claim and use their authority appropriately?
 - What are their experiences with and attitudes towards racial and ethnic minorities?
 - What are their experiences and attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community?
 - Can you envision this person as your priest?

- One or two volunteers share some aspect of their faith journey.

- Before closing the meeting, conduct an LDC check-in. Review the meeting, the process, what worked or not, what to consider for the next meeting. The Recorder should note the comments for the Convener's use in the next meeting.

- Convener or LDC member closes in prayer.

Suggestions for SESSION SEVEN.

- This session happens individually. Rather than a regular meeting, each LDC member (and the aspirant) are invited to use this time to prayerfully recollect and reflect on the vocation of the applicant.

Preparing Your Evaluation.

- Find a comfortable and quiet place where you won't be interrupted. Spend some quality time being present to God. Ask God to guide your recollections and reflections.
- Read the notes recorded from every session. Spend some time reflecting on each 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 for the aspirant.
- 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 the group through the process of writing the Discernment Narrative.
- Take your time with each question. After you have written your response to each one, stop to notice your inner state. Is there a sense of peace and "rightness" about what you have written? Is it complete and whole or does something more need to be written?
- When you have completed your responses to the questions, set your work aside. Think of each person in the Committee and give thanks for their gift to you and to the group.
- When you gather for the final meeting, bring your responses and your Guidelines.

SESSION SEVEN

- The Convener or LDC member opens the meeting with prayer. Centering/silent time may help everyone become present to the meeting and the purpose.

READING:

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

The Book of Common Prayer, from the Ordination Liturgy

- Each member of the LDC will answer each question individually. These will provide the structure for the Discernment Narrative.
- For those in discernment about the diaconate, the Bishop and COM have asked the Committee to give a very specific description of the applicant's present ministry and what they are passionate about,

SESSION SEVEN, continued.

QUESTIONS FOR EACH COMMITTEE MEMBER REGARDING THE ASPIRANT

These questions do not have to be considered in this order. They are to be used by the LDC throughout the discernment process in order to assist in preparing the Discernment Narrative.

1. How do the ministries, gifts, skills and requirements of a deacon/priest line up with what the aspirant is already doing in their life? Be specific.
2. How would ordination affect the aspirant's closest relationships economically, professionally, emotionally, and otherwise? Be specific.
3. What issues of power, authority, obedience, and accountability may be present for the aspirant as the possibility of ordination is considered? How well does the aspirant know themselves? Be specific.
4. What issues of health and self-care (physical, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional) may be present for the aspirant as the possibility of ordination is considered? Be specific.
5. Describe the aspirant's spiritual life and relationship with Christ: its maturity, depth, change over time; its discipline, form, content, and personality. Be specific.
6. Describe the aspirant's current and potential relationship with the requirements of the canons and ordination vows. Be specific.
7. The Church's needs and expectations are for leaders who bear special qualities of Christian commitment, leadership, vision, and responsiveness to the needs, concerns and hopes of the world. Indicate whether such qualities are emerging in the Group's sense of the aspirant's vocation. Be specific.
8. What spiritual, intellectual, and moral qualities for ministry have emerged in the aspirant as the group has engaged this part of the discernment process? Be specific.
9. Are there other things you would like to report?

FINAL SESSION – Working Through the Questions Together.

- Although the aspirant is not present for this session, inviting them to come after the session might be a good way to have some time to share together how the process has been, to thank one another for what each has offered to the times together and to pray together.
- The Convener or LDC member opens the meeting with prayer. Centering/silent time may help everyone become present to the meeting and the purpose. Refer to prayers in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), pages 832-833 and/or the following prayer.

Thomas Merton Prayer.

My Lord, 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.

- Work through each question. The use of newsprint to capture the consensus or divergence of the group may be useful.
- Following this meeting, it is the convener's responsibility to consolidate the individual responses together into one Discernment Narrative from the whole LDC. This document should be:
 - Signed by all members of the LDC and the aspirant.
 - Forwarded to the Bishop's Office.
 - A copy given to the aspirant within two weeks of the group's final meeting.
 - A copy sent to the person canonically in charge.
- The LDC disbands. Suggestions for the LDC may include:
 - A meal together.
 - A Eucharist.
 - A space for LDC members to share this ending

- The Discernment Narrative to be sent to:

**The Rt. Rev. Prince Singh
Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan
Hall Street SE Suite 200
Grand Rapids, MI 49506**

- The Convener should collect all of the notes/minutes from the sessions and shred them.
- The confidentiality of all involved must continue to be maintained!

