

Local Discernment Committee
Overview and Materials
2022



*the Episcopal Church
in Wyoming*

Congregations have an essential role in discerning those in their midst with the gifts for ministry and leadership. A Local Discernment Committee is charged with helping an *inquirer* (traditionally called an *aspirant*) discern the nature of his/her call to ministry. The Committee is formed under the supervision of the guidelines established by the Commission on Ministry (COM), the canons of the Episcopal Church, and the *inquirer's* priest (or other representative of the church leadership), in consultation with the *inquirer*.

The selection of the Local Committee:

1. A Local Committee is to be established by the current clergy and lay leaders of a church in consultation with the Inquirer.
2. The Committee will be comprised of:
 - a. members of the church who are in good standing, exhibit emotional and spiritual maturity, and are active in the liturgical life and ministry of the congregation.
 - b. At least one member of the vestry to act as liaison.
 - c. Wherever possible, the committee should reflect racial, cultural, and gender diversity and have an appreciation for the breadth and depth of the Anglican Tradition.
3. It is inappropriate for committee members to be:
 - a. Members of the Inquirer's family.
 - b. Current/Active clergy of the church.
 - c. Anyone whose participation may represent a conflict of interest or the appearance of such a conflict.
4. Committee Members are to have good listening skills, good pastoral skills, and a thorough understanding of the expectations, duties, and responsibilities of the work of ministry in the church. They should also have a clear understanding of the different orders of the church, and clarity in the differences between the roles of priest, deacons, and laity.
5. The same person/body in consultation with the Inquirer appoints a convener (or chair) for the committee. This individual's responsibilities include:
 - a. Scheduling meetings
 - b. Leading each session
 - c. Directing, drafting, and sending all required communications for the discernment process.
6. A sample covenant for the committee and a form for recording its membership is included in this packet. This form should be completed and retained in the parish records and a copy forwarded to the Commission on Ministry.

The functions of the Committee:

1. The Committee meets with the inquirer once or twice a month; each meeting will contain the content of one session
 - a. The sessions are themed as follows:
 - i. Orientation and Commissioning
 - ii. Spiritual Autobiography
 - iii. Hard Work
 - iv. Leadership – lead a Bible study
 - v. Listening
 - vi. Spiritual Maturity – lead a spiritual exercise
 - vii. Vision – creative prayer
 - viii. Giftedness – tokens symbolizing gifts
2. Included with each session (other than the orientation) is a discussion guide for the committee to assess that session and the inquirer's participation in it.

3. Informal sharing and discussion are necessary ingredients of the discernment process. Since the focus of the committee is to explore the inquirer's call for ministry, at least half of the time allotted for each session should be given to the inquirer to share as appropriate.
4. Throughout the sessions the committee will explore each theme, which have been determined as necessary for individuals who are ordained or commissioned for ministry and leadership in the church.
5. The Committee must take seriously the importance of confidentiality in order to provide an environment in which the Inquirer and its members may freely and openly discuss the Inquirer's call to ministry.
6. Committee members must make a firm commitment to attend and participate fully in all sessions of the work.
7. Members of the Committee should endeavor to pray regularly for the inquirer and for understanding God's direction throughout the process.
8. Members of the Committee serve as a support system for the Inquirer in the discernment process. They are to encourage the Inquirer to engage in a process of profound and honest self-examination and prayerful discernment.
9. Following the final session, the Committee will prepare a letter outlining the ministry to which they believe the inquirer is called. This letter should be submitted to the Lead Clergy person/COM, the Vestry, and the Inquirer. If the Vestry subsequently nominates the Inquirer, copies must be provided to the COM and the Bishop.

The Sessions

Session 1: Orientation Getting Started

Opening Prayer:

By the Light of Christ shining in our midst, open our hearts and minds, O God, to your Word, present now and always for the sake of your holy name. Amen.

Scripture

John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Meditation:

The Gospel tells us that the darkness cannot prevail and that we never meet anyone who is completely unenlightened by the true Light. In other words, no one can be a stranger to Christ. He has already met them and touched them in some way. If that is true, no one need be a stranger to those who are in Christ. With the dawning of this Light, all should be approached and all should be welcomed. With the dawning of the true Light, we may begin to see the strangers not as dangerous but as magnificent creatures already touched by the power of God.

