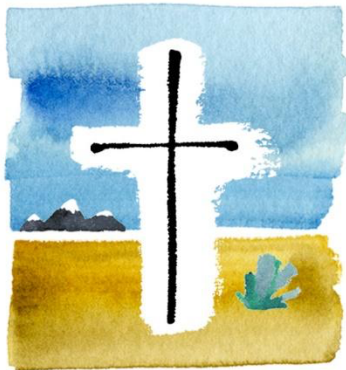


Local Discernment Committee Process and Materials 2025



*the Episcopal Church
in Wyoming*

Approved by the COM on: 2/12/2025

Welcome Inquirer, to the deep and meaningful world of formal discernment:

In general, the idea of this formal discernment process is about seeking God's specific calling for you and reaching understanding as clearly as possible for this time in your life. It is an intentional way of seeking guidance and understanding, which invites the active participation of other members of the church. It involves commitment on your part as the Inquirer and on the part of those who will be engaging in this process with you.

All Christians are called to ministry by virtue of our baptism. Sometimes, we are very aware of our calling in God's Kingdom and how that manifests itself in ministry, and sometimes further clarity is needed. Formal discernment with the help of a small group of supporters can clarify not only God's call for you but can help your community find clarity as well. The prescribed diocesan discernment process allows time and focus for deep listening and opportunity for thoughtful response to God within a supportive community.

Spiritual discernment can be challenging for us. We live in the 21st century, a fast-paced, straight-to-the-goal, don't-waste-time world where decision making must oftentimes be quick and predictable. This discernment process is intentionally unhurried and deliberate. It strives to make space for work in God's time and sets participants and their discernment committee in a world where they are patiently waiting for the Holy Spirit.

True discernment can churn up unexpected results. Sometimes, it results in the affirmation of an existing ministry, perhaps with renewed commitment and vigor. Other times, people come to an awareness of a different sort of ministry than they have been engaged in before. Sometimes, a call might be discerned as a call to an ordained ministry in the Church. Clarifying and answering our callings is vital to the continued health and vitality of our churches.

The following guidelines will help you and your discernment committee follow the prescribed formal discernment process for our diocese. As a process it may seem like an extended job interview in which you are asked to complete tasks that test your skills and respond to questions in a particular way. Instead of this "corporate" approach, I encourage you to enter this process contemplatively and prayerfully. Take this time to lean into your calling and your gifts, wait on the Lord, and listen earnestly to what God is calling you to.

Help from diocesan staff and the Commission on Ministry are always available. Please contact us whenever you are in need.

Blessings on your journey and may the peace of Christ be with you.

The Rev. Canon Lara Gilbert

Canon for Spiritual Formation and Congregational Development, and Bishop's Chaplain

Before Entering a Formal Discernment

1. If you are feeling called to leadership in ministry:
 - a. Spend time in prayer listening to the Holy Spirit.
 - b. Contact the clergy leadership of your church.
 - c. Spend time with church leadership in prayer and consideration.
2. Using the Recommendation for Formal Discernment Guide (pp. 30-33) your church clergy leadership recommend to the Commission on Ministry (COM) that you begin formal discernment.
 - a. The COM will assign you a guide for this process who will contact you and your clergy leader with instruction about next steps:
 - i. Forming a discernment committee.
 - ii. Discernment Process Orientation
 - b. Your guide becomes a point of support and connection as you walk the discernment process.

Other Considerations

Formal discernment is necessary for entering the process for Holy Orders and for commissioning as a WISE Lay Minister. Therefore, discernment must be completed prior to enrollment in the formation programs at the Wyoming Iona School, which prepare people for such leadership roles.

Under some conditions, it is not practical or appropriate for an Inquirer to be discerned by a local discernment committee, i.e., a committee formed in a parish for the purpose of formal discernment. In these cases, a diocesan discernment committee will be formed, and at least one representative of the Inquirer's church will be asked to be a member of that body. The representative(s) of the Inquirer's church will be chosen following the guidelines provided for choosing members of a local discernment committee (p. 3 of the Local Discernment Committee Process).

