



Diocese of the Western Gulf Coast

GUIDE FOR PARISH DISCERNMENT

Preparing the Team

From the early days of the Church, laity affirmed the call to ordained ministry, as did the clergy, thus preventing the clergy orders from becoming a self-selected body. In Acts, we learn that the Apostles asked the laity to, “pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.” This pattern is also found in Paul’s First Letter to Timothy, “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands” and “and let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.” Therefore, your role as lay people is extremely important and sacred.

The Parish Discernment Team is a group of 3-4 lay people who help an Aspirant in the discernment process. Typically, the Aspirant invites one member of the Team, and the Sr. Pastor/Rector invites another member (who is usually the Team leader), and a third may be a member of the Parish Council/Vestry.

The Sr. Pastor/Rector helps the Team prepare, and may convene the initial meeting, but typically does not attend the meetings. The Team leader should report each meeting to the Sr. Pastor/Rector in writing, and he/she will write up the final discernment report to the Parish Council/Vestry.

It is important to note that the Aspirant will receive a Psychological evaluation from a professional Christian counselor. Therefore, the Parish Discernment Team will not need to evaluate the underlying emotional and psychological motivations of the candidate. However, if a serious emotional or psychological question seems to surface, please advise the Sr. Pastor/Rector so that the counselor can address that with the Aspirant.

The Aspirant will already have indicated to the Sr. Pastor/Rector whether he senses a call to ministry as a deacon or as a priest. Your role is to listen and learn about this person, and to give your discernment to the Sr. Pastor/Rector and Parish Council/Vestry.

The Parish Discernment Team must be prepared to recommend one of the following:

1. **Refute:** The person is not called to ordained ministry to the order for which they are seeking (Deacon or Priest)
2. **Affirm with Recommendations:** The person is called to ordained ministry, but needs to continue seminary or other training
3. **Affirm:** The person is called and well prepared for ordained ministry

In any case your letter should supply sufficient written response to validate your findings. The Team should be prepared to support the Aspirant, either during the time of preparation for ordination, or a period of re-direction toward lay ministry. If the person is to be ordained, it is suggested that the Team raise the funds to help them purchase the Alb and Stole for his/her order.

The Parish Discernment Team should meet 3-6 times over a 3-6-month period, for 2 hours per meeting. After each meeting, the Team should assemble without the Aspirant present to prayerfully discuss the gathering, and to prepare for the subsequent meeting.

The focus of this process should be on the following (in this order):

1. **Personal Foundations:** Personal and spiritual history, personal faith experiences
 2. **Character Formation:** including employment, life experiences, and interests
 3. **Spouse support** (if applicable)
 4. **Ministry Formation:** Ministry and church background, including relationships in the parish and leadership abilities
 5. **Spiritual Life:** Gifts, devotional life, passions
 6. **Call to Holy Orders:** Pastoral focus and motivation for seeking ordination
- The tone and tenor of these meetings should be non-adversarial, honest and open, and unrushed. The candidate should be allowed to express viewpoints on ministry and theology, some of which may diverge from the personal viewpoints of the team. So long as these viewpoints are orthodox and within Anglican streams, please be open to hearing their point of view. It is also important to be open to different personality types (e.g. introvert/extravert).

It is not recommended that the Team meet for longer than six months.

If the Team recommends ordination, and the Parish Council/Vestry agrees, please provide the Bishop (copied to the Ministry Formation Administrator) with the Parish Discernment Team's letter and the Parish Council/Vestry's approval.

Thank you for serving in this important ministry. Please feel free to contact the Diocesan House with any questions.

Guide for Discernment Team Meetings

Personal Foundations

By way of introduction tell us about yourself, your family situation, educational background, church experience, etc.

How would you describe your childhood and adolescence? How would you describe your understanding of God in this period of your life?

What was the single most shaping event of your childhood or adolescence?

Describe your relationship and walk with Jesus Christ. At what point did you begin to develop an adult, personal relationship with Jesus Christ? How has that relationship grown and developed over the years?

At what point did you begin to realize that you might be “called” to ordained ministry? Describe how you came to that awareness. Was it through a single event, a series of events or a general growing awareness?

How do you seek to keep your relationship with Jesus Christ and his church vibrant and growing? What have been the obstacles and struggles in your walk with Christ?

What has been the most significant spiritual growth or development you have experienced in the last year?

Character Formation

Describe an experience that softened your heart towards God or others...

Have you ever had a time in which you believed that God was giving you direction? Describe that experience. How was the discernment of others involved in that direction? What was your response?

What practices do you have in place in your life to support living a life of integrity? What practices do you have in place to grow in humility, grace, forgiveness, and peacefulness with others?

What do you think are important relational “boundaries” and how do you maintain those in healthy ways?

Spouse Support

Note: Spouse should only be asked to attend one meeting and can leave following his/her answers. A separate psychological evaluation of the candidate is conducted concurrent with the discernment process. If the screener deems it necessary, a marital assessment is conducted.

Do you believe your spouse is called to ordained ministry? Can you share the reasons you sense that call?

Can you support him/her in their ministry?

Is there anything you would like this Team to know?

Ministry Formation

Give an example of a time when you were given a ministry task and you successfully completed it.

Have you ever had the opportunity to faithfully serve under another person in ministry? What about that was difficult? What about that was easy? How would you describe the experience?

What do you think are the most serious needs of people today? What have you learned about how people today can best be served?

What current ministries are you participating in? What are you learning as you serve there?

Spiritual Life

What do you believe are your spiritual gifts? How have you had an opportunity to use them? Have you ever had others confirm those areas of giftedness?

How would you describe your devotional life? To what degree have you spent time reading and studying the Bible on your own? What portions of Scripture have been particularly meaningful or impactful on your spiritual formation?

In what way do you consider yourself a worshiper? Describe what that means and how that looks to you.

What brings you joy in your life? Have you ever experienced a time in which you felt God took pleasure in you? If so, describe that.

How do you live your life as a learner? How do you put yourself in the position of being formed by others?

What aspects of the spiritual life do you find most important personally?

Call to Holy Orders

Why are you seeking Holy Orders?

To the best of your knowledge, how would you describe the difference between a Deacon and a Priest?

Why do you feel called to be a (Deacon or Priest)?

What has led you to seek ordination with the Anglican Diocese of the Western Gulf Coast?

If you were unable to be ordained with the Anglican Diocese of the Western Gulf Coast what effect would that have on your involvement in ministry?

If you are ordained, where do you see yourself in five years?

