

**DISCERNMENT FOR HOLY ORDERS  
IN THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA**

*Responding to God's Call:  
First Steps*



**The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania  
COMMISSION ON MINISTRY**

*This document has been designed to support the discernment process in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. This discernment process was created by the Commission on Ministry, under the direction of the Rt. Rev'd Daniel G. P. Gutierrez. Materials for this process were produced by members of the Commission, in consultation with the Bishop, and include information from guides published by other dioceses, including The Episcopal Church in Minnesota, The Episcopal Diocese of New York, The Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande, and The Episcopal Diocese of Washington.*

November 2017



## Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

*Then the Lord said: Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord; the Lord will pass by. There was a strong and violent wind rending the mountains and crushing rocks before the Lord-but the Lord was not in the wind, after the wind, an earthquake-but the Lord was not in the earthquake; after the earthquake, fire-but the Lord was not in the fire; after the fire, a light silent sound. 1 Kings 19:11-12*

My brothers and sisters,

I greet you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and offer my welcome as you discern a call to ministry in the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania.

This is a sacred time of seeking, reflection, and prayer. Discerning a call to ministry is filled with both certainty and uncertainty; speaking and listening; action and contemplation. It is a time of hope grounded in the transformative power of Jesus Christ. Throughout each step of your holy journey, know that we are with you.

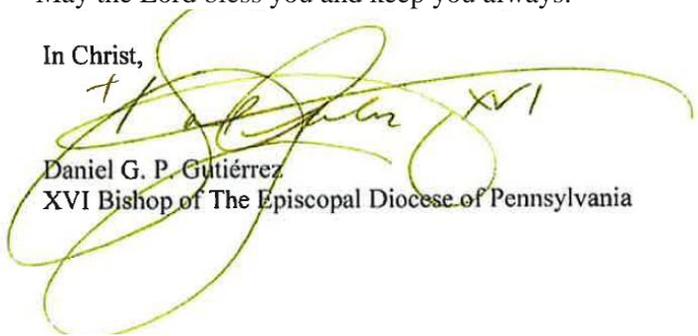
Take this time to discern where God is calling you to serve. Listen intently to that light, silent sound. Do not rush the process, because it will unfold in new and unexpected ways. Dedicate yourself to learning and actively following the process for discernment in our Diocese. Open yourself to learning the gifts and responsibilities of each order of ministry. Each has its own significant and distinct charisms, and this is a time to discover where you are called. You may be called to serve God and God's beloved through dynamic lay ministry, the pioneer spirit of the diaconate or the shepherding of the priesthood.

As you move forward, take time to sit in the sacred presence of our Lord. Pray, read scripture, seek forgiveness through reconciliation of a penitent, and receive the Holy Eucharist. I also encourage you to have open conversations with your family, members of your church, experienced clergy, your spiritual director, and friends. Be mindful and most importantly - enjoy this time, because no matter where it leads, God is with you.

If you have any questions or just need a boost, please reach out to us. Above all, know that I am praying for you.

May the Lord bless you and keep you always.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Daniel G. P. Gutiérrez XVI".  
Daniel G. P. Gutiérrez  
XVI Bishop of The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

## First Steps

*The next day John again as standing with two of his disciples,  
and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed,*

*“Look, here is the Lamb of God!”*

*The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.*

*When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them,*

*“What are you looking for?”*

*They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?”*

*He said to them, “Come and see.”*

John 1:35-39a

*Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to thee, so guide our minds,  
so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly thine, utterly dedicated unto thee;  
and then use us, we pray thee, as thou wilt, and always to thy glory and the welfare of thy people;  
through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer, p. 832, *A Prayer of Self-Dedication*

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“Come and see.” It is the simplest invitation that Jesus offers to the disciples. If you are curious about me, if you are drawn to me, if you find yourself wondering who I am and what I might have to say to you, then I invite you to do just one, simple thing. Come and see. Take that first step in faith into the heart of discipleship. This packet is designed for those who have decided to take that first step – to come to this process of discernment and to see where Christ might be calling them to serve the Church. This first step requires courage and humility, patience and perseverance. It is a step out in true faith, not knowing where the process will lead, but knowing that wherever you ultimately find yourself, God will be present. The Diocese of Pennsylvania is grateful to you for bringing yourself to this process of holy discernment. May this time be filled with the movement of the Holy Spirit, and may God bless you on your journey.