From Feasting on the Gospels Commentary, Pastoral Perspective
Philip D. Jamieson

Instructions for this session:

- Everyone shares:
 - How long have you been part of the parish?
 - Why did you say yes to being on this discernment committee?
- An instructor from the diocese will be present at this meeting to go through the materials, facilitate the covenant, provide general training, go over guidelines, and answer questions.

Reflection Question(s): (to be answered by the Inquirer)

As this committee gathers in the Light of Christ, as the Light of Christ, what is it that you hope will come into being? What are your yearnings for this committee?

Closing Prayer:

May the true Light shine on us. May the Word that was with God in the beginning be our guide and strength. Let us go in peace and live in hope, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Next Session: Spiritual Autobiography (provide the inquirer with a copy of the "Guidelines for a Spiritual Autobiography" at the end of this session for preparation for Session 2)

Session 2: Spiritual Autobiography Getting to Know the Inquirer

Opening Prayer:

Good and Gracious God, draw near to us in hope and grace, surround us with your presence, and fill us with your peace. We pray that you will use us and our gifts to your service and for the good of all people. May our lives and our world be transformed by Your love and to Your glory. Hear us, we pray, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture:

Luke 9:28-36

Once again, Jesus went away to pray. This time He took along only Peter, John, and James. They climbed a mountainside and came to a place of solitude. Jesus began to pray and the disciples tried to stay awake, but their eyes grew heavier and heavier and finally they all fell asleep. When they awakened, they looked over at Jesus and say something inexplicable happening. Jesus was changing before their eyes, beginning with His face. It seemed to glow. The glow spread, and even His clothing took on a blinding whiteness. Then, two figures appeared in the glorious radiance emanating from Jesus. The three disciples somehow know that these figures were Moses and Elijah. Peter, James, and John overheard the conversation that took place among Jesus, Moses, and Elijah – a conversation that centered on Jesus’ “departure” and how He would accomplish this departure from the capital city, Jerusalem. The glow began to fade, and it was clear that Moses and Elijah were about to disappear. Peter said to Jesus, “Please, Master, it is good for us to be here and see this. Can we make three structures – one to honor You, one to honor Moses, and one to honor Elijah, to try to capture what’s happening here?” Peter had no idea what he was saying.

While he spoke a cloud descended, and they were enveloped in it, and fear fell on them. Then a voice came out of everywhere and nowhere at once. It said, “This is my Son! This is the One I have chosen! Listen to Him!” Then the voice was silent, the cloud disappeared, and Moses and Elijah were gone. Peter, James, and John were left speechless, stunned, staring at Jesus who how stood before them alone. For a long time, they did not say a word about this whole experience.

Meditation:

To see God is to be changed. Our interactions, not only with God, but with others change us because proximity changes our perspective in an irreversible way. There is no reliable process to unknow what we have seen, experienced, or participated in. Through our experiences, we gain knowledge, and knowledge stubbornly refuses to let us remain the same. Who can see God and remain the same? Who can see God and not be forever changed?

Excerpts from his sermon “Forever Changed”
The Rev. Joshua Woods

Instructions for this session:

The inquirer is invited to share their spiritual journey. Beginning with earliest childhood memories and being attentive to particular turning points, the inquirer tells the story of their relationship with God.

Reflection Question(s):

It is appropriate at this time for the inquirer to answer questions regarding the direction they are going with the Holy Spirit in light of their past journey.

Avoid questions about resolution of past issues or situations that may have been part of the inquirer's spiritual autobiography.

- What do you do to listen for God?
- How do you invite God's Presence?
- How have your past experiences of God prepared you for future ministry?

Sit in silence in the Presence of God to listen.

An assigned person breaks the silence by praying the Closing Prayer.

Closing Prayer:

May the glory of the Lord shine upon us,
the Word of the Lord live within us,
and the Spirit of the Lord give us peace. Amen.

Next Session: Hard Work (There is no preparatory work for the coming session.)

The inquirer is dismissed; the committee members remain for the Assessment of the Inquirer portion of the meeting.