The conditions that call for a diocesan discernment committee to be formed are:

1. Congregations with an Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) of less than 15.
2. Inquirers who are the spouse of a clergy person in your church.
3. The COM will assess, on a case-by-case basis, other situations that arise which may necessitate the use of a diocesan committee.

In each of these cases, it may be difficult to field the appropriate mix of committee participants from the body of the parish or the person's position may make it difficult for members of the parish to participate objectively in the process.

While the diocesan discernment process, which is identical in content to the local discernment process, is overseen by a diocesan discernment committee, nomination for Holy Orders or WISE Lay Ministry begins with a letter of support from the Inquirer's vestry. This canonical requirement keeps this important process for the church connected to local parish leadership.

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; providing support, prayer, and thoughtful examination that leads the Inquirer to some clarity regarding God's hope for him/her. 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 and the Commission on Ministry.
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, age, 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. Anyone whose participation may represent a conflict of interest or the appearance of such a conflict.
 - c. Current/Active clergy of the church. Retired clergy and/or clergy who periodically "supply" when clergy leadership of the church are not available do not fall into this category. It is important to understand the context of your particular church; if a clergyperson may have undue influence on a committee, he/she should exclude themselves as a participant.
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 priests, deacons, and laity. (see pages 36-39 of this packet)
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.

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
 - ii. Spiritual Autobiography
 - iii. Hard Work
 - iv. Leadership
 - v. Family
 - vi. Listening
 - vii. Spiritual Maturity
 - viii. Vision
 - ix. Giftedness
2. While the contents of the sessions may seem performative or like an audition of the skills of the Inquirer, it is important to keep in mind that the entire experience of this process is meant to make space for the Inquirer to lean into their calling and gifting, to listen to God for clarity, and for the committee to support them in the journey. It is meant to be a contemplative experience, not an extended job interview.
3. A trainer from the diocese will be assigned by the Commission on Ministry to lead the first session (the orientation).
4. 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.
5. Informal sharing and discussion are necessary ingredients of the discernment process. Since the focus of the committee is to explore the inquirer's call to ministry, at least half of the time allotted for each session should be given to the inquirer to share as appropriate.
6. Throughout the sessions the committee will thematically explore characteristics, which have been determined to be necessary for individuals who are ordained or commissioned for ministry and leadership in the church.
7. 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.
8. Committee members must make a firm commitment to attend and participate fully in all sessions of the work.
9. Members of the Committee should endeavor to pray regularly for the inquirer and for understanding God's direction throughout the process.
10. 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.
11. Following the final session, the Committee will prepare a letter outlining the ministry to which they and the Inquirer have come to understand is the Inquirer's calling from God at this time: Priest, Deacon, WISE Lay Minister, Licensed Lay Minister.

The Sessions

Session 1: Orientation Getting Started

Opening Prayer:

O God, by the Light of Christ shining in our midst; open our hearts and minds 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 the Pastoral Perspective
Feasting on the Gospels Commentary
Philip D. Jamieson

Instructions for this session:

- Committee Members share:
 - How long have you been part of the parish?
 - Why did you say yes to being on this discernment committee?

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?

- A guide from the COM will be present at this meeting to collect committee members' information (page 34), facilitate a covenant for committee interaction (page 35), provide general training, go over guidelines, answer questions, and ensure that the next meeting of the committee has been scheduled.

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 to live in hope, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Next Session: Spiritual Autobiography – provide the inquirer with a copy of the Guidelines for a Spiritual Autobiography (page 40) 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 saw 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 knew 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 now 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 un-know 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.

(Guidelines for this exercise are found on page 40.)

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 – In preparation for the next session, the Convener will invite the clergy leadership and key lay leadership to join the session for a discussion regarding the work of the church and the role(s) an additional leader could play in support and furtherance of it.

