

# Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin

## Steps Toward Ordination

### Attachment F

#### **Discernment Steps for the Aspirant**

The goal of the ordination process is not that people be ordained and begin a career; rather the goal of ordination is that the church continues with effective ministry, to the church and to the world. Ordained ministry is only one part of the ministry of the church. Those seeking ordination should already be effective ministers of the church who are now seeking a different path to join in Christ's ministry. Ministry will occur before ordination, during the ordination process, and then, possibly continue as part of the ordained ministry.

As such, the ordination process should be viewed as a discernment process of the most effective avenue of ministry for the individual to join with Christ's ministry. The word "discernment" comes out of middle English, from a word that means "to separate". During the process, different thoughts, feelings, and institutions are separated and examined, and put back together. From a similar word in Greek, we look at "dia-krisis", through crisis. Crisis here is not trauma, but things out of the ordinary, so we are getting out of the ordinary and looking for the guidance of God in the midst of things.

Most of this discernment will take place in the familiar settings of family and home congregation, especially at the early steps. In ideal settings, the community would recognize gifts and talents and suggest that a person consider seeking Holy Orders. More often, in our current culture, individuals sense a call, and then verify it with the community. As with all other forms of ministry, there are situations where the gifts offered may not be the gifts needed within a community and they may not be received by the community.

#### **First Steps Toward Ordained Ministry**

Each person seeking ordination in the Diocese of San Joaquin must have been a communicant in good standing and have demonstrated leadership for at least one year in a parish of the diocese. Each person seeking ordination next devotes a year or more for discernment. This includes work with a spiritual director who can assist in listening to God with the individual. Conversations with the clergy and members of the congregation are also helpful.

While informal conversations with members of the community and clergy may help clarify a sense of vocation (calling), there are two specific steps that those aspiring to Holy Orders need to take at the beginning. They are to attend a *Day of Discovery* workshop (and completion of the *Context for Ministry* work) and to engage in discernment with a formal Congregational Discernment Committee. The *Context for Ministry* program can help individuals clarify their own sense of ministry, and some people

have discovered where their vocation lies without going through an ordination process and being redirected to other ministry.

The first discernment step in the ordination process in the Diocese of San Joaquin is the same for the Diaconate and the Priesthood, as prescribed by the Commission on Ministry. The COM may utilize different discernment tools or processes as situations warrant. The following process is used in several dioceses, including the Diocese of San Joaquin. It formally begins with the Day of Discovery offered by the Commission. The twelve-week Context for Ministry program directly follows the Day of Discovery. The purpose of these programs is to create an environment for interested persons to discover more about the ministry of Christ and how the four orders of ministry in the Episcopal Church (Laity, Deacons, Priests, and Bishops) complement and support each other. The programs are open to all interested members of the laity, but applicants for Holy Orders must participate in both programs. Development and implementation of a ministry project is an important component of the Context for Ministry program and is seen by the Commission as an essential step in the discernment process.

During the Context for Ministry program, a participant should begin regular meetings with a spiritual director, if not already doing so. A list of persons willing to serve in this capacity is available from the Diocese. The director may not be the participant's rector, a lay or clerical member of the participant's sponsoring parish, a member of the Commission, or a member of the Standing Committee. These exclusions will enable participants to share their spiritual journeys in confidence. The spiritual director will not report to the Commission or to the Standing Committee. Upon Completion of the first step in the discernment process, a person desiring further discernment should contact their rector to discuss the appointment of a Congregational Discernment Committee. This committee will meet regularly with the aspirant to help in discerning the specific nature of God's call to ministry.

### **The Congregational Discernment Process**

The call to ministry is an evolving process that may lead one into uncharted territory and into varieties of service over time. God calls us all to ministry. Our task is to hear the call and to respond. The discernment process is for the whole church, and a significant portion occurs at the Congregational level in the Diocese of San Joaquin. The process takes from one to two years or more. Ideally, discernment committees can be set up on a regional basis, with every congregation providing members to help with discernment. Until that ideal is met, Congregational Discernment Committees will be established, drawing primarily on members from the aspirant's home congregation. Other members of the committee will be appointed from other congregations in the region. These additional members will have received training in establishing discernment groups.

The primary purpose of the Committee is to discern with the Aspirant the call and the claims of the Church. The Committee should also provide spiritual support to the Aspirant. The Committee is one of many groups discerning on behalf of the Church how God calls an applicant to serve the Church, as a member of the Laity, a Deacon, or a Priest.

## **The Congregational Discernment Committee**

The Committee should be comprised of four to seven members, one of whom should be ordained. Some members of the Committee may come from different congregations. Members of the Committee should not be the parish priest, the aspirant's Spiritual Director, or a member of the Commission on Ministry. The members of the Committee should be active in a parish and be familiar with the roles of the Laity, Deacons, Priest, and Bishops in the wider Church. All members must keep confidences, listen with open minds and hearts, and prayerfully seek and speak the truth with love.