Session 2 Assessment of the Inquirer
Spiritual Autobiography

Guiding Questions:

- What were the roots of the inquirer's call and how did it develop in their faith journey?
- Were any connections with Biblical themes or images made by the inquirer in their spiritual autobiography?
- Who were the inquirer's spiritual guides and mentors?
- What impression/understanding do you have of the inquirer at this point in the discernment process?

Notes:

Session 3: Hard Work
Exploring the Scope of Work in Ministry

Opening Prayer:

In the faithful hands of Christ,

our little is multiplied to feed many.

We thank you Father, that you have empowered us

to participate in the miraculous multiplying ministry of your Son.

May we see the world and its people

through the eyes of Christ's compassion.

Hold us, bless us, and change us

as we work in You. Amen

Scripture

Matthew 14:13-21

Now when Jesus heard this [Jesus has just been told of John the Baptist's death.] he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Meditation:

In this passage we are shown a new way forward. We learn about our responsibility for one another and about God's trust in us to provide, with God's help, the needs of the community. We see the miracle that comes when we renounce the message of scarcity and turn to God in faith, offering what we have and allowing God to bless and multiply even the smallest of gifts.

Liz Barington Forney

Reflection Question(s): (to be answered by the Inquirer)

- What do you expect from your church leadership? What do you think church leadership expects from congregants?
- What work invigorates and excites you? What work is tedious and burdensome?
- How do you know when you are tired? What do you do about it?
- What keeps you from asking for help?
- When is God most present to you in your work?

It is appropriate at this time for the inquirer to assess whether there is value in continuing the discernment process. If the inquirer does not feel a calling to ministry at this time, the committee should be excused from discernment duties and it should be reported to the COM. At least two members of the committee should continue in a pastoral role with the inquirer providing support and counsel for next steps in their faith journey.

Sit in silence in the Presence of God to listen.

An assigned person breaks the silence by praying the Closing Prayer.

Closing Prayer:

Touched, changed, called, and empowered, let us go now in the power and provision of Christ to serve the world. Amen.

Next Session: Leadership

The inquirer is dismissed; the committee members remain for the Assessment of the Inquirer portion of the meeting.

Session 3 Assessment of the Inquirer Hard Work

Guiding Questions:

- How does ministry currently express itself in this person's life?
- Does this person exhibit personal authority without arrogance?
- Can this person verbalize and communicate with appropriate skill?
- Is this person aware of the demands of ministry? Will he/she be able to handle the time and education commitments?
- What impression/understanding do you have of the inquirer at this point in the discernment process?

At the end of this session a progress report to the Commission on Ministry should be made. No confidential information should be shared, but a general report of how the process is going will be given. See the Guidelines for Progress Reports document in the Supporting Documents section.

It is also appropriate at this time to assess whether the committee sees value in continuing the process. If the committee is convinced that the inquirer is not called to ministry at this time, that should be reported to the COM. The Committee and the COM will then consult regarding the next steps to be taken for communication of the committee's finding to the inquirer and the church's vestry.

If it is determined that the process will continue, the convener will provide the inquirer with the guidelines for leading a Bible study for preparation for Session 4 within the next day to provide for appropriate preparation time.

Notes:

Session 4: Leadership
Lead, Organize, and Equip Others in Ministry

Opening Prayer:

Read aloud this summary of Isaiah found in Luke:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:16-21; Isa. 61:1-3)

Meditate silently on this text for 3 minutes, then close by saying, "Amen."

Instructions for this session:

Lead a Bible Study

It is important that church leaders have the ability to speak passionately and learnedly about the promises of God as they are found in the scriptures. Accordingly, this session will be spent with the inquirer leading a group Bible Study. Approximate time allotted for the study is 30 minutes.

The Guidelines for Bible Study can be found in the supplemental materials.

Reflection Question(s): (to be answered by the Inquirer)

- What was your process for preparing this study?
- How did it feel while you were leading?
- What have you learned about yourself through this exercise?
- What is the role of the Holy Spirit in church leadership?

Sit in silence in the Presence of God to listen.

An assigned person breaks the silence by praying the Closing Prayer.