If the Inquirer will not be serving in your church once discerned, this discussion can still be had with the Inquirer in a broader sense of their vision for their future in ministry in the broader Church. Attendance of church leaders is still encouraged and will help add perspective from a Church-wide standpoint.

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

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

Instructions for this session:

The Convener leads a discussion with key leadership of the church, the inquirer, and the committee members regarding the work of the church and how it may be impacted by an additional leader, whether ordained or lay. The goal of this discussion is not to pinpoint the inquirer's specific ministry, but to explore the potential of having another key leader in your particular church, and also what challenges another leader could bring. This conversation is significant, and may continue beyond the confines of this meeting.

If the Inquirer will not be serving in your church once discerned, this discussion can still be had with the Inquirer in a broader sense of their vision for their future in ministry in the broader Church. Attendance of church leaders is still encouraged and will help add perspective from a Church-wide standpoint.

At the conclusion of the discussion, those not on the discernment committee may be dismissed.

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?
- In light of the group discussion, how are you beginning to understand what your role as a leader in the church could be? What boundaries might you want to set? Where might your work as a leader expand upon the discussed vision.

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 in writing in place of the scheduled progress report (see page 12). 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.

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?
- Is this person aware of the demands of ministry? Will he/she be able to handle the time and education commitments?
- How does the vision for future ministry discussed in this session by the church leadership and that of the inquirer coalesce? Conflict?
- In general, how did the inquirer handle him/herself during the discussion (articulate, attentive, accepting, collaborative, etc)?
- 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 and the Bishop 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 on page 45.

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, the head of the COM will be contacted and brought in for consultation regarding the next steps to be taken for communication of the committee's finding to the inquirer and the church's vestry. The results of this consultation will be communicated in writing to the COM and the Bishop, in place of the above required progress report.

If it is determined that the process will continue, the convener will provide the inquirer with the guidelines for leading a Bible Study (located on page 41) 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."

Review of assessments to this point:

Spend some time discussing with the Inquirer what has come up in the committee assessment meetings regarding the Inquirer up to this point. Remain open for spontaneous discussion.

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 on page 41.

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: Family – In preparation for the next session, the Inquirer will ask members of their immediate family to commit to coming to the next session for discussion or to write a note to the committee regarding the Inquirer's calling to leadership in the church. Family attendance in person is preferable, but virtual attendance is permissible. Appropriate family for this exercise is family elders, adult children, spouses, or others with deep insight into the Inquirer's spiritual life journey.

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

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: Family Church Leadership Affects our Loved Ones

Opening Prayer:

Holy and Gracious God, may your steadfast love abide within us. Teach us to trust in you as you call us to live together as family. Help us be worthy of you, and to find our lives in the eternity of your love. Amen.

Scripture:

Matthew 10:34-39

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law,
and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

Meditation:

Through this discourse, Jesus seeks to shape the lives of the disciples as they carry forth his work. He warns them about the cost involved in following him and the conflict it will create. Jesus’ words are radical; they appear to go against Scripture and even his own teaching. However, Jesus’ values are first and foremost Kingdom values, not family values. The individual and the family are of less concern than the ushering in of God’s Kingdom. He is speaking of the division that can occur within relationships as a result of allegiance to Christ. What Jesus calls his followers to do is to put loyalty to God above every other relationship, including family. Therefore, for Christians, life is not about focusing on the family. Rather, life is about focusing wholeheartedly on God. Establishing such a priority may create division in some situations. In other situations, seeking first the Kingdom of God may strengthen the family, giving it a purpose greater than itself that holds its members together and causes them to love one another. Whatever the consequences are to the family, the command to follow Jesus is supreme. As difficult as it is to put God and God’s Kingdom above family, that is what Jesus calls us to do. In God’s family, as William Willimon points out, “water is thicker than blood.” The waters of baptism create a new family and invite all kinds of people from diverse families to join. To be a Christian is not to belong to a family that revolves around itself, but to discover a new family composed of those who have discovered that their ultimate commitment is to God. In God’s family, water is thicker than blood.

