

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

*Responding to God's Call:
The Path to Ordination for the Diaconate*



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.

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“As they were going along the road, someone said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’ To another he said, ‘Follow me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ Another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.’ Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’” Luke 9:57-62

My brothers and sisters,

You are now beginning the next stage of your journey. Throughout sacred scripture, Jesus called people to follow Him. As a community of hope, we will work together to discern the next stages of your call to “follow Him.” This is a moving, difficult, and beautiful road. Hold these next steps with care. Be mindful of the people and moments; they are actively forming your ministry.

Always remember that you are not in control. Jesus has laid out a path before you and asks us to follow. But Jesus does not give a detailed description of ministerial programs, speak of his self-importance, or require perfection as a prerequisite for service. He simply says, “Follow me”.

Ordained ministry is a prayerful vocation. It is not about status, title, wearing a collar or job security. It is about letting go of those concerns; it is about becoming smaller, so Jesus can become larger. Following Him is more than ordained ministry; it about emptying yourself so that you might give your life for the next person that walks through your door.

During this next stage, please listen, ask questions, and then listen. Pray, pray often and then pray some more. Again, do not worry about your self-imposed plans or deadlines; just ask, listen, serve, and pray. You are being called for transformative and inspirational work in the name of Jesus Christ. I encourage you to be kind, patient and forgiving. These are essential to ordained ministry.

As you progress in this journey, I urge you to ground yourself in Jesus Christ. Rededicate yourself to this holy work so that every word and action may proclaim the Good News. That is the core of ministry, and it is why you have chosen to turn your life over and follow Him as your Lord and Savior. We walk this path, because it leads to the New Heaven and New Earth that was promised at the end of the Book of Revelation.

Know that You are in my daily prayers as you journey onward and that we are always here for you.

In Christ,


Daniel G. P. Gutiérrez
XVI Bishop of The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

An Overview of the Process from Postulancy through Ordination

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,
one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all,
who is above all and through all and in all.*

Ephesians 4:4-6

*Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favor,
and further us with thy continual help;
that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee,
we may glorify thy holy Name,
and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer, p. 832, *For Guidance*

Welcome to the ordination process in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. God has begun a good work in you, and we in the diocese are looking forward to sharing this profound journey with you. The following is intended to help you navigate the pathway towards ordination as a deacon. Please know that the Bishop, the Canon for Transition, and the Commission on Ministry are present for you at each step in this process. We are here to pray for you, to support you, and to celebrate with you.

May God continue to bless you along this journey.

What happens once a person is made a Postulant?

Early Postulancy

Once you are made a Postulant, you enter under the care of the Commission on Ministry (COM) and prepare 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, you will begin the formal formation process offered by the Diocese of Pennsylvania, usually in the fall of the year in which you accept the invitation to become a Postulant. Each Postulant in this formation process will be expected to complete a social service placement, a field education placement, and one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education. All of these placements will be made in consultation with the Bishop.

During this time, you will be assigned a Shepherd from the COM. This person will be a contact and liaison during your formation process. The Shepherd will contact you early in his or her postulancy to establish a connection with you and to discuss the workings of your relationship. The Shepherd/Postulant relationship is intended to help with formation and accountability for both you and the COM. The Shepherd is your primary connection to the COM between formal meetings,

which is vitally important both to you and to the COM. However, this does not mean that your Shepherd is responsible for explaining the questions or decisions of the COM or the diocese, nor is he or she responsible for fixing any difficulties that may arise. He or she is there to be a friend, a listening ear, and perhaps an advisor, but he or she is always working alongside others in the diocese to help you have a healthy, holy process of formation. Your shepherd will understand that conversations of the COM are always confidential, and neither your information nor the information of those on the Commission will be shared without permission. And, most importantly, your shepherd will understand the importance of holding you and your continuing discernment and formation in their prayers.

Ember Day Letters

You are required by the canons of the church to send Ember Day letters four times a year to the Bishop. The Ember Days in the Church calendar are the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday following:

- the third Sunday of Advent,
- the first Sunday in Lent,
- the Day of Pentecost,
- and the Sunday closest to September 14 (Proper 19).

Ember Day letters should be promptly received by the Bishop during these weeks.

These Ember Day letters are, according to the national canons, to include reflections on the Postulant's "academic, diaconal, human, spiritual, and practical development." They continue through Postulancy and Candidacy.

Ember Day letters are a personal, private, pastoral communication between you and the Bishop and as such are not read by the COM or anyone else in the diocese. You are encouraged to take full advantage of this opportunity to develop a deep pastoral relationship with your Bishop. If there are changes happening in your personal life, such as an engagement, a pregnancy, a spouse's change of employment, please let your Bishop know! As with anything in this process, our hope is that these Ember Day letters will be much more than a perfunctory report on your work in formation. Bring all of yourself to these letters, and use your Bishop for council, feedback, and prayer.