The Committee will meet at least once before meeting with the Aspirant. The Aspirant will meet in person with the Committee a minimum of four times within a period of six months or until consensus has been reached. Additional Committee meetings will be necessary for discussing and writing the report and sharing the decision with the Aspirant. If no consensus is reached in the initial period, then the committee should so report. They may choose to reconvene at a later time for further discernment.

## **The Congregational Discernment Committee Report**

When the Committee completes its discernment, it will meet with the Aspirant to discuss its conclusions concerning that call to ministry. The Committee should have a candid, open, honest, and caring conversation with the Aspirant.

Following this discussion, the Committee will prepare a written report for the Cleric using the format suggested by the Commission. All members should sign the report. If consensus is lacking, the report should so state. Committee members may submit alternative conclusions and recommendations. The report is confidential, and the Cleric must exercise discretion in sharing it. The Commission and the Bishop must receive a summary of the report and the Committee recommendation by 30 prior to the announced date of the Ministry Discernment Conference.

In making discernment about the calling of the aspirant to Holy Orders, the following list may offer some insights regarding the quality of character being sought.

### **The Bishop and COM uphold these values when discerning a call to ordained ministry:**

- God calls people both by inward spiritual experience and by the outward beckoning of the community, the Body of Christ.
- Our process of discerning various calls to ministry is rooted in the history, doctrine, community, and worship of the Episcopal Church.
- Each individual is treasured and held in the highest esteem.
- Baptism calls each person to ministry. All orders of ministry- Laity, Deacons, Priests, and Bishops – are equally important in carrying out the mission and ministry of Christ's Church.
- In the discernment process we are to be prayerful, centered in God, patient and yearning for gracious guidance.
- Conversations concerning discernment are always to be open and honest.

- For those pursuing ordained ministry, thorough evaluations and recommendations from sponsoring clergy and vestries are essential and vital.
- Ministries may vary over time and place. The call to ordination is to a vocation which encompasses ministries, local and global.

**The Bishop and COM look for these qualities in persons seeking ordination:**

- A deep commitment to follow Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord,
- A Desire to seek God's will,
- A love of Jesus Christ that can inspire and empower others,
- A practice of prayerfulness and servanthood demonstrating durable Christian faith and witness,
- A significant leadership involvement in church activities,
- Involvement in and a keen awareness of the issues of society,
- The ability to integrate the needs of the world with the message of the Gospel—a quality especially important for a Deacon,
- Commitment to the development of moral character patterned after the life of Christ,
- A capacity for perseverance in difficulty, a resilience in adversity, and an ability to using life experiences as vehicles for personal growth,
- Intelligence and imagination with a sound educational background,
- The ability to learn and a desire to continue to learn,
- To communicate well,
- The ability to teach and to give a reasoned account of the Gospel,
- A desire to help others grow in faith knowledge
- A commitment to listen with sensitivity and understanding,
- The ability to hear and accept constructive criticism,
- Initiative and energy; the capacity to be a self-starter and to work hard,
- A sense of humor and humility,
- Self-awareness, including a firm grasp of one's personal strengths and weaknesses,
- A healthy sense of personal and institutional boundaries, including an understanding of the need for discretion and confidentiality,
- The ability to care for and serve others and to be with them in times of crisis,
- An enjoyment of others; pleasure in human interaction, and a history of getting along well with others and cooperating in team efforts,
- Breadth of vision and tolerance of others; an ability to relate to people of different personalities and ages and from varying religious cultural and economic backgrounds,
- A demonstrable ability to be a leader, to motivate and enable the ministry of others, and to be an agent of change,
- An appreciation of the Anglican ethos within the Episcopal tradition.

## **Spiritual Autobiography:**

There are many ways a person may tell their spiritual autobiography, but listen for significant people and turning points, highs and lows, family life and church experience. Listen for the aspirant's experience of the "calling" to ordained ministry. Also, listen for the person's ability to articulate their life experience and faith. It is suggested that you let the person tell their story without interruption, except for questions of clarification. Feel free to take notes so that you can ask follow up questions after the person has finished. Note that many of the topics raised in the person's autobiography (e.g. spirituality, leadership) will be further discussed in upcoming sessions.

### **Follow up Questions, if not covered:**

When did the Church have a significant impact on you and on those with whom you share your life?  
Describe the faith communities that have influenced you.

How has your life changed recently so that it seems headed toward seeking Ordination?

Why are you seeking Holy Orders at this time?

Has there been an ebb and flow to this sense of call?

### **Guided Questions for Checklist Meetings:**

#### **Spirituality**

*The responsibilities of a clergy person are uniquely spiritual. A clergy leader's openness to God must be fed regularly by a disciplined life of prayer; worship, spiritual attentiveness, and actions of caring and justice. A clergy person is a model of the spiritual life by way he/she lives each day, in actions and relationships.*

- Describe your prayer life, spirituality, and worship disciplines. Are you part of a prayer group? Do you have a spiritual director?
- What is your relationship with God? How do you understand God? Do you understand the Trinity?
- How have you experienced obedience to God? What happens when God says "no"?
- How is Holy Scripture important to you? What role does it have in your life? What other writings are important to you?
- Do you pray the Daily Office? How is the Book of Common Prayer important to your life?
- How has your understanding of God changed?

