

Pastoral Work in Discernment

Those who are discerning God's call for their lives need companions and trusted guides. The following resources are intended to support clergy and congregational leaders in pastoral work with individuals seeking to discover their call to ministry.

Qualities We Seek in People Who Are Ordained

We seek a diversity of ordained leaders to reflect the breadth of humanity represented in our mission area. They will be mission-focused, entrepreneurial, collaborative, and adaptive. The qualities described here are not exhaustive -- nor are these qualities exclusive to priestly ministry. We do not expect every candidate for the diaconate or priesthood to exhibit all of these qualities, but we do expect them to exhibit most of them. Our discernment process will focus on discerning the presence, or the seeds of presence, of these qualities and abilities in each candidate.

- **Compelling spiritual life and a passion for the Gospel:** There is great spiritual hunger in the culture at large and in our congregations. The Diocese seeks clergy who love God with heart, mind, and soul, and who know Christ and seek to make Christ known. Our clergy will have a vision for the Episcopal Church's ministry and how to guide our people to greater faithfulness and spiritual depth. They will have both a deep reverence for the sacraments at the heart of our liturgical life and a sacramental worldview in which *outward and visible things reveal inward and invisible truths*.
- **Ability to communicate the Gospel in ways that people and communities find engaging and relevant to their lives:** Communication is multi-faceted. Today's clergy need to speak several "languages," both human and technological, from the pulpit, in personal conversation and in social media. They are called to minister in a wide variety of contexts, among all sorts of people. There is a need to reach younger generations—families raising children, teenagers and young adults—as well as a need for those who can serve as an effective spiritual presence among older adults.
- **Spiritual maturity, self-awareness, and authenticity:** The work of the ordained ministry is challenging. It requires a strong spiritual center, physical and mental stamina, healthy personal boundaries, and a willingness to grow and learn alongside others. Effective clergy must be able to persevere in challenging circumstances, recognize their personal growth edges, and be willing to learn new skills and ask for help.
- **Ability to lead, organize, and equip others in ministry:** We seek clergy able to equip others for meaningful Christian lives and vocations, inviting others into the life of Christian community and ministry. This requires community organizing skills and the ability to identify and mentor new leaders.
- **A willingness and ability to be vocationally flexible:** Our churches are in a variety of contexts in a variety of locations with a variety of needs. Our clergy will need to respond to this variety with their own flexibility. In addition, a growing number of congregations require members of the clergy who do not depend on them for their entire livelihood. Thus, we need some priests who can offer their presence and their gifts in a part-time or non-stipendiary capacity, and deacons willing to serve where the need is greatest. Our clergy will demonstrate flexibility in their vision of professional ministry in order to respond to God's call to them and the church in our world.

Especially for Deacons

- **Engagement in the needs of the world:** We seek deacons who are involved in and have a keen awareness of the issues of society. Deacons, in particular, need the ability to integrate the needs of the world with the message of the Gospel, and are willing to engage in advocacy for those in need.

- **Servant leadership:** Deacons assist bishops and priests in the proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments, and need to be willing and able to serve under the direction of others. They must possess the ability to call and equip others to ministry.

Especially for Priests

- **Entrepreneurial leadership:** We seek individuals who are able to take risks and try new things in ministry. Twenty-first century clergy need creativity, the capacity to discern new paths, and the willingness to make mistakes and learn from them. Entrepreneurial leaders see opportunities where others see decline; possibilities where others see insurmountable challenges.
- **The ability to lead congregations through change:** The majority of our congregations face significant adaptive challenges. Our clergy will lead the way in faithfulness to God's call and in the challenging work of change as we adapt to new ways of being the Church.

What is ministry?

Those who are discerning need to understand the ministry of all the baptized, as well as the ordained ministry roles of priests and deacons. Spend time exploring how the Book of Common Prayer articulates the vision of ministry in the Church.

From the Catechism:

Q. Who are the ministers of the Church?

A. The ministers of the Church are the lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.

Q. What is the ministry of the laity?

A. The ministry of the lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.

Q. What is the ministry of a bishop?

A. The ministry of a bishop is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese; to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the whole Church; to proclaim the Word of God; to act in Christ's name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ's ministry.

Q. What is the ministry of a priest or presbyter?

A. The ministry of a priest is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as pastor to the people; to share with the bishop in the overseeing of the Church; to proclaim the Gospel; to administer the sacraments; and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God.

Q. What is the ministry of a deacon?

A. The ministry of a deacon is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a servant of those in need; and to assist bishops and priests in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

Q. What is the duty of all Christians?

A. The duty of all Christians is to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God.

From the Examination in "Ordination of a Priest" (BCP, 531): "As a priest, it will be your task to proclaim by word and deed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to fashion your life in accordance with its precepts. You are to love and serve the people among whom you work, caring alike for young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor. You are to preach, to declare God's forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God's blessing, to share in the administration of Holy Baptism and in the celebration of the mysteries of Christ's Body and Blood, and to perform the other ministrations entrusted to you. In all that you do, you are to nourish Christ's people from the riches of his grace, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come."