Relationship with the Standing Committee (SC)

The Standing Committee has a canonical obligation to review the work of Postulants and Candidates before they move along in the process towards ordination. Members of the Standing Committee are responsible for making sure the formation of those in the process is progressing in a healthy and effective way. The Standing Committee executes this obligation in several ways. First, two members of the Standing Committee are selected each year to serve on the Commission on Ministry. These two individuals are full members of the COM, participating in interviews and discussions and contributing to the overall discernment of the COM. In addition to this, the entire Standing Committee reviews all documentation provided by the diocese relating to the formation of

Postulants and Candidates. The Standing Committee also receives written recommendations from the COM following their interviews about areas of formation that may need attention or adjustment.

The Standing Committee also gathers yearly at the annual diocesan convention with all of the people who are in the process in order to meet them in person and to come to know you more fully than they can by simply reading your file. These gatherings are an important part of your participation in the life of this diocese, and you are highly encouraged to attend.

Interviews for Candidacy

Interviews for Candidacy take place during the second year of your formation process. In order to apply for Candidacy, you should, after speaking with the Canon for Transition Ministry, write a letter to the Bishop which includes:

- a formal request to be granted Candidacy
- the date of your admission to Postulancy (from the Bishop's original letter)
- a letter of support by your sponsoring parish, which needs to include the vestry endorsement form, to be signed by two-thirds of the vestry

Once this application is received, you will be invited to a Candidacy interview with the COM. This interview will provide a chance for the COM to check in with you about your spiritual, emotional, and academic progress in this time of formation.

Following these interviews, the COM will write a letter to the Bishop with its recommendation about whether or not you be made a Candidate. The COM may

- recommend you be made a Candidate. This means that the COM sees strong progress in you and recommends wholeheartedly that you be made a Candidate. This endorsement may also come with some recommendations about work that you could do to enhance your formation even further, recommendations that will also be shared with the SC as material for their ongoing conversations with you.
- recommend that you remain in the process but wait to be made a Candidate. This would be in the case where the COM has some serious concerns about what has taken place during the first part of your formation, or about your spiritual or emotional health. If the COM asks you to wait before being made a Candidate, it will make specific recommendations to the Bishop about what it would like to see you do to address these concerns.
- recommend that you not be made a Candidate and be removed from the process. This would only happen in the case of critically serious concerns about your overall physical, mental, or spiritual health or the health of your vocation. While rare, this is a possibility, although the COM is committed to creating a process of formation where each Postulant has the support he or she needs to be successful in this process of formation. The process is designed so that any grave concerns such as these would be addressed in multiple contexts, and would not likely be the result of only one interview.

Final Academic Evaluation

For those who are in formation for the diaconate, this final evaluation takes the form of the preparation of a portfolio which gathers together work from all three years of the formation process. Portfolios are to evaluate your proficiency in the five canonical areas:

- The Holy Scriptures, theology, and the tradition of the Church
- Diakonia and the diaconate
- Human awareness and understanding
- Spiritual development and discipline
- Practical training and experience

Portfolios are reviewed by a team of people from the diocese, appointed by the Bishop's Designee on the Diaconate, and including the COM Shepherd. You will receive more information from the Bishop's Designee on the Diaconate about how these portfolios are to be created and how they will be evaluated.

Pre-Ordination Interviews

Pre-Ordination interviews take place in the final months before your ordination. In order to apply for ordination, you should, after speaking with the Canon for Transition Ministry, write a letter to the Bishop which includes:

- a formal request to be ordained
- the date of the admission to Postulancy and Candidacy
- a letter of support by your sponsoring parish, which needs to include the vestry endorsement form, to be signed by two-thirds of the vestry

These interviews provide a chance to discuss the final evaluations of your academic work.

Following these interviews, the COM will write a letter to the Bishop with its recommendation about whether or not you be ordained. Like with the application for Candidacy, in response to this interview, the COM may

- recommend you for ordination. This means that the COM sees strong progress you and recommends wholeheartedly that you be ordained. This endorsement may also come with some recommendations about work you could do to enhance your formation even further.
- recommend that you remain in the process but wait to be ordained. This would be in the case where the COM has some serious concerns about what has taken place during the first part of your formation, or about your spiritual or emotional health. If the COM asks you to wait before ordination, it will make specific recommendations to the Bishop about what it would like to see you do to address these concerns.
- recommend that you not be ordained and be removed from the process. This would only happen in the case of critically serious concerns about the your overall physical, mental, or spiritual health or the health of your vocation. While rare, this is a possibility, although the COM is committed to creating a process of formation where each Candidate has the support he or she needs to be successful in this process of formation. The process is designed so that

any grave concerns such as these would be addressed in multiple contexts, and would not likely be the result of only one interview.

Some Helpful Tips about the Path to Ordination

1. *Be communicative.* In other words, remember your Bishop! Keep the Bishop informed of any major life events as soon as you become aware of them, including pregnancy, a change in your job or your spouse or partner's, or any health or relationship difficulties. Most things can be communicated to the Bishop via your Ember Day Letters, but if you are discerning a vocation to marriage and are planning to become engaged, please make an appointment with the Bishop to speak with him about this happy news in person. The same is true if you and your spouse are facing marital challenges or are contemplating separation or divorce.

You should also communicate regularly with the Sponsoring Priest of your home parish. Remember, he or she will need to formally recommend you both for Candidacy and for ordination, so it's good to keep the lines of communication open throughout your formation process.