Resources:

Bound with Cords of Love. Kidder, The Rev. Ann, The Diocese of Maine, 2002.

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

Guidelines for the Parish Lay Committee. Diocese of Atlanta; Diocese of Western North Carolina.

The Clearness Committee. Palmer, Parker

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 under Resources.

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 under Resources.

A Short List of Questions for Use in the Discernment Process

This list may be used as a resource for additional questions and individual work in the discernment process.

- A. What are the needs within this Episcopal community of faith?
 - 1. How do you respond to each?
 - 2. How do you know you are doing what God has committed you to do?
 - 3. Is your effort enough? Did you listen correctly?
 - 4. How is God using you?
 - 5. How is Christ lifted up in addressing these needs?
 - 6. What vision has God given you to address any or all of the needs as an individual and/or as a body of Christ?

- B. What are the needs within the community at large?
 - 1. How do you respond to each?
 - 2. How do you know you are doing what God has committed you to do?
 - 3. Is my effort enough? Did I listen correctly?
 - 4. How is God using you?
 - 5. How is Christ lifted up in addressing these needs?
 - 6. What vision has God given you to address any or all of the needs as an individual and/or as a body of Christ?

- C. What gifts has God given you that are:
 - 1. Used most often?
 - 2. Hardly used at all?
 - 3. Might be enhanced as a spiritual lay leader?
 - 4. Might be enhanced as an ordained person?

- D. How do you approach the Gospel with others?
 - 1. What do Christ's teachings mean to you?
 - 2. How do you articulate the Gospel to others?

- E. What does worship mean to you?

- F. Describe the miracle of the Eucharist and what it means to you?

Gifts Appropriate to Lay Ministry

A Biblical model for lay leadership

Nehemiah began his life as a “servant leader” having been appointed royal cup-bearer at the palace of Shushan in the days that Judah was a province of the Persian Empire. He may be the ideal role model for lay leadership. He was decisive, well organized, a wise overseer of other people, a good administrator, and a skilled project manager who knew how to get things done. He also had all the biblical qualifications for spiritual leadership: godly character, a consistent testimony, a burning zeal for the Lord, a desire to serve, and a commitment to honor God in all that he did. His prayer life was exemplary.

Nehemiah himself was not a priest, a scribe, an expert in the law, a theologian, or a teacher. He apparently had no special training to do what he ultimately did. He was simply a model of hard work, practical ministry, and compassion, rebuilding Jerusalem while working alongside his people. Nehemiah teaches us that whoever we are, whatever our background or training, and whatever our position in life—God has gifted us and called us to use our gifts as servants.

Lay ministry in the Diocese of Western Michigan

Lay ministers are called in the Book of Common Prayer to “take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church”. There are four opportunities for formal lay leadership within the diocese: 1. Lector, 2. Lay Reader, 3. Eucharistic Minister, and 4. Eucharistic Visitor.

1. Lector (non-licensed)

The function of Lectors is to read the Lessons in the Church’s liturgy as appointed to do so by the celebrant or officiant.

Qualifications for Lectors:

- a. Baptism
- b. Appointment to that function by the celebrant or officiant.
- c. Ability to read clearly, audibly, and with the sense of the passage.

2. **Lay Reader (licensed by Bishop)**

The Lay Reader fills the same function as a lector with the addition that they are licensed by the Bishop to lead public worship under the direction of the person canonically in charge of the parish.

Qualifications for Lay Readers:

- a. Baptized member in good standing in the congregation in which they intend to serve.
- b. Completed all training and passed examination.
- c. Demonstrated ability to lead public worship.
- d. Licensed by the Bishop upon completion of training.

3. **Eucharistic Minister**

A person licensed to administer communion is "an extraordinary minister of the sacrament". Eucharistic Ministers may function during the administration of Holy Eucharist. They may, if the Celebrant desires, assist the Deacon in oblations, or if there is no deacon, the Eucharistic Minister may do oblations.

Qualifications for Eucharistic Ministers:

- a. Baptized member in good standing in the congregation in which they intend to serve.
- b. Completed training and passed examination.
- c. Licensed by the Bishop upon completion of training.

