

Parish Discernment Committee Handbook

Guidelines for Assisting Others in Discernment for Ordination



The Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh

Adopted by the Commission on Ministry

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Welcome to the Parish Discernment Committee

You are about to gain a window into God's amazing work of calling people into ordained leadership. The word "discern" means "to perceive or detect." Spiritual discernment comes through prayer, Scripture, and taking counsel together. In this case, the Parish Discernment Committee (PDC) assists the Rector and Vestry in discerning whether or not he or she is called to ordained ministry. It is the understanding of this diocese that a call to ministry comes out of community. You are the people who have seen this person the most and know them the best. Therefore, your input is vital.

Often the PDC is a standing committee, appointed by the Rector. In some cases, a PDC is called together on an *ad hoc* basis for one particular individual. It may also be appropriate for the vestry to serve in this capacity. If this is the first time your church has established a PDC, please contact the Bishop's Office for guidance and assistance.

The PDC:

- Normally includes 4-8 lay people
- Normally includes a vestry member (or 2)
- Does not normally include clergy person

Committee members are active members of a congregation who:

- Have a lively faith in Jesus Christ which they can articulate
- Have a heart for the mission of the Church
- Pray regularly and agree to pray for the discernment process and the people in it
- Are able to listen carefully to God and to others
- Have gifts of discernment

Responsibilities of committee members:

- PRAY for yourself, the other committee members, the Aspirant
- Respond in a timely fashion to communications from the committee chair
- Read the Aspirant's materials and be prepared at committee meetings
- Attend committee meetings

Ways to pray:

- For the Aspirant and committee members to be able to hear God's call
- Pray for God to reveal his will
- Pray for unity
- Pray to see and hear clearly
- For discernment on the part of aspirant and committee members
- For the ability to listen to other committee members, again listening to God's voice in the midst of these conversations
- For the Holy Spirit's presence during the conversations
- For wisdom

Overview of the Ordination Discernment Process

There are four phases to the ordination discernment process. The PDC does its work in the second (Aspirancy) phase.

Exploration Phase (takes place at the parish level)

- First, he or she goes to their rector. The Rector meets with him or her 2-3 times; this is called the Rector's Careful Inquiry.
- If the Rector says yes, he or she meets the Bishop. If the Bishop gives him/her permission to proceed with the process, he or she is called an Aspirant (as they are aspiring to ordination).

Aspirancy (starts at the parish level, then transitions to the diocesan level)

- Once the Bishop gives permission to proceed, then the Parish Discernment Committee is convened. If the PDC has little experience, they are encouraged to invite a member of the Commission on Ministry to orient them to their work. It is most effective to include the Rector and Vestry in this meeting.
- The Parish Discernment Committee meets with the Aspirant.
- The PDC writes a report and sends it to the Rector.
- If the Rector and the PDC are supportive, the Aspirant meets with the Vestry. The Rector and Vestry must sign a recommendation form before sending the Aspirant to the Diocese.
- Schedule an Aspirancy interview with the bishop
- After completing the requirements, he or she then goes before the Commission on Ministry (COM) for a postulancy interview.

Postulancy (diocesan level)

- The COM is an advisory committee of lay people and clergy from around the Diocese who advise the Bishop on ordination related matters. It functions like a PDC at the diocesan level and conducts postulancy interviews in March and October.
- If approved, the aspirant is now a Postulant.

Candidacy (diocesan level)

- After fulfilling all requirements, the Postulant is ready for a Readiness Assessment to assess readiness for ordination. If approved, he or she is now a Candidate
- Last stage before ordination

The Parish Discernment Process

The Parish Discernment Committee (PDC) assists the Rector and Vestry in discerning whether particular persons are called to ordained ministry. It is the understanding of this diocese that a call to ministry comes out of community.

Often the PDC is a standing committee, appointed by the rector. In some cases, a PDC is called together on an *ad hoc* basis for one individual.