Closing Prayer:

Be with us Lord, as we go from this place. Keep the lessons we have learned and your presence set in our minds and hearts. May your love and grace follow each of us as we return to our daily lives, refreshed and blessed by you and this time we have spent together. In the love of our Lord. Amen.

Next Session: Listening – There is no specific preparation necessary for the next session.

The inquirer is dismissed; the committee members remain for the Assessment of the Inquirer portion of the meeting.

Session 4 Assessment of the Inquirer Leadership

Guiding Questions:

- What did you find most compelling about the Bible Study?
- What did you like about the Bible Study?
- What would you have done differently?
- Does this person exhibit a non-anxious presence?
- Would you be comfortable having this person leading in your church?
- Has this person demonstrated an ability to lead? Have they exhibited an ability to inspire?
- What impression/understanding do you have of the inquirer at this point in the discernment process?

Notes:

Session 5: Listening
To God, to Others, to Ourselves

Opening Prayer:

God of Wisdom, open us to the work of your Spirit, that we may hear and faithfully respond to you and to one another. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Scripture:

Psalm 81:10-13

I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt and said,
 “Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.”
And yet my people did not hear my voice,
 and Israel would not obey me.
So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their hearts,
 to follow their own devices.
Oh, that my people would listen to me!
 that Israel would walk in my ways!

Meditation:

When we are spiritually deaf, we are not aware that anything important is happening in our lives. We keep running away from the present moment, and we try to create experiences that make our lives worthwhile. So we fill up our time to avoid the emptiness we otherwise would feel. When we are truly listening, we come to know that God is speaking to us, pointing the way, showing the direction. We simply need to learn to keep our ears open. Discernment is a life of listening to a deeper sound and marching to a different beat, a life in which we become “all ears.”

From his book “Discernment”
Henri Nouwen

Instructions for this session:

Using *Lectio Divina* or *holy reading* as a Holy Listening exercise.

See the guidelines for The Practice of Group Lectio Divina in the supporting documents section.

It is preferable that this exercise be organized and led by the Convener with the group discussion and listening facilitated by the inquirer.

Reflection Question(s): (to be answered by the Inquirer)

- Recall a time when you felt listened to. What about a time you were a holy listener?
- What keeps you from being a holy listener?
- In what ways is listening ministry?

Sit in silence in the Presence of God to listen.

An assigned person breaks the silence by praying the Closing Prayer.

Closing Prayer:

God of all creation, you made us for yourself. May we go forth from this place into your creation open to what we may hear, patient with those who speak, and gracious in our response. All to your glory. Amen.

Next Session: Spiritual Maturity – provide the inquirer with the handout “Guidelines for the Examen” in order to prepare to lead the group in that spiritual practice.

The inquirer is dismissed; the committee members remain for the Assessment of the Inquirer portion of the meeting.

Session 5 Assessment of the Inquirer
Listening

Guiding Questions:

- Does this person listen with interest, insight, and compassion?
- What does the inquirer's body language and verbal cues say about their listening?
- When you interact with the inquirer, do you feel like they are listening to you?
- What impression/understanding do you have of the inquirer at this point in the discernment process?

Notes:

Session 6: Spiritual Maturity
Self-awareness, Openness to Growth, Authenticity

Opening Prayer:

Adapted from the prayer by St. Ignatius

Take, Lord, and receive all our liberty,
our memory, our understanding
and our entire will.

All we have and call our own,
You have given all to us,
to you, Lord, we return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give us only your love and your grace.,
that is enough for us. Amen.

Instructions for this session:

The inquirer will lead the group in the spiritual practice of the Examen. (Guidelines for this exercise are available in the supplementary materials.)

At the conclusion of the exercise, each person is given time to recall what came up for them during the Examen.

Reflection Question(s): (to be answered by the Inquirer)

- As you completed the Examen, what is hardest for you to see as part of God's action in your life? What is easiest?
- Talk about a time you've been the person in the minority. What was that like?
- Reflect on your social location. In what ways are you part of the dominant or privileged group, and in what ways are you not?
- Where is the Holy Spirit in the moments of your life that are stressful and emotionally triggering?
- How do you define resilience? When have you seen it in someone else? In yourself?
- How would you like to grow and develop as a person?