Excerpts from the Homiletical Perspective
Feasting on the Gospels
Dave Bland

Instructions for this session:

Ask each of the family members in attendance to tell an insightful story about the Inquirer.

If notes have been written, members of the committee should read them aloud.

The Convener will then lead a discussion with the whole group regarding the stories and the perceived changes and challenges that could occur in the family's life as a result of a possible increase in the Inquirer's leadership role and time commitment in the Church.

Possible discussion questions:

- How do you picture your role of supporting the Inquirer in their ministry?
- What impact might you foresee an increased commitment to the church having on your relationship with the Inquirer?
- Ask a family member: What is your ministry? How do you and the Inquirer practice your life in Christ together?
- In your experience with the Inquirer, what is their greatest spiritual gift? How do they use it? What is your vision for their ministry?

Once the discussion is concluded, the family members may be dismissed while the Inquirer and committee members continue with the reflection questions.

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

- In what ways do you see your family partnering with you in your ministry now? In the future?
- Tell about a time when you had to choose between a family commitment and a God commitment. How did you handle it? What would you do differently?
- Reread the scripture passage that began this session. What is your reaction to Jesus' teaching? How does it make you feel?

Sit in silence in the Presence of God to listen.

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

Closing Prayer:

O Christ, you made yourself servant of all,

we set our hearts and affections upon you – and upon you alone – for we can only serve others rightly when such service is undertaken from first to last as an act of devotion offered to you.

May this sacred work be enjoined by those closest to us, our families; and your loving presence bind us together. Let our love be sincere and our service be fearless. Amen.

Next Session: Listening – In preparation for the next session, the Convener (or another of the committee members) will prepare the Lectio Divina exercise (p. 42).

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

Session 5: Assessment of the Inquirer Family

Guiding Questions:

- Does the Inquirer have an understanding of how their ministry affects their family? What is their ongoing plan for addressing this?
- Are key family members supportive of the Inquirer in ministry? If not, how does the Inquirer compensate for this? Is there anything concerning?
- Does this family practice faith and ministry together? In what ways?
- What impression/understanding do you have of the inquirer at this point in the discernment process?

Notes:

Session 6: 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

Review of assessments to this point:

Spend some time discussing with the Inquirer what has come up in the committee assessment meetings regarding the Inquirer up to this point. Remain open for spontaneous discussion.

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 (p. 42).

The Convener (or another member of the committee) organizes and leads this exercise. The Inquirer facilitates group discussion and employs listening skills. The exercise should be given approximately 30 minutes.

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?

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 in writing in place of the scheduled progress report (see page 20). 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:

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

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

Session 6: Assessment of the Inquirer Listening

Guiding Questions:

- Does this person listen with interest, insight, and compassion?
- What do the inquirer's body language and verbal cues say about their listening?
- When you interact with the inquirer, do you feel that they are listening to you?
- 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 and the Bishop 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, page 45.

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, the head of the COM will be contacted and brought in for consultation regarding the next steps to be taken for communication of the committee's finding to the inquirer and the church's vestry. The results of this consultation will be communicated in writing to the COM and the Bishop, in place of the above required progress report.

If it is determined that the process will continue, the convener will provide the inquirer with the Guidelines for the Examen (located on page 43) for preparation for Session 7: Spiritual Maturity within the next day, to provide for appropriate preparation time.

Notes:

Session 7: Spiritual Maturity Self-awareness, Openness to Growth, Authenticity

Opening Prayer:

Adapted from a 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.

Review of assessments to this point:

Spend some time discussing with the Inquirer what has come up in the committee assessment meetings regarding the Inquirer up to this point. Remain open for spontaneous discussion.

Instructions for this session:

The inquirer leads the group in the spiritual practice of the Examen. (Guidelines for this exercise are on p. 43.) Allow approximately 30 minutes for the exercise.

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 reflect on 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 in your spiritual life?

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...

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

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

Session 7: 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?