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### *What is discernment?*

The term discernment is used in two ways. In its broadest sense, it is a process of determining God’s calling in one’s life. This can apply when one is deciding whether to accept a promotion, to enter into marriage, or to move to a new city. These decisions can be made on purely practical bases, but as Christians we ask for God to guide us so that we can live into a life and ministry that God wills for us.

The word discernment is also used to talk about the specific question of entering into Holy Orders. Historically in our diocese, the formal process of discernment was only used for those considering

the priesthood and the diaconate. This is changing in our new process to include opportunities for discernment for those who are prayerfully considering a lay ministry within the Church.

The process of discernment involves the individual, the community, and the Holy Spirit. It is the process of work, thought, prayer, and listening which makes possible the recognition and understanding of the Spirit's call to an individual (or group). Discernment is a matter of identifying the gifts of a faithful individual that are suited to a particular form of ministry. Each of us has a duty to be in a lifelong process of discerning the ministries through which we may use our gifts in service to God.

Call is an essential part of all ministry in the Church. In becoming members of the Body of Christ in baptism, all are covenanted through our baptismal promises. Discernment is that ongoing process whereby we attempt to determine how we will respond to this call.

Relationship with God and with community is necessary to discern fully God's call. God calls persons, congregations, communities, and the Church continually to discern their call to mission. Discernment must be entered into with humility, care, and authenticity by all involved.

All baptized persons are called to ministry in their life. A call to ordained ministry is not a "better call." But when one's call seems to be toward Holy Orders, the Church has a great responsibility to participate in the discernment process. This includes prayerfully joining in seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, supporting the individual in further exploration of the call, and considering the Individual's gifts in the context of the needs of the Church. This work of discernment will first be carried out locally, but eventually a call to ordained ministry involves a wider circle of concerned persons within the diocese continuing the work begun at the local level.

*How do you know if it is time to begin formal discernment in the diocese?*

The recognition of a call may begin with the Individual's sense of being drawn into a new ministry, or it may emerge from the community's identification of a person's gifts for a particular ministry. Exploration of a call may lead to a deeper sense of vocation in secular employment, to community service, to specific ministries within the Church, or to consideration of ordination. Discernment is a prayerful attempt, within the scope of human weakness and limitation, to identify a pathway to meeting God's will for the Individual, the community, and the Church.

Vocational discernment begins and continues with listening for the Holy Spirit, starting with the Individual (or seeker) and extending into ever-widening communities of discernment. The essential question of discernment is, "What is God calling me to do?" – a question that seeks to understand how the seeker's gifts best serve the world through Christ. It is a question that must be answered in community and by community. The community seeks to affirm a seeker's gifts by listening for the Holy Spirit in discernment for Church leadership.

*Who can pursue ordination as an Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Pennsylvania?*

Any person may pursue ordination to the priesthood, including a person who has been ordained in another faith tradition, if that person has been a confirmed adult communicant in good standing of The Episcopal Church for one year and is already in possession of a baccalaureate degree.

*Who can pursue ordination as an Episcopal deacon in the Diocese of Pennsylvania?*

Any person may pursue ordination to the diaconate, including a person who has been ordained in another faith tradition, if that person has been a confirmed adult communicant in good standing of The Episcopal Church for one year.