Four areas to be explored:

1. Call
2. Character
3. Maturity
4. Ministry Experience

The parish discernment process is a series of conversations (normally 2-4) between a person seeking ordination and a PDC to assess the individual's readiness in the four areas listed above. Usually the rector or other ordained parish priests do not participate in the conversations with the PDC, although sometimes the rector is present for the first one. If the individual is married, the spouse attends the sessions with him or her and is required to attend at least one.

When the PDC has finished meeting with the aspirant, it writes a report that is presented to the vestry. Usually a member of the PDC meets with the vestry to give an explanation of its findings.

A suggested format for conversation with the aspirant is as follows:

- Session 1: Questions about the aspirant's background, personal faith, life and calling, health of the marriage
- Session 2: Questions about his or her ministry and gifts
- Session 3: Follow up on particular questions or issues raised in first two conversations
- Session 4: Summary conversation, once again focused on things raised in earlier conversations.

It is important for these conversations not to be rushed, allowing both the individual and committee members enough time to ask and answer questions prayerfully and thoughtfully. Additional sessions may be added at the discretion of committee members or individual. You may direct your questions to the COM Chair.

Core Convictions & Core Values

God Is Our Mission

Jesus Is Lord

- Joyful Worship
- Faithful Prayer
- Prompt Obedience (to God's Word and the leading of the Spirit)
- Reconciled Relationships (personally, racially, socially, etc.) and Charitable Assumption
- Peaceful Confidence
- Abundance Mentality
- Openness to Adventure
- Discernment Focus (rather than decision-making)
- Whole-life Stewardship

The Holy Spirit Empowers Us

- Expectation of signs and wonders
- Power of the Gospel of Grace

The Church Is Essential in God's Mission in the World

We Follow Jesus in an Anglican Way

- Gospel-centered
 - Reformation's emphasis on Scriptural authority, grace, and faith.
- Trinitarian/Creedal
- Missional
 - Celtic Mission Movement's passion for God's glory and salvation of the world
- Sacramental/Liturgical
- Collaborative: locally, regionally, globally
 - Diocesan networks
 - Ecumenical cooperation
 - Global Connections

Core Values

Inner Dispositions

- Healthy
- Humble
- Inquisitive

Relational Disposition

- "High-hearted" (gracious, generous, optimistic, fun)

Work Dispositions

- Trustworthy
- Competent
- Cooperative

Suggested time frames for Parish Discernment Committee Process

Step	Target Time Frame
Schedule first conversation with aspirant	Within 4-6 weeks of receiving "permission to proceed" from the bishop
Post-interview communication with aspirant	Aspirant should be notified within 1 week whether there will be another meeting or whether the meetings are complete (after each conversation)
2 nd and additional conversations	Within 4-6 weeks of last interview
Report preparation	Completed within 4-6 weeks of last interview
Vestry presentation	Rector's discretion; usually within next two meetings

Postulancy Interview Timeline

The Commission on Ministry conducts postulancy interview in **March** and **October**

To send an aspirant to a postulancy interview in March, the following deadlines must be met:

- Aspirancy interview with the bishop must be completed by the second Friday of February.
- Psychological evaluation, medical evaluation and child abuse training must be completed prior to the Aspirancy interview. These usually take 1-2 months to schedule and allow reports to reach the diocesan office by the deadline.
- The diocese prefers that psychological and medical evaluations occur after vestry approves the candidate, so they are current at the time of the second interview with the bishop. Therefore, it is recommended that vestry approval take place no later than November to allow the aspirant sufficient time to schedule necessary appointments.

To send an aspirant to a postulancy interview in October, the following deadlines must be met:

- Aspirancy interview with the bishop must be completed by second Friday of September.
- Psychological evaluation, medical evaluation and child abuse training must be completed prior to the Aspirancy interview. These usually take 1-2 months to schedule and allow reports to reach the diocesan office by the deadline.
- The diocese prefers that psychological and medical evaluations occur after vestry approves the candidate, so they are current at the time of the second interview with the bishop. Therefore, it is recommended that vestry approval take place no later than July to allow the aspirant sufficient time to schedule necessary appointments.