Notes:

Session 8: Vision Community and Personal

Review of assessments to this point:

Spend some time discussing with the Inquirer what has come up in the committee assessment meetings regarding the Inquirer up to this point. Remain open for spontaneous discussion.

Opening Prayer:

The 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 (p. 44) to prepare for the last session.

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

Session 8: 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 9: 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:

The committee members and inquirer give the tokens/symbols that have been collected and tell about the gifts they have seen in one another. Allow up to approximately 30 minutes for this exercise.

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

- Choosing from people you know, have read about, even historical figures, whom do you regard as gifted in ministry? Choose more than one person, one lay and one ordained. Describe their 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 that were 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 shadow 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 (WISE or licensed). Calling to a specific ministry may also be recommended.

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

Session 9: Drafting the Letter

The purpose of the letter is to make a clear recommendation of the Inquirer's ministerial direction in the diocese. The recommended track for ministry process **must be named**: Priest, Deacon, or WISE Lay Minister.

If a particular licensed Lay Ministry (Preacher, Pastoral Leader, Worship Leader, Eucharistic Minister, Eucharistic Visitor, Catechist) has been pinpointed, or the committee has concluded that the Inquirer is not currently suited for leadership in ministry in the church; this must be communicated in this recommendation letter. However, no nomination letter from the church Vestry is then required.

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.

Submit your letter to your Lead Clergy person, the COM, the Bishop, your Vestry, and the Inquirer.

If your vestry subsequently nominates the Inquirer, their letter must be provided to the COM and the Bishop. Please share with your vestry the guidelines for their letter, which are on page 46 of this packet.

Where to send copies of your recommendation letter:

COM Chair: Rev. Christie Laughery – christie@stjohnsjackson.org

Bishop:

Canon Jessica Reynolds: email – jessica@episcopalwy.org

Supporting Documents

Recommendation for Formal Discernment Guide for an Inquirer's Rector or Priest-in-Charge

Overview:

All Christians are called to ministry by virtue of baptism. Sometimes, a person is aware of a calling in God's Kingdom and how that manifests itself in ministry, and sometimes further clarity is needed. A formal discernment with the support of a community can help a person hear God's call more clearly.

A person seeking to enter such a formal discernment process must first be recommended to the Commission on Ministry (COM) of the Episcopal Church in Wyoming. This guide will assist clergy who would like to make such a recommendation.

Purpose:

The purpose of this process is to ascertain the preparedness of a person for formal discernment prior to beginning the process. Those who enter discernment prematurely can be faced with disappointment and frustration, which can lead to the inquirer leaving the church and/or walking away from their faith journey. Therefore, it is important for the rector/priest-in-charge to spend time with parishioners exploring their call to leadership in preparation for the intense experience of formal, community discernment.

Recommendations for formal discernment should be reserved for those who have a sense of their calling from God and have evidenced this calling through their presence and work in their parish.

Considerations:

When approached by a person inquiring about ordination or formal discernment for leadership in ministry in the church, the rector/priest-in-charge should set aside time to listen attentively to the inquirer and to delve deeper into the story of the call they are hearing. This may mean meeting on multiple occasions. The two should pray together and for one another over the time of this discussion and beyond. It is appropriate for the rector/priest-in-charge to counsel the inquirer on listening for God, the ways to follow their calling in their current context, and next steps.

During the discussion, special note should be made by the rector/priest-in-charge of details surrounding the length of time the inquirer has been an active member of the congregation, the inquirer's current involvement in the ministry of the church, and the particulars of the call the inquirer has received as it has been shared with the rector/priest-in-charge.

These details will be requested in the endorsement letter written to the COM by the rector/priest-in-charge on behalf of the inquirer.

Submit your endorsement in writing:

Your recommendation will include information regarding your impression of the inquirer's suitability for leadership in the church based on all of the above information, and your endorsement for the person as a leader in your church and the wider church as well (see the letter template below).

VI. Additional comments as to why you think this person is suitable for formal discernment for church leadership.

I whole-heartedly recommend and endorse _____ to enter into a formal discernment process for the purpose of hearing more clearly their calling from God for leadership in the church, and commit to providing guidance and help to the inquirer for growing their understanding and practice of their ministry.