From the Examination in "Ordination of a Deacon" (BCP, 543): "As a deacon in the Church, you are to study the Holy Scriptures, to seek nourishment from them, and to model your life upon them. You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live, and work, and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world. You are to assist the bishop and priests in public worship and in the ministration of God's Word and Sacraments, and you are to carry out other duties assigned to you from time to time. At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself."

Scripture Study

Some suggested passages for discerning vocation:

- Exodus 2:11-3:22 (The call of Moses)
- 1 Samuel 3 (The call of Samuel)
- 1 Samuel 16: 1-13 (The anointing of David)
- The Book of Jonah
- Matthew 4:18-22 (The calling of the disciples)
- Luke 1:26-38 (The annunciation)
- Luke 5:1-11 (Simon Peter's calling)
- Acts 1:12-26 (Mathias chosen to replace Judas)
- Acts 8:26-40 (The Ethiopian Eunuch)
- Acts 9:1-19 (Saul's conversion)
- Romans 12:1-8 (The new life in Christ)
- 1 Corinthians 12-13 (Spiritual gifts and the Gift of Love)
- Ephesians 4:11-16 (Body of Christ)

Spiritual Autobiography

A spiritual autobiography is the story of significant events, people, and places that have influenced your relationship with God. Those who are discerning a call to ministry will find the exercise of writing a spiritual autobiography to provide insight into God's activity in one's life. A priest or spiritual companion can assist by asking clarifying questions. For the purposes of the Bishop, Discernment Committee, and Commission on Ministry, the autobiography should be approximately 2000 words.

As you write your autobiography, consider these helpful prompts:

- What are your early memories of the role of religion or spirituality in your life?
- How has your understanding or experience of God changed in your lifetime?
- What incidents or experiences have been turning points in your spiritual journey?
- What have been your most profound religious experiences? Where have you felt God's presence in your life?
- When have you felt God's absence in your life? Or, when have you turned away from God?
- What are the personal practices that have supported your journey?
- Who are the people who have influenced your faith?
- How have you experienced God's call?

Discerning Questions

When a course of action seems to present itself through dreams, prayer, or synchronicity, how do we know if it is indeed Divine Will?

The following questions applied separately may not give us a definitive answer, but applied collectively they can help determine who or what is truly calling us to action. They may help us discern God's will.

1. Is it harmful? God's will is man and woman's well-being. Do I feel free or compelled? The Spirit is not compulsive; we have a choice. A sense of urgency may signal neurotic compulsion, rather than freedom of choice in God.
2. Does the course of action take into account the obvious facts of my situation? Does it acknowledge my other responsibilities? Do circumstances seem to be shifting of their own accord to accommodate this course of action?
3. Does the course of action feel natural? Do I feel "at home" with it? Can I look back at my life to date and see this new development as a positive, natural extension of my life's journey? Does it seem to "fit"?
4. In retrospect, what have been the fruits of my choice? If we experience consistent failure or disappointment in a course of action, perhaps our true gifts lie elsewhere.
5. Even though individuation sometimes means going against mainstream culture, is this a decision I can put before the broader community, at least for discussion? If no one in my Christian community can support my course of action, I may need to re-think it.
6. Is the message persistent? Am I hearing it from a number of sources?
7. Is the action required of me, or of other persons? God's will for our lives usually requires us to do our own footwork.
8. Do I seem to be spending an inordinate amount of time and thought "building a case" for this course of action? Could I be rationalizing some compulsive behavior?
9. Am I willing to take "no" for an answer? Do I feel like everything depends on this particular course of action being carried out? Or that this is the only "right" way?
10. As I live out this course of action, am I growing in the love of Christ? Is the world around me becoming brighter and more colorful? Am I better able to communicate with more people? Or has my world become more dark and narrow, my own place in it more cut-off and isolated?
11. Do I have a growing sense of connectedness to God's love in Christ?
12. Am I growing in my ability to show this love to others?
13. The most important thing in discernment is seeking to live out the love of God in Christ Jesus. Keep it central.

Written by Trinity Cathedral Journey Group, including some ideas from To Pray to Grow (Flora Slosson Wuellner), On Being a Christian (Hans Kung), and Journey Group suggestions

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Practice

Good discernment includes active ministry. As a congregational leader, look for opportunities for an aspirant to practice leadership and service within the Church. Good opportunities for testing out one's call may include various sacramental or liturgical roles, teaching classes, organizing others in outreach, and extending pastoral care. Encourage those who are discerning to try various leadership roles and look for growing opportunities. Spend time reflecting on leadership experiences.

Other Companions

Spiritual Directors and Therapists can also be good companions in discernment. Consider making referrals that will further support individual growth.