It is appropriate at this time for the inquirer to assess whether there is value in continuing the discernment process. If the inquirer does not feel a calling to ministry at this time, the committee should be excused from discernment duties and it should be reported to the COM. At least two members of the committee should continue in a pastoral role with the inquirer providing support and counsel for next steps in their faith journey.

Sit in silence in the Presence of God to listen.

An assigned person breaks the silence by beginning the Closing Prayer.

Closing Prayer:

(A prayer by Howard Thurman. Pray the lines on a rotating basis, with each person taking a turn.)

...to be quiet together for a spell, to sit, to think, to feel our way into each other's joys and sorrows, to surround ourselves with the great sense of collective destiny.

Each of us has our own cares and burdens, our own world of involvements and complexities of stresses and strains, of lights and shadows, of heights and depths, or pain and pleasure, in ways that are commonplace and in ways that are shocking.

None of us can live unto ourselves, no matter how hard we try. We are so deeply involved in each other and in others that often it is difficult to determine where we begin and the other leaves off.

And perhaps in the quietness we may sense the mystery and the wonder and the magic of our relatedness, and in that relatedness become aware of each other after the pattern of our own sensitivities of the emergence in the midst of the living Spirit of the Living God in whom we live and move and have our being...

Whispers in our hearts, O God...the assurance that what we seek when we are most ourselves, thou seekest. That when we stumble, thou does stumble. When we rejoice, thou dost rejoice.

O thou redeemer of the thoughts and the memories and the souls of everyone, speak unto us that we may live; breathe through us that we may live; think through us that we may live.

For without thee, O God, there is nothing, not even we ourselves. This is the simple quivering of our spirit as we wait in the quietness for the moment of thyself within us. Amen.

Next Session: Vision

The inquirer is dismissed; the committee members remain for the Assessment of the Inquirer portion of the meeting.

Session 6 Assessment of the Inquirer Spiritual Maturity

Guiding Questions:

- Did the experience of the Examen show the inquirer to be kind, relational, and empathetic?
- Did the inquirer exhibit self-awareness, thoughtfulness, and emotional maturity?
- Does the inquirer seem to have a strong spiritual center? What about physical and mental stamina?
- Is the inquirer mindful of their social location and, and cognizant that others will perceive things differently from their own social locations?
- What impression/understanding do you have of the inquirer at this point in the discernment process?

At the end of this session a progress report to the Commission on Ministry should be made. No confidential information should be shared, but a general report of how the process is going will be given. See the Guidelines for Progress Reports document in the Supporting Documents section.

It is also appropriate at this time to assess whether the committee sees value in continuing the process. If the committee is convinced that the inquirer is not called to ministry at this time, that should be reported to the COM. The Committee and the COM will then consult regarding the next steps to be taken for communication of the committee's finding to the inquirer and the church's vestry.

If it is determined that the process will continue, the convener will contact the inquirer with instructions for preparation for Session 7: the inquirer will be asked to lead a short (10-15 minutes) opening prayer experience that includes music, art, movement, or some other creative element(s). There are no guidelines provided other than notification of the expectation. Notify the inquirer within the next day to provide for appropriate preparation time.

Notes:

Session 7: Vision
Community and Personal

Opening Prayer:

Inquirer leads a short (10-15 minutes) opening prayer experience that includes music, art, movement, or some other creative element(s).

Reflection Question(s): (to be answered by the Inquirer)

- Talk about your process in coming up with the creative worship for this session. Where did you get the idea? how did you develop it and make it your own?
- Talk about the tension between being entrepreneurial and being pastoral, and between being part of an institution while also working outside the walls.
- Talk about a time that you failed. Avoid a stereotypical response that shows a time you “failed” by being too dedicated or too effective. Try to think of a time when you truly failed. How did you care for yourself through the experience? What did you learn?
- In envisioning the church at its best, what would it be? Not be?
- In your vision, how might the church work to transform the world?
- What are you presently doing to make your vision for the church a reality?

Sit in silence in the Presence of God to listen.

The inquirer breaks the silence by praying the Closing Prayer.

Closing Prayer:

The inquirer is asked to close the session with an extemporaneous prayer.