Sample Discernment Questions

Below are examples a PDC may choose to use. They are not, however, required. As long as the PDC discusses the general categories brought up below, they can choose to do so in their own manner. Some questions create dialogue that may answer other questions. In this situation questions do not have to be asked again.

Questions about personal faith and background

- Tell us briefly about your personal faith.
 - How did you come to know and follow Jesus Christ?
 - How do you keep your faith lively? (personal disciplines? Prayer? Scripture?)
 - What is the role of Scripture in your life? Be specific.
- Tell us about a time when following Christ was difficult for you.
- In what ways have you experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in your life?
- Tell us a little about your family– past and present. (parents/siblings/spouse/children)
 - What aspects of your family/personal life are nourishing and satisfying to you?
 - Tell us about your marriage.

Questions about Call

- Tell us about your sense of call to ordained ministry.
 - How did you get to this point?
 - What influences, or models have shaped your understanding of ordained ministry?
 - What has led you to consider that ordained ministry is the best context for the exercising of your calling, gifts, passions, and skills?
- What experiences in your past seem to be consistent with this sense of call?
- How have others (who know you well) responded to your calling?
- What skills and experiences do you have that are in line with this sense of call? What gifts or skills would you most like to develop?
- What areas of ordained ministry would be challenging for you?
- Describe your understanding of ordained ministry
 - What does the Bible say about ordination?
 - All Christians are called to ministry...how is ordained ministry different?
 - What is the difference between the ministry of a priest? A deacon? A bishop?
- What does your spouse think and feel about this direction in your life?
- (To spouse): tell us about your thoughts and feelings about your spouse's seeking ordination. How will this direction affect you and/or your family?

Questions about Character & Maturity

- Ordained ministry not only involves a deep relationship with God, it also demands fruitful relationships with others.
 - Tell us about a person you have nurtured spiritually.
 - Tell us about a situation in which you have had conflict with another person or group of persons. How did you handle it and what did you learn?
- What adjectives would people who know you use to describe you? How accurate are they?

- How do you relate to authority of others? In what ways have you exercised authority?
 - Tell us about a relationship with a boss or other superior that you learned from –either positive or negative.
- Where are you finding challenges or stress in your personal life?
- What things do you do for relaxation, refreshment, re-creation?
- Tell us about a tough season or situation and how you “rebounded” from it (or didn’t).
- What conversations have emerged with your family as a result of this direction? What else will need to be addressed?
- How do you think you will react to expectations the parish may put on your family, either fair or unfair?
- If Single, what do you see as the unique challenges in ministry for a single person?
- What supportive relationships and other supportive structures nourish you? How might they need to shift if you are ordained?
- What are your weaknesses?

Questions about Ministry Involvement

- Describe your relationship with your parish (or other community of faith.) Tell us something about your relationships with others, your involvement in activities, your involvement liturgically, etc.
- Tell us about a time when you shared your faith with someone else.
- In what contexts or situations are you most “yourself” or most “alive”?

Instructions for Writing the Parish Discernment Committee Report

The report should be finished within six (6) weeks of the final parish committee meeting.

This report template is provided to make it easier for PDC’s to write reports. A version can be downloaded from the diocesan website if you wish to type directly into it.

Parish Discernment Committee Report (Template)

Aspirant Name: _____ Meeting Date(s): _____

Presenting Parish and Discernment Committee Member Names:

Background/ Faith Information on Aspirant: Name, spouse's name if applicable, age, time in parish. When did they come to faith? How do they describe their current relationship with the Lord?

Call to Ministry and Current Ministry Involvement: How do they describe their call to ministry, and what is their understanding of that call? How are they currently serving? How do others respond to their call?