And one last reminder about communication – don't underestimate the importance of being in touch often with the people from the diocese who are involved in your process with you. Your COM Shepherd and the Canon for Transition Ministry especially need to hear from you in order to advocate for you as you go through this process. This is especially true if you find that you are facing a particular problem or obstacles – those moments are the time to reach out, not to try to hide the problem or fix it on your own.

2. *Be organized.* Make and keep copies of all the documents and paperwork of your process, both what you send into the Canon for Transition Ministry and what you receive from the offices of the diocese or other institutions and advisors. Start a file now for all of these materials and keep a written record of what steps you have completed in the process and when.
3. *Be available.* Please update us with any changes in address or contact information, even if the change is temporary.
4. *Be a good planner.* Be aware of what steps in the discernment process are coming up and start well in advance of deadlines in order to meet all the requirements.
5. *Be a careful scheduler.* Set aside time every year for the Standing Committee gatherings, conventions, and ordinations of the diocese so that you can be in attendance. Mark down their specific dates as you get them and begin to plan any travel early.
6. *Be a volunteer.* You may be asked to help out at various diocesan events – say yes! We appreciate the ways you are already serving the Church in this diocese and we hope that you will share what you are learning with us when appropriate.
7. *Be patient.* The process to ordination is a long journey, and it can be easy to become anxious or upset at different times during your experience. Know that you are not on this journey

alone! Christ, of course, travels with you and will be with you always, even to the end of the age. And the community of the Diocese of Pennsylvania is here to support you and to help shape this process so that it helps you to become the deacon God has created you to be.

8. *Be a person of prayer.* Remember that it is your life of prayer that helped you to hear God's call in your life in the first place, and it is your life of prayer that will continue to sustain you in this journey. Keep up with spiritual direction, praying the office, and regular worship, either in your field education site or elsewhere. Set holy habits for yourself now, before ordination, so that they can continue when you begin to live out your ministry as a deacon in God's holy Church.

Checklist for Postulancy

<i>Requirement</i>	<i>Deadline</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Meet with Bishop regarding formation	April 1
<input type="checkbox"/> Ember Day letter	June
<input type="checkbox"/> Ember Day letter	September
<input type="checkbox"/> Attend Diocesan Convention and Standing Committee Gathering	November
<input type="checkbox"/> Ember Day letter	December
<input type="checkbox"/> Ember Day letter	March
<input type="checkbox"/> Ember Day letter	June
<input type="checkbox"/> Ember Day letter	September
<input type="checkbox"/> Attend Diocesan Convention and Standing Committee Gathering	November
<input type="checkbox"/> Ember Day letter	December
<input type="checkbox"/> Ember Day letter	March
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete one year of a social service placement	
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education	
<input type="checkbox"/> Meet with Standing Committee at annual diocesan convention (yearly)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Communicate with COM Shepherd (at least quarterly)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Meet with your spiritual director (regularly)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue a regular discipline of prayer	
<input type="checkbox"/> Begin diaconal formation training	

Checklist for Application for Candidacy

All documents are due to the Canon for Transition Ministry by September 15.

Requirement

- Letter to Bishop, requesting Candidacy
(including the date you were granted postulancy)
- Letter of support from your Sponsoring Priest
(with vestry endorsement form signed by two-thirds of the vestry)
- Social Service Placement Evaluations
- CPE Evaluations
- Formation Director Evaluation

Checklist for Candidacy

<i>Requirement</i>	<i>Deadline</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Attend meeting with Commission on Ministry	November
<input type="checkbox"/> Attend Diocesan Convention and Standing Committee Gathering	November
<input type="checkbox"/> Ember Day letter	December
<input type="checkbox"/> Ember Day letter	March
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete Formation Evaluation Portfolio	March 1
<input type="checkbox"/> Update background check paperwork, medical exam, and psychological evaluation (if applicable)	March 1
<input type="checkbox"/> Ember Day letter	March
<input type="checkbox"/> Ember Day letter	June
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete one year of field education	
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete Safe Church, Anti-Racism, Mandatory Reporter, and Title IV Training	
<input type="checkbox"/> Meet with Standing Committee at annual diocesan convention (yearly)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Communicate with COM Shepherd (at least quarterly)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Meet with your spiritual director (regularly)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue a regular discipline of prayer	
<input type="checkbox"/> Begin seminary training (if applicable)	

Checklist for Application for Ordination (Diaconate)

All documents are due to the Canon for Transition Ministry by March 1.

Requirement

- Letter to Bishop, requesting Candidacy
(including the dates you were granted postulancy and Candidacy)
- Letter of support from your Sponsoring Priest
(with vestry endorsement form signed by two-thirds of the vestry)
- Field Education Evaluations
- Formation Portfolio Evaluations
- Seminary endorsement for ordination
- Safe Church, Anti-Racism, Title IV, Mandatory Reporter Training Certificates
- Updated paperwork for background checks, and medical and psychological evaluations

Some of these materials may already be on file because of previous interviews. Please verify with the Canon for Transition Ministry that your file is complete.