Next Session: Giftedness – provide the inquirer and each member with the handout “Guidelines for the Sharing of Gifts” in order to prepare for the last session.

The inquirer is dismissed; the committee members remain for the Assessment of the Inquirer portion of the meeting.

Session 7 Assessment of the Inquirer Vision

Guiding Questions:

- What was it like to experience the inquirer's leadership during the opening prayer experience today and in other sessions?
- Was the prayer experience inspirational, comfortable, worshipful? Describe how you felt and the effectiveness of it.
- Does the inquirer have a vision of him/herself and their future ministry?
- What kind of vision for ministry does the inquirer exhibit? What sort of potential do you see?
- What impression/understanding do you have of the inquirer at this point in the discernment process?

Notes:

Session 8: Giftedness
Accessing and Assessing Our Gifts as Experienced in Our Church Community

Opening Prayer:

Almighty God, we have opened our hands to you, and our hands have been filled with good things. May we receive our gifts with gratitude and put them to good use as we serve your purpose in creation. Through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Instructions for this session:

In this final session, the members and inquirer are invited to give the tokens/symbols that have been collected and tell about the gifts they have seen in one another.

Reflection Question(s): (to be answered by the Inquirer)

- Whom do you regard as gifted in ministry? Choose more than one person, one lay and one ordained. How would you describe those persons' gifts?
- Which gifts do you believe are most essential for ministry?
- Do you have any gifts that were not brought forth by the exercise? Any you don't see in yourself?
- What do you do when you need a particular gift but do not have it? Give an example from your experience.
- How do we admit to ourselves and others that we are not able to do/be some things?

The members of the committee are invited to share with the inquirer what their guidance is for the inquirer's ministry.

Guiding Questions: (to be answered by the committee members)

- In what ways could you imagine the inquirer in ministry in your church?
- Does this seem to be the "right moment" for the inquirer to embark on a path for ministry or are there life realities, which would signal a more opportune time?
- Does the inquirer's life and current ministry seem to articulate a call to leadership ministry? If so, what could that look like?
- What room for growth would you advise the inquirer to explore?

Sit in silence in the Presence of God to listen.

An assigned person breaks the silence by praying the Closing Prayer.

Closing Prayer: A Prayer of Thomas Merton

God, we have no idea where we are going. We do not see the road ahead of us. We cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do we really know ourselves, and the fact that we think we are following your will does not mean that we are actually doing so. But we believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And we hope that we have that desire in all that we are doing. We hope that we will never do anything apart from that desire. And we know that if we do this you will lead us by the right road, though we may know nothing about it. Therefore, we will trust you always though we may seem to be lost and in the show of death. We will not fear for you are ever with us, and you will never leave us to face our perils alone. Amen.

At the completion of these sessions, the Discernment Committee is asked to prepare a brief letter as to a recommendation for the direction of the inquirer's ministry. Specifically, to which order he/she is most suited: priest, deacon, lay. Calling to a specific ministry may also be recommended.

The inquirer is dismissed; the committee members remain to draft the letter.

Session 8: Drafting the Letter

The purpose of the letter is to make a clear recommendation for the inquirer's ministerial direction in the diocese. The recommended track for ministry process must be named: Priest, Deacon, or WISE (lay) ministry. A specialty area may also be recommended, especially in cases of WISE Ministry. It is also possible that the inquirer is not currently suited for leadership in ministry in the church; this must also be communicated.

The letter should contain supporting rationale for the recommendation. Comment on areas of significance that emerged during the committee's deliberations. Below are some areas that might be considered:

1. Expression and Communication of their Faith
2. Capacity for Self-Awareness and Openness to Growth
3. Understanding of their Vocational Awareness and Community Affirmation
4. Demonstrated leadership

Notes that were taken at all of the sessions will be helpful in compiling the supporting rationale.

Remember to submit your letter to the Lead Clergyperson, the COM, the Vestry, and the Inquirer. If the Vestry subsequently nominates the Inquirer, copies must be provided to the COM and the Bishop.

Supporting Documents

Guidelines for a Spiritual Autobiography

Discerning one's call within the Body of Christ requires that we become comfortable being transparent and courageously vulnerable in telling our story. Therefore, the first step in any discernment is to give the one exploring a call the opportunity to tell their spiritual autobiography.