*What are the first steps for someone discerning a call to ordained ministry in The Episcopal Church?*

Recognition of a potential call to ministry can happen in many ways. Perhaps a parish priest will approach someone in his or her congregation to suggest that he or she might be called to be a deacon or a priest. A fellow parishioner might mention that he or she sees the gifts for ordained ministry in a particular person. Or an individual may begin to sense a stirring of the Holy Spirit in his or her own life. The first step for the Individual who is sensing this kind of a call is to approach his or her Sponsoring Priest to discuss this potential call to ordained ministry. The phrase “Sponsoring Priest” refers to the rector or priest-in-charge of that Individual’s faith community. If the Individual’s community has no rector or priest-in-charge, the Individual should speak with the rector’s warden. This person will then reach out to the Canon for Transition Ministry, who will connect the Individual to another priest through the local deanery.

At this point, several things are set into motion:

- The Sponsoring Priest commits to walk with the Individual through prayer and conversation over a period of several meetings.
- The Sponsoring Priest recommends the Individual begin attending the regular meetings of the diocesan Regional Discernment Group. These groups are intended to aid in discernment for people in all different places in their journey, including those who are discerning lay and ordained ministries. The Individual and his or her Sponsoring Priest should discuss the work of this Regional Discernment Group in their ongoing conversations. How is the group helping to clarify a call? What challenges is the group presenting to the Individual? What comfort does it provide?
- The Sponsoring Priest may also recommend that the Individual meet with another person in the diocese – lay or ordained – who is gifted in the practice of discernment and who can serve as a kind of additional vocational counselor during this time. These conversations are not meant to replace the Individual’s discernment with the Sponsoring Priest but to enhance it.

- If the Individual is sensing a call particularly to the diaconate, the Sponsoring Priest may also recommend that the Individual speak with the Bishop's Designee for the Diaconate.

If, after several months of these prayerful conversations and engagement by the Individual in a Regional Discernment Group, the Sponsoring Priest determines that there is sufficient evidence of a call to warrant doing so, he or she, along with the Individual, reaches out to the diocese.

- The Sponsoring Priest contacts the Canon for Transition Ministry to indicate that an Individual is interested in discerning for Holy Orders and confirms that this Individual has been confirmed in The Episcopal Church for at least one year and also has been an engaged, active participant in the sponsoring faith community for at least a year.
- The Canon for Transition Ministry works with the Chair of the Commission on Ministry (COM) to find a representative of the COM to serve as a liaison with the Sponsoring Priest and the Individual. This liaison meets in person with the Sponsoring Priest, the Individual, and the Canon for Transition Ministry to review the entire process of discernment and formation, including
  - reviewing the document *The Qualities We Seek in Our Ordained Leaders*
  - assuring the Individual's commitment to engage in a relationship with a spiritual director, beginning immediately, and providing a list of spiritual directors in the diocese
  - defining the numerous roles involved in the process for the Individual, Sponsoring Priest, sponsoring faith community (including the Parish Discernment Group), COM, Standing Committee, Canon for Transition Ministry, and the Bishop
  - discussing what will, in this process, become the two primary components of discernment:
    - *discernment in the local community* (work to be done within the Individual's faith community, including work with the Sponsoring Priest and a Parish Discernment Group) and
    - *discernment in the diocesan community* (work to be done within the diocese, including work with the COM at the Bishop's Discernment Retreat)
- After this prayerful conversation, the Sponsoring Priest and the Individual work together to form a Parish Discernment Group (PDG) to begin discernment in the sponsoring faith community.

*What does discernment in the local community look like?*

### **The Parish Discernment Group**

- The Sponsoring Priest and the Individual will work together to invite people from the sponsoring faith community to be members of the PDG. The PDG should consist of
  - The Individual in discernment
  - The Companion – a member of the faith community who agrees to walk with the Individual through the discernment process, serving as spiritual friend and guide.

This person should be one who can both support and challenge the Individual and therefore needs to be spiritually mature and self-aware. The Companion should have been a member of the faith community for at least one year.