4. **Eucharistic Visitor (Visitor of the Sick and Shut-In)**

A Eucharistic visitor is licensed to carry the Sacrament to the sick and shut-in as an "extraordinary minister of the Sacrament" directly from the principal Sunday Eucharistic Celebration to the sick or the shut-in so that they may receive communion from this Eucharistic Celebration. This ministry does not take the place of clergy visitations.

Qualifications for Eucharistic Ministers:

- a. Baptized member in good standing in the congregation in which they intend to serve.
- b. Completed training and passed examination.
- c. Licensed by the Bishop upon completion of training.

The Discernment of a Call to Diaconal Ministry

Through their ordination vows, deacons place themselves under orders to follow Jesus and to be obedient to the bishop, who gives them the mandate to encourage, support, and develop servant ministries in this diocese.

Three aspects of Call

1. A deacon has the ability to articulate the proclamation of servant in the Gospel and has the leadership skills and willingness to lead others into servant ministry. Deacons are not simply those who exercise servant ministry as baptized Christians. Deacons are those who call and empower the laity to exercise servant ministry.
2. A deacon has the courage to be a prophetic voice to the Church concerning the needs of the powerless and voiceless in the community. They have the mental ability and competence for ordained ministry and understand that the diaconate is a life-long discernment of ministry involving continuous prayer, openness to change, willingness to study, and the active quest for personal growth.
3. The diaconate is a distinct order and is not a stepping-stone to the priesthood. The diaconate is not to be seen as a reward for faithful service as a Reader, Eucharistic Minister, Warden, or member of the Vestry. It is not a reward for a pre-existing ministry. Individuals aspiring to the Sacred order of Deacons must clearly articulate and demonstrate that they are called to the order of ministry which is integral to the church leading the laity into lives of servant ministry, *diakonia*.

1. Persons with a sense of “call” will be recognized by themselves and by the Church as meeting three fundamental requirements”.

- The exercise of a servant ministry in the world.
- The desire and capacity to call, equip, empower, and enable the baptized to the practice of servant ministry as required of each person through baptism.
- The desire and capacity to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world.

2. Persons with a discernible vocation evidences many, if not all, of the following qualities.

- A strong commitment to and a deep love for Jesus Christ and the Church.
- An ability to articulate their faith.
- A confirmed adult communicant in good standing with the understanding of their ministry as a baptized person.
- A spiritual life marked by the holy habits of worship, prayer, the study of the scripture, and proportional giving.

- A vocation to serve and enable others to serve.
- Empathy for the powerless.
- A history of satisfactory employment (if applicable) and healthy interpersonal relationships.
- A willingness to undertake extensive preparation, including theological education, spiritual formation and practice of ministry.
- A clear understanding of the ministry of a deacon.
- A willingness to serve God through the leadership of the diocesan bishop.

3. Persons who are called to live the vision statement for diaconal ministry will understand the following:

- Their work may take them to risky places.
- Their work may require them to respond to the needs of the poor, the weak, the addicted, the sick, and the lonely.
- Their work calls them to engage the issues of justice, mercy, poverty, family, and the environment.
- That their work calls them to be agents of change.

NOTE: The ministry of a deacon is a ministry served under the Bishop on behalf of the Church in Western Michigan. Though a local context can provide fertile ground for a sense of call to ministry, ordination is rarely, if ever, to a specific location. One is ordained for the whole church. Though the customary does allow for the possibility of a Deacon continuing to serve in the parish where the Deacon was raised up for ordination, a true sense of call to the Sacred Order of Deacons must also involve a willingness to serve elsewhere in the Diocese, with the strengthening of the total ministry of the church being the focus and goal.

Gifts Appropriate to the Priesthood

1. A sense of “call”.

- An openness to holiness as present in sacrament, the community, the Gospel and Creation; an ability to communicate that awareness to others.
- A personal, spiritual desire to live in communion with others as an ordained leader and specific to the Episcopal tradition.
- A desire to preside at the sacraments with an awareness of both mystery and presence.
- An ability to articulate this calling.

2. A desire to spread the Gospel.

- A desire to proclaim the good news of Christ and share one’s faith.
- An awareness of and honesty about one’s own story and Christ’s presence on the journey.
- A desire to invite/shape a community in to the living of the gospel good news.