Signature of Cleric

Date

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			
Member			
Member			
Member			
Member			
Member			
Inquirer			

This discernment committee has been formed in accordance with the Local Discernment Guidelines:

Requested by the lead clergy of the church: _____,

With permission of the Commission on Ministry,

On this date: _____.

Signature of the Diocesan Trainer

Printed Name of the Diocesan Trainer

Submit this form to the Canon for Finance and Administration following the completion of Session 1. The Canon will provide a copy to the Inquirer's church for their records.

Sample Covenant for Discernment Committee

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

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
- Ensure all voices are heard

The Vows We Make: Understanding the Orders of the Church

At Baptism/Confirmation (BCP, p. 299)

The Questions:

Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?

Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?

Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior?

Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?

Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?

Baptismal Covenant:

Do you believe in God the Father?

I believe in God, the Father almighty creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting.

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers?

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

Licensed Lay Ministry:

Communicants in good standing may be licensed for a specific ministry to serve in their particular congregation: Pastoral Leader, Worship Leader, Preacher, Eucharistic Minister, Eucharistic Visitor, or Catechist.

WISE Lay Ministry:

WISE Lay Ministers are considered Lay Theologians. They are called to be enablers of mission, to be inspirational teachers of the faith, and to be influential leaders in church and society. They serve beside clergy leaders of the church, furthering the ministry of Christ. Upon commissioning, they are considered licensed to perform all licensed lay ministries in the diocese.

At Ordination: Deacon (BCP, p. 537)

The Presentation

Will you be loyal to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of Christ as this Church has received them? And will you, in accordance with the canons of this Church, obey your bishop and other ministers who may have authority over you and your work?

I am willing and ready to do so; and I solemnly declare that I do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation; and I do solemnly engage to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of The Episcopal Church.

The Examination

My *sister*, every Christian is called to follow Jesus Christ, serving God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit. God now calls you to a special ministry of servanthood directly under your bishop. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely.

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.

My *sister*, do you believe that you are truly called by God and his Church to the life and work of a deacon?

Do you now in the presence of the Church commit yourself to this trust and responsibility?

Will you be guided by the pastoral direction and leadership of your bishop?

Will you be faithful in prayer, and in the reading and study of the Holy Scriptures?

Will you look for Christ in all others, being ready to help and serve those in need?

Will you do your best to pattern your life and that of your community in accordance with the teachings of Christ, so that you may be a wholesome example to all people?

Will you in all things seek not your glory but the glory of the Lord Christ?

May the Lord by his grace uphold you in the service he lays upon you.

The Consecration

Make *her*, O Lord, modest and humble, strong and constant, to observe the discipline of Christ. Let *her* life and teaching so reflect your commandments, that through *her* many may come to know and love you. As your Son came not to be served but to serve, may this deacon share in Christ's service, and come to the unending glory of him who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, forever and ever.

The Diaconate:

Deacons are often envisioned as the bridge between the world and the church; bringing awareness of the needs of the world into the church, and taking the church out to meet the needs of the world.

Theirs is a ministry of Justice. It is also the role of the Deacon to organize people of the church to join them in this work.

At Ordination: Priest (BCP, p. 525)

The Presentation

Will you be loyal to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of Christ as this Church has received them? And will you, in accordance with the canons of this Church, obey your bishop and other ministers who may have authority over you and your work?

I am willing and ready to do so; and I solemnly declare that I do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation; and I do solemnly engage to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of The Episcopal Church.

The Examination

My *sister*, the Church is the family of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. All baptized people are called to make Christ known as Savior and Lord, and to share in the renewing of his world. Now you are called to work as pastor, priest, and teacher, together with your bishop and fellow presbyters, and to take your share in the councils of the Church.

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.