Readiness for Ministry. Challenges and Growth Areas:

Concerns and/or Areas for Follow up:

Summary and Recommendation:

Committee Chair Signature

Date

SAMPLE Parish Discernment Committee Report

Aspirant Name: Mr. John Smith Meeting Date(s): 2/10/13, 3/2/13, 4/1/13

Presenting Parish and Discernment Committee Member Names: *Beloved in the Lord Anglican. Lane Anderson, Chair Bud Rogers, Jane Green, Susan Gorfield and Robert Kinn, members*

Background/ Faith Information on Aspirant: *Mr. Smith presents with an active and lively faith, though relatively young in the Lord. He reported that he came to Christ as a junior in college four years ago through the influence of his InterVarsity staff worker. He attended a Baptist church for a year but joined the Anglican church after graduation three years ago. He is active in his congregation and in a small group Bible study. He also notes that he and his wife set aside time each Friday morning for Bible Study and prayer as a couple.*

Mr. Smith and his wife Susan have been married 6 months. She was raised in the Pentecostal tradition and made a profession of faith at age 6. She is supportive of his desire to be ordained but has expressed some concerns about worshipping in the Anglican tradition. She started attending the Anglican church with him when they got married and has found the transition to liturgy "difficult." Both Mr. and Mrs. Smith say this is an area that they are praying about.

Call to Ministry and Current Ministry Involvement: *Mr. Smith said he first felt a call to ordained ministry while serving as a camp counselor for a Christian camp the summer after he became saved. He told his InterVarsity worker when he returned to college in the fall, and his staff person encouraged him to talk to his pastor. Mr. Smith noted that he has been a residential advisor and in "pastoring" type roles even before he became a Christian. Currently he has been teaching a High School Boys Bible study for his church and has maintained ties with his campus fellowship as a part-time volunteer staff member.*

Mr. Smith understands ordained ministry as a call to serve the people of God by encouraging them to deepen in relationship with God and equipping them to call other lost people to salvation. His wife noted that since becoming saved, Mr. Smith has witnessed to his entire extended family and currently meets to discuss Scripture with some of his cousins.

Readiness for Ministry. Challenges and Growth Areas: *Mr. Smith is 25 years old. While he was very enthusiastic about the nature of ministry in a way that seemed potentially naive to the committee, it is our opinion that this may be due simply to his age. We believe that a good church placement could help mature him in this area. There were no flags of a more serious nature. Mr. Smith reports that he is close to his parents and his three older brothers. However, none of them are believers and his father has expressed disappointment that Mr. Smith is not pursuing the family business (a CPA firm). "He doesn't understand this choice, but that is because he does not believe in being led by God." Mr. Smith said he was sad about the current tension but that he and his father have been able to remain on relatively good terms by "agreeing to disagree."*

Mr. Smith clearly has strong intellectual and academic abilities. He graduated summa cum laude with a degree in economics from his undergraduate university. At the recommendation of his rector, he has been taking online courses at Trinity to develop his biblical knowledge.

Concerns and/or Areas for Follow up: *Our only concerns about Mr. Smith's "fitness for ministry" are that he is a relatively young Christian and that he and his wife are not yet on the same page about whether this is the right tradition in which for him to be ordained. He is able to present the gospel message clearly but is less clear about what sets Anglicanism apart from other denominations/ traditions. Other than that, we do believe he has the skills and abilities for ordained ministry.*

We believe he may need to grow in healthy self-assertion and being able to state a clear opinion on potentially difficult issues.

Summary and Recommendation: *We believe that Mr. Smith has several strengths. He is very joyful and talking to him was a delight. He very aware of other people and listened respectfully and attentively when others were speaking. He also has a great sense of humor.*

We do believe that Mr. Smith possesses the gifts and skills for ordained ministry. We also believe he is called. Not only can he articulate a clear calling, but those who have interacted with him in the congregation over the past two years have frequently said, "you should be a pastor!" As a community, we sense he is called.

Committee Chair Signature

Date