What is a Spiritual Autobiography? It is the story of our personal journey with God. Throughout the Scriptures, God reveals Himself powerfully and personally in the particularity of individual lives. These moments of God's self-revelation and a believer's God-consciousness enable persons to discern, with the help of other Christians, their place within Christ's body (Ephesians 4:11-16). Having an understanding of one's spiritual autobiography also helps leaders respond sensitively, compassionately, and resiliently to those person and events they encounter in their ministry. By listening to the presence and voice of God in our own lives, we increase our ability to help others feel God's presence and hear God's voice in theirs.

God is always with us, even in those moments when we are afraid God isn't – in the face of suffering, trials, temptations, and testing. Those moments of God's seeming absence speak just as powerfully in a spiritual autobiography as those moments when we experience God's presence in worship, prayer, service, or conversation.

What should a Spiritual Autobiography "Say"? Discuss not only those moments when you have felt the joy of God's presence but also those moments we have felt the sorrow of God's absence. It should also give an indication of the experience of God in community, since an important role of church leaders is to be able to lift up the presence and call of God in community. Finally, a spiritual autobiography should try to find a healthy balance between transparency and appropriate self-disclosure. We need to be able to share our own story freely in a way that creates safe space for others to do the same.

Please use the following questions as a guide for reflection:

- What kinds of Christian community have I experienced as a child, youth, and adult?
- When has God felt most real to me?
- When has God felt most absent?
- When/where/with whom have I encountered God in a pivotal, life-changing, transformative, or powerful way
- Have I had seasons of doubt, disillusionment, or disobedience? What did these moments feel like? Where was God in these moments? What have I learned about God as a result of them?
- Who do I know, or have known, who seemed to know God intimately? How does my story overlap with theirs? How is my story different?

Guidelines for Bible Study

Among other sources, please see the following resource:

<https://episcopalchurch.org/bible-study>. This resource is also excellent for providing brief descriptions about the background and context of a given Bible passage.

To explore the passage deeply on a spiritual level and not simply as an academic exercise, consider the following guiding questions:

- Why does this passage matter to you?
- What is at stake in this piece of scripture, and why is it important?
- What do you find most compelling about this passage?
- What message is God speaking to the church through this passage?
- What astounds or astonishes you about God in this passage?
- What is the context for this passage of Scripture and how does that affect how you read it?
- What questions does this passage pose of us?

Finally, take some time to think about the method for study you will follow:

- How will you structure the study so that everyone gets a chance to contribute?
- How will you share what you have developed in the course of your preparation?

Guidelines for The Practice of Group Lectio Divina

A group leader coordinates the process and facilitates sharing. The same text from the Scriptures is read out three times, followed each time by a period of silence and an opportunity for each member of the group to share the fruit of her or his lectio.

The Convener will choose the reading and arrange for the volunteers to read.

The first reading is for the purpose of hearing a word or passage that touches the heart. When the word or phrase is found, the group's members take it in, internally recite it, and reflect on it during the silence that follows. After the silence, each person shares which word or phrase has touched his or her heart.

The inquirer calls upon the members of the group to share their word or phrase and listens to what they have to say as well as sharing as a member of the group.

The second reading (by a different member of committee) is for the purpose of "hearing" or "seeing" Christ in the text. Each ponders the word or phrase that has touched their heart and asks where the word or phrase touches his or her life that day. Then, after the silence, each member of the group shares what he or she has "heard" or "seen."

The inquirer calls upon the members of the group to share and listens to what they have to say as well as sharing as a member of the group.

The third and final reading (by a different member of the committee) is for the purpose of experiencing Christ "calling us forth" into doing or being. Members ask themselves what Christ in the text is calling them to do or to become today or this week. After the silence, each shares for the last time with clarifying and encouraging questions being asked to draw the members even further into understanding.

The inquirer calls upon the members of the group to share, listens to what they have to say, and engages them in brief conversation for deeper understanding as well as sharing as a member of the group.

The exercise concludes with each person praying for the person on the right of him or her.

The Convener invites and explains the manner of the prayer conclusion.