## Care & Compassion

*A clergy person communicates the love of God through qualities of genuineness empathy, compassion, and presence. A servant leader seeks to empower others to grow in grace and in the likeness of Christ, claiming their call to discipleship: the work of service, reconciliation, care for all social justice.*

- Where are the opportunities for care and compassion right now in your life?
- What is pastoral care for you? Give examples.
- Have you ever done any pastoral care work?
- Describe your work with children and the elderly.
- What issues of justice are important to you and what have you done about it?
- How do you feel that God's love has been manifested in your life?
- Who has shown God's love to you in your life?
- How do you share God's love with others? Be specific.
- Are you a good listener?

## Leadership & Ministry

*A clergy person should possess, among other things, the skills to listen and make decision, equip and inspire others, work in groups, manage conflict, take initiative and communicate a vision.*

- What ministries have you exercised in the parish? How would you characterize these ministries: pastoral, liturgical, educational, parish life, administrative?
- Have you ever preached or spoken in public?
- How has your life apart from church prepared you for leadership within the church?
- What is your experience of committee work? What role do you take?
- Give some examples of projects or new ministries that you started or of which you have been a part.
- How was the Context for Ministry for you? What was your Ministry Project?
- What is your vision for the church? The parish?
- How do you go about making decisions?
- Give examples of situations of conflict that you have been a part of, and how they were resolved.

## Understanding of Ministry in the Episcopal Tradition

*One's vision or understanding of ministry greatly shapes the persons call and how they view their future in the Church. It is important to have clarity about the various roles of the orders the ministry and how the person fits into them. A clergy person should also be able to articulate the Anglican Ethos meaningfully discuss the Episcopal Church and what has drawn them to it.*

- Who are the ministers of the Church?
- Describe the models of lay, diaconal, and priestly ministries you have encountered. What is a Priest for you? What is a Deacon for you? What is a Bishop for you? Why do you think the Church needs Priests, Deacons, Bishops, and Laity?
- Could you perform your ministry without being ordained? Why not? Why do you believe ordination is necessary for this ministry? Describe the difference ordination would make.
- Do you see yourself as a servant? What comprises your servant ministry?
- How do you understand the demands of ordained ministry? What do you believe are its boundaries? What is your understanding of the availability of employment opportunities in the Church? What is your dream job as an ordained person?
- What drew you to the Episcopal Church?
- What do you see as some of the unique qualities of the Anglican Tradition?
- What do you tell someone who asks you, “What is an Episcopalian?”

### **Individual & Family Life**

*A clergy person must have a good awareness of self, their own boundaries, and have the skills to maintain a healthy balance among work, family, and self-care responsibilities.*

- How does your seeking Ordination effect those with whom you share your life?
- Tell us about your family relationships? Is your family supportive of your vocational goals?
- Describe your strengths. Describe your weakness. What are your growing edges? What are your boundaries?
- How do other people see you? How have you learned the views of others?
- What feedback have you received from others regarding your lay ministry?
- How does your age influence your career plans?
- Have you thought about what theological education would be appropriate for you? How would you pay for this? Do you expect help from the parish? From the diocese?
- Do you pledge? Do you tithe?
- What are you most afraid of in the vocational discernment process for ordination?
- What are you most afraid of in ordained ministry?
- What are you most excited about in ordained ministry?
- What do you do for fun?

**Check List for Congregational Discernment Committee**  
**at \_\_\_\_\_ Episcopal Church**  
**for \_\_\_\_\_ (aspirant name)**

Date Completed

- \_\_\_\_\_ Parish priest-in-charge appoints chairperson for DC.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Chair selects meeting dates and confirms them with the aspirant.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Select and appoint members of DC (at least 5 including chair).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Aspirant forwards a copy of his spiritual autobiography to the Chairperson.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Chairperson sends a copy of the autobiography to the DC at least one week before first meeting.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting# 1: 1 1/2 hours: 30 min for explanation by the priest-in-charge and a charge to the committee regarding its task and then leaves. 60 Minutes meeting with the aspirant to discuss their spiritual autobiography.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting # 2: On spirituality, to the extent that it has not already been covered. No more than 1 1/2 hours.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting # 3: On Care, compassion, leadership and ministry. No more than 1 1/2 hours.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting #4: On understanding of the ministry in the Episcopal Church, and Individual and family life. No more than 1 1/2 hours.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting # 5: The committee only to: highlight and summarize the “essence” of the prior meetings and to decide to recommend or not recommend the aspirant to move forward in the process.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Chairperson drafts a committee report and sends it to the committee members for their approval, editing, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting # 6: DC meets with aspirant to share their summary thoughts, and to present him with a copy of the report that it will issue.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Chairperson sends written and electronic copies of the DC report to: Bishop, Canon, Chair of COM, and Priest-in-Charge.