- A vestry member – this person represents the formal lay leadership of the parish and will be responsible for reporting back to the vestry, along with the Sponsoring Priest, when their approval is required.
  - Two or three members of the faith community – these members should represent the breadth and diversity of the community itself. If possible, they should include members who know the Individual as well as those who do not.
  - Two diocesan discernment representatives – these members come from the diocesan discernment team, a group of ministers – lay and ordained – who have a charism for spiritual discernment, as well as a deep knowledge of the theological grounding and charism of each order. These representatives, who have been raised up and trained by the diocese, will be appointed by the Canon for Transition Ministry in consultation with the COM.
- The PDG will meet a total of nine times, meeting no more often than every two weeks. The hope is that these meetings will be concluded in between five and nine months. At least two hours should be allowed for each meeting. As the first of the two Bishop’s Discernment Retreats occurs in January, it is best if the cycle of meetings ends in time for the Individual to be nominated by his or her Sponsoring Priest (including the vestry endorsement) by September 30. However, because considerable work is involved in preparing for each PDG meeting, and because true discernment needs space for prayer and the moving of the Holy Spirit, the PDG should not rush their work.
  - It is the job of the PDG to aid the Individual in clarifying his or her call. Is this a call to the priesthood or the diaconate? Or is this a strong call to formal lay ministry? Through a series of opportunities for intense questioning and prayer, the PDG and the Individual should come to a mutual decision about the Individual’s call. At this point, the Individual should be prepared to formally claim a call to a particular order of ministry (lay, diaconal, priestly). Both the PDG and the Individual will produce documents outlining their experiences in the group and articulating their sense of the call that is present.
  - If the PDG determines that the Individual does not have a call to ordained ministry, the Sponsoring Priest will work with the Individual to connect with the Regional Discernment Group for further discernment. Where is the call to serve? Where is the Individual’s “yes”?
  - The PDG should stay in place, praying and supporting the Individual, until the Individual has or has not been granted postulancy. If the Individual is not granted postulancy following the Bishop’s Discernment Retreat, the PDG should be prepared to meet with him or her in order to provide support and care.

### **The Congregational Leadership Project**

- Depending upon the gifts of the Individual and his or her needs for development, as well as the needs of the faith community, the Sponsoring Priest works with the Individual to decide upon a congregational leadership project. These are experiential projects that explore various dimensions of leadership in the Church. These projects should be structured in a way that

ensures that there are clear goals and outcomes, a comprehensive and detailed action plan, and a means for evaluation.

- Possible leadership categories include:
  - Pastoral care
  - Administration
  - Preaching
  - Teaching
  - Catechesis
  - Formation
  - Liturgy
  - Social Justice
  - Outreach
  - Evangelism
  - Communication
- There may be other categories for these projects that would be appropriate for particular Individuals and their faith communities. Projects, though, should be designed to help the Individual experience leadership in the parish in a new way, responding to a need or passion in a new area of ministry.
- Following the completion of the congregational leadership project, the Individual and the Sponsoring Priest should reflect on the outcomes and learnings from the project. Potential questions for discussion include:
  - What was the project/goals/etc.?
  - How did the Individual display leadership in this project?
  - What gifts were revealed?
  - What growing edges were revealed?
  - How would this project have been the same or different if the Individual were a priest? A deacon? A Licensed Lay Minister?
- The Sponsoring Priest should include a brief report of the Individual's work with this leadership project in his or her nomination letter to the Bishop (see next bullet point). This project will also be a point of conversation for the Individual and his or her PDG.

### **Concluding Formal Discernment in Context**

- If the Sponsoring Priest and the PDG discern that the Individual is called to be a deacon or priest, the Sponsoring Priest submits a letter formally nominating the Individual for Diocesan Discernment. This letter must include a promise that the congregation will contribute financially to the education and formation of this Individual and also that it will involve itself in the Individual's formation for ordination. This letter should be signed by two-thirds of the Vestry or comparable body as well as by the Sponsoring Priest. (Sponsoring Priests may also use the diocesan vestry nomination form, provided by the Canon for Transition Ministry). The Sponsoring Priest then forwards all pertinent information and documentation to the diocese, including the following:
  - the report of the PDG
  - all papers/projects produced by the Individual during the PDG process