My *sister*, do you believe that you are truly called by God and his Church to this priesthood? Do you now in the presence of the Church commit yourself to this trust and responsibility? Will you respect and be guided by the pastoral direction and leadership of your bishop? Will you be diligent in the reading and study of the Holy Scriptures, and in seeking the knowledge of such things as may make you a stronger and more able minister of Christ? Will you endeavor so to minister the Word of God and the sacraments of the New Covenant, that the reconciling love of Christ may be known and received? Will you undertake to be a faithful pastor to all whom you are called to serve, laboring together with them and with your fellow ministers to build up the family of God? Will you do your best to pattern your life and that of your community in accordance with the teachings of Christ, so that you may be a wholesome example to your people? Will you persevere in prayer, both in public and in private, asking God's grace, both for yourself and for others, offering all your labors to God, through the mediation of Jesus Christ, and in the sanctification of the Holy Spirit? May the Lord who has given you the will to do these things give you the grace and power to perform them.

The Priesthood:

Priests are most recognized by their place at the Altar; they administer the Sacraments of the Church. They are also shepherds of the congregation and the spiritual leaders in their church. It is the responsibility of the priest to assist the people in their church to identify their calling and to provide support for active response.

The Consecration

May *she* exalt you, O Lord, in the midst of your people; offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to you; boldly proclaim the gospel of salvation; and rightly administer the sacraments of the New Covenant. Make *her* a faithful pastor, a patient teacher, and a wise councilor. Grant that in all things *she* may serve without reproach, so that your people may be strengthened and your Name glorified in all the world. All this we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, in God, forever and ever.

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 their 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 Godself 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 persons 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 you 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. Since this spiritual autobiography is being shared as the beginning of a discernment process, it is essential that it include your sense of calling, even perhaps the moment of calling, as well as how you came to desire a community discernment. 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.

In the narrative of the story of your living faith journey, be sure to address the following questions:

- What kinds of Christian communities 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?
- What does Christ mean to me?
- Why do I feel led to enter this discernment process?

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

Either the Convener or another committee member coordinates the process, while the Inquirer facilitates sharing.

The same text from the Scriptures is read aloud 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 leader will choose the reading and arrange for committee members to read.

The first reading is for the purpose of hearing a word or phrase that touches the heart. When each person in the group individually finds the word or phrase, they 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, through 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 ministers to them during a brief conversation for deeper understanding. The Inquirer also shares 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.

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 not to 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.

In the case that the committee does not see value in continuing the discernment process, this report should also include:

- Details as to what led to this conclusion.
- A proposed plan for communicating with the Inquirer.
- Description of how continuing pastoral support for the Inquirer will be administered.

Where to send your reports:

COM Chair: Rev. Christie Laughery – christie@stjohnsjackson.org

Bishop:

Canon Jessica Reynolds: email – jessica@episcopalwy.org

Guidelines for the Vestry Nomination Letter

The purpose of the letter is to make a clear nomination of the inquirer's ministry. The track for ministry **must be named**: Priest, Deacon, or WISE Lay Minister. It is possible that the vestry has concluded that the inquirer is not currently suited for leadership in ministry in the church; this must be communicated in this letter.

The letter should also indicate that this Vestry and the congregation of the church pledge to contribute financially and pastorally to the support of the nominee's preparation for ministry, and that they will also provide for ordination or commissioning as is appropriate.

This letter must be signed by 2/3 of the vestry and by the clergy leadership of the church, and attested to by the clerk of the vestry.

Your letter should be sent to the Commission on Ministry with a copy to the Bishop. Please attach a copy of the Discernment Committee's recommendation letter to be submitted as well.

Once the COM has received this nomination from the Vestry, the Inquirer will be contacted with further directions for their process and/or for registration information to the Wyoming Iona School. To this end, please include the nominee's contact information.

Please mail the original letter to:
The Episcopal Church in Wyoming
Commission on Ministry
123 S. Durbin St.
Casper, WY 82601

Please mail a copy of your letter to:
The Episcopal Church in Wyoming
Bishop
123 S. Durbin St.
Casper, WY 82601