Guidelines for the Examen

One important way to develop spiritual maturity is through praying the Examen, a method of prayer developed by Ignatius of Loyola. What follows is a brief description of this method as a daily practice, which can be used to reflect on our personal history and guiding purpose in life:

1. Become aware of God's presence. Find a comfortable place where you can secure ten or fifteen minutes. Close your eyes and relax your body.
2. Review the events and experiences of the day with gratitude to understand how God is acting in your life. Move through the day as if you were watching it on video.
3. Pay attention to the feelings that your experiences evoke. Ask what God is saying through these feelings.
4. Choose one feature of the day, reflect upon it, and pray from it. How are you discovering God in the midst of your daily life? Are you drawing closer or further away?
5. Look toward tomorrow. Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges.

Prompts for Reflection as one prays:

- What struggles have you had and what have you learned from them?
- Where is it most difficult to see God's presence?
- Where is it easiest to see God's presence?
- Have you ever been the person in the minority?
- What did your family of origin value most and why?
- What opportunities have you had because of something that was given to you?
- Who has mentored you?
- What is your deepest desire?
- What is your deepest fear?
- Who has been your friend?
- What have you learned from those who love you, and those you love?
- What have you learned in the course of conflict or difficulty?
- When have you forgiven someone or looked past their faults and limitation?
- When have you had to realize your own powerlessness to change events?

Please see the following resource if you need guidance:

<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>

Guidelines for the Sharing of Gifts

It is important that we each understand our giftedness in the Holy Spirit. It is also important for us to recognize the gifts of others for the purpose of building up the Body of Christ. What follows is a brief exercise which allows each person to practice seeing the giftedness of the others.

Instructions for the inquirer:

A few days before the next gathering of your committee:

1. Find a quiet place.
2. Center yourself in the Presence of God.
3. Call to mind each member of your committee
4. Ask the Holy Spirit to allow you to see each of them in turn as God may see them.
5. Ask yourself what their gifts are, each of them in turn.
6. Make note of these gifts.
7. Thank the Holy Spirit for revealing this to you.
8. Over the course of the next few days, search for small items that symbolize the gift of each person. Take these items to your next gathering to give to each person as you tell what you have seen as their gift.

Instructions for the committee members:

A few days before the next gathering of your committee:

1. Find a quiet place.
2. Center yourself in the Presence of God.
3. Call to mind the inquirer
4. Ask the Holy Spirit to allow you to see the inquirer as God may see them.
5. Ask yourself what their greatest gift is.
6. Thank the Holy Spirit for revealing this to you.
7. Over the course of the next few days, search for a small item that symbolizes the gift of the inquirer. Take this item to your next gathering to give to the inquirer as you explain what you have seen as their gift.

Local Discernment Committee Members

This Discernment Committee is formed for (name of inquirer):

From (name of home congregation):

Role	Name	Telephone	Email
Chair/Convener			
Member			

Signature of Lead Clergy person of home congregation

Date

Sample Covenant for Discernment Committee

It is often important to generate and/or lay out guidelines for how the Discernment Committee will be together and work.

Questions to consider:

What do I need in order to feel safe to share?

How do we want to be together as a group of discerners?

This is a sample of what can be included in a Discernment Committee Covenant:

We Covenant Together That We Will...

- Pray for one another
- Listen for the Spirit of Truth to lead us
- Listen to and show respect for the opinions of others
- Assume positive intent of other members
- Speak for ourselves – using “I” statements
- Stay with the Group Discussions
- Keep Confidentiality
- Use Technology Responsibly (Keep phones on silent)
- Arrive and end on time

Guidelines for Progress Reports

The content of any progress reports is to be agreed upon by the whole committee.

- Report the number of times the committee has met.
- Tell how often you are meeting and the timeline for future meetings.
- Convey a concern about the committee or the inquirer and your future plans regarding this concern.
- Communicate something about the inquirer that the committee finds especially encouraging at this time, being sure to not divulge information that could be considered confidential, e.g., details from the inquirer's spiritual autobiography.
- Share appropriate committee responses to the question 'What impression/understanding do you have of the inquirer at this point in the discernment process?' which is included in the Guiding Questions list following each session.