3. A gift of leadership.

- The desire and ability to empower others to live into their baptismal calling and ministries.
- A sense of vision, held in community and guided by the Spirit; ability to give voice to that vision, inspiring communal participation in it.
- An ability to see the big picture and think in systems terms.
- The personal qualities of authenticity, humility, strength and trustworthiness.
- The ability to be a “non-anxious” presence.
- A willingness to take risks and encourage change.
- The abilities to problem solve, plan, delegate and follow through.
- An intellectual curiosity and commitment to life-long learning and formation.
- A willingness to be accountable to the parish, the bishop and the diocese.

4. An active prayer life and spiritual maturity appropriate to one’s age.

- Is grounded in the teachings of Scripture and committed to the study of Scripture.

- Practices a rule of life with personal prayer, meditation and reflection.
- Seeks out opportunities for personal growth and an increased knowledge of self.
- Displays an awareness of the challenges, pains, healings and joys of their personal journey; is able to articulate and interpret their story to self and others.
- Practices good stewardship of resources.

5. A pastoral inclination.

- Listens well.
- Demonstrates compassion and a desire to be present to those who are hurting.
- Articulates a concern about the well-being of others and a desire to help them seek wholeness.
- Relates well to a diversity of types and ages of people.
- Is sacramentally present as representative of God's people.

6. Personal Health.

- Is physically healthy; practices well-being of body, mind and soul; passes the medical examination as required by canons.
- Demonstrates emotional health and stability; articulates easily personal strengths and limitations; has sought out the support of professional support when needed; keeps healthy boundaries; passes the evaluation as required by canons.
- Maintains stable relationships with: spouse/partner, colleagues, community of faith, family and friends.
- Demonstrates financial responsibility, has managed personal finances with integrity and does not carry unmanageable personal debt.

FEEDBACK FORM

To the convener – please give us your feedback! This discernment guide is designed to help parishes through the intense process of helping fellow Christians more clearly understand the call that God is making for them. Your comments on this guide will help us make it better and improve future outcomes. Please use the reverse side of this page for additional comments.

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 changes?

5. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?

Please mail the complete feedback form to:

**Commission on Ministry
Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan
5347 Clyde Park Ave. SW
Wyoming, MI 49509**



STATEMENT OF RECOMMENDATION

Form 1
Last updated March 2021

The Local Discernment Committee makes the following recommendation concerning the aspirant:

Aspirant's name _____

We recommend for Christian ministry in the following order (choose one)

- Priesthood
- Diaconate
- Laity (specify particular callings) _____

We make this recommendation

- With no reservation
- With reservations

Signed (All members of the Local Discernment Committee)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Chairperson: _____ Date: _____

Applicant: _____ Date: _____

Please attach the signed discernment narrative to this form.



CERTIFICATE OF VESTRY SUPPORT FOR NOMINATION TO HOLY ORDERS IN THE DIOCESE OF WESTERN MICHIGAN

*Form 2
Last updated March 2021*

To the Bishop, Commission on Ministry of The Diocese of Western Michigan, from (Name of Parish)

_____, on (Date) _____.

We, whose names appear below, certify that _____ is a confirmed adult communicant in good standing of this Parish. We declare that in our opinion, this person possesses such qualifications as old be fitting for admission as a Nominee for Holy Orders. This judgement is based on our personal knowledge.

(To be signed by Rector or person canonically in charge, and at least two-thirds majority of the Vestry.)

Attestation of Clerk or Recording Secretary:

I hereby certify that the foregoing certificate was signed at a meeting of the Vestry of (Name of Parish) _____, (City) _____ Diocese of Western Michigan, duly convened on the day of (Time) _____ (Day) _____ (Month) _____ (Year) _____, and that the names attached are those of all (or a two-thirds majority of all) the members of the Vestry.

Signed by Clerk/Secretary of Vestry: _____



ORDINATION PROCESS INFORMATION FORM

Form 3

Last updated March 2021

Name: _____

Spouse/Partner's Name (if applicable): _____

Sponsoring Parish: _____

Home Address: _____ City: _____ ST ____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____ Mobile Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Discerning a Call to Holy Orders in (check one): Diaconate
 Priesthood

For office use only

DIOCESAN RECORDS UPDATE

Date Postulancy Granted: _____/_____/_____

Formation

1) Seminary _____

Seminary Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

2) Alternate Formation Approved by the Bishop

Date Candidacy to Ordination Granted _____/_____/_____