- If the Bishop accepts the report of the sponsoring parish and the PDG, the Canon for Transition Ministry helps the Individual to complete three evaluations:
  - a psychological evaluation, including personality tests and cognitive testing
  - a medical examination
  - an evaluation of the Individual's personal and family finances
- Once these evaluations are completed, the Bishop and his or her staff will review the pertinent information. If the evaluations reveal that the Individual is in good physical, mental, and financial health and has the capacity in all of those areas for a healthy engagement with the remainder of the discernment process, the Bishop will then invite the Individual to attend the first of two Bishop's Discernment Retreats. At this point, the Individual becomes a Nominee.
- Following invitation to the discernment retreats, the Canon for Transition Ministry will be in touch with the Nominee to acquire all canonically required paperwork. This paperwork will be provided to the COM as a part of the Nominee's discernment packet along with some parts of the psychological, medical, and financial reports.

*What does discernment in community look like?*

- The Bishop's Discernment Retreats are held on a Friday evening and most of a Saturday, once in January and once in February each year. They are staffed by the Bishop and members of the COM. If the COM discerns that the Nominee has a vocation to the ordained diaconate or priesthood and the Bishop concurs, the Bishop extends an invitation to the Nominee to accept status as a Postulant for Holy Orders. If the COM discerns that the Nominee has a call to leadership in lay ministry, the COM refers the Nominee back to the Sponsoring Priest and PDG for support and further discernment.
- Discernment is a very serious matter and not to be undertaken lightly. A Nominee will be issued an invitation to accept status as a Postulant only if a number of people hear the Holy Spirit's affirmation that a call is present. These people include the Nominee him or herself, the Nominee's Sponsoring Priest, the Nominee's PDG, the COM, and the Bishop. The process is intended to be strenuous, and admission as a Postulant is not guaranteed. However, if the Nominee is granted postulancy, the Bishop and the COM are committed to that person's formation and to supporting that person in becoming the best deacon or priest he or she can be.

*What happens once a person is made a Postulant?*

**Early Postulancy**

- Once the Nominee is made a Postulant, he or she enters under the care of the Commission on Ministry and prepares to enter formation.
- Those who are Postulants for the Diaconate will consult with the Bishop to mutually determine how this formation will take place. Generally, he or she will begin the formal

formation process offered by the Diocese of Pennsylvania, usually in the fall of the year in which he or she accepted the invitation to become a Postulant.

- Those who are Postulants for the Priesthood will consult with the Bishop to mutually determine the theological institution where this formation will take place. The COM also may have made a recommendation to this effect following the Bishop's Discernment Retreat. Generally, the Postulant will matriculate in the fall of the year he or she accepts appointment as a Postulant.
- The Postulant will be assigned a Shepherd from the COM. This person will be a contact and liaison during the Postulant's formation process. The Shepherd will contact the Postulant early in his or her postulancy to establish a connection and to discuss the workings of this relationship. The Shepherd/Postulant relationship is intended to help with formation and accountability for both the Postulant and the COM.

## Checklist for Nomination to Bishop's Discernment Retreat

*The following documents are due to the Canon for Transition Ministry by September 30.*

- Letter of nomination from the Sponsoring Priest signed by two-thirds of the vestry (or with separate Vestry Endorsement Form). This letter need include the community of faith's commitment to
  - pledge to contribute financial to the Individual's formation
  - involve itself in the Nominee's preparation for ordination
  
- Letter to Bishop from the Individual, accepting this nomination and including the following information:
  - Full name and date of birth
  - Length of time resident in the Diocese
  - Evidence of Baptism and Confirmation
  - Whether an application has been made previously for postulancy of the person has been nominated in any other diocese
  - A description of the process of discernment by which the Nominee has been identified for ordination
  - The level of education attained and, if any, the degrees earned and areas of specialization

*The following documents are due to the Canon for Transition Ministry by November 30.*

- "Application for Postulancy" form
- Behavior Screening Questionnaire
- Report from Psychological Evaluation
- Report from Medical Evaluation
- Financial Statement
- Academic Transcripts (all)
- Background Check Clearance
- Parish Discernment Group Report
- All PDG written work
- Two recent photographs