The Episcopal Diocese Of Western New York

Discerning a Call to Ministry

Discernment Handbook for the Diocese of Western New York

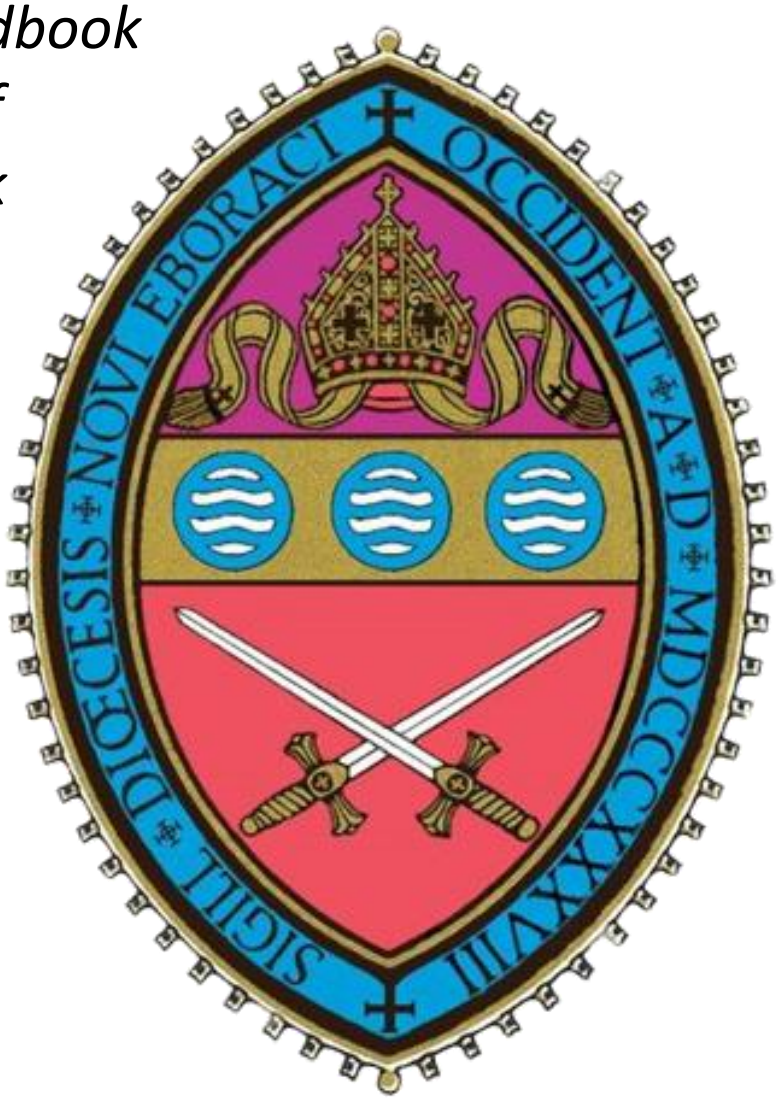


Table of Contents

I. Overview of Ministry and Ordination—The Right Reverend Stephen T. Lane 3

II. Conversations for Deepening Discernment 4

A. Initial Conversation with Clergy Sponsor 4
B. Aspirants Weekend 5

III. Discerning and Preparing for Lay Ministries 5

IV. Discerning and Preparing for Ordained Ministries 6

A. First Conversation with the Bishop 6
B. Parish Discernment Process 6
C. Second Conversation with the Bishop 7
D. Nomination by the Congregation and Application for Postulancy 8
E. Postulancy 8
F. Letter of Support by the Congregation and Application for Candidacy 9
G. Candidacy 10
H. Letter of Support by the Congregation and Application for Ordination 10
I. Ordination to the Diaconate 10
J. Letter of Support by the Congregation and Application for Priesthood 11
K. Ordination to the Priesthood 11

V. Appendices 12

A. Writing a Spiritual Autobiography 12
B. Understanding the Call: Discerning Ministry in the Community..... 13

Note: The forms referenced in this handbook are available at: https://episcopalwny.org/discerning-a-call-to-ministry/

I. Overview of Ministry and Ordination

The Right Reverend Stephen T. Lane

Welcome to the Commission on Ministry Handbook for the Episcopal Diocese of Western New York!

The following pages are intended to help you understand our diocesan interpretation of **the process for the discernment of ministries** laid out in **the Canons of The Episcopal Church**. This Handbook should be read alongside **Title III** of the Canons. In fact, it might be best if you read Title III first, and then read about our local process.

The Episcopal Church understands discernment of ministry in the context of Baptism and the life of a local worshipping community. Discernment of ministry is a function of the Body of Christ and is expected to be addressed mutually with members of the local church. Every baptized person has a call to ministry given in baptism. The discernment of particular ministries requires both the internal sense of call on the part of an individual and the external affirmation of that call by the Body. Since the days of the apostles, the church has always given the "Amen" to an individual's sense of call. (I Cor. 12:4-11) Indeed, the Body has often discerned a call in a person before it has become apparent to that person and raised him or her up to serve. (Acts 6 & 7)

While we often think of the discernment of ministries in relation to ordained persons, the discernment of ministry is intended for all Christians. Therefore, these pages offer guidance for the discernment of lay ministries, as well as for deacons and priests. The Commission on Ministry has responsibility for the oversight of all discernment and formation for ministry in the diocese. Regardless of your sense of call, this Handbook is for you.

Any worshipping community may serve as a place for the discernment of ministry. These communities include, but are not limited to, local churches, college chaplaincies, youth groups, Christian camps, and military bases. Wherever the Gospel is preached in community, there is the opportunity for the discernment of ministry.

Discernment usually begins with a conversation with the priest responsible for the worshipping community. Questions and wonderings may lead to more substantial conversations that then proceed to conversations with the bishop and a formal discernment process. The diocese will sponsor occasional discernment days to encourage and facilitate these conversations.

A brief word here about the priesthood and the diaconate. For many decades, the church understood the call to these ministries as a single call. Those who stopped short of priesthood were called "permanent" deacons, and such persons were often understood to be pastoral assistants to priests. In the early 2000s, during the revival of the diaconate, The Episcopal Church recognized the diaconate as a separate and equal order to the priesthood with separate requirements for formation. We now call such persons **deacons**, and those persons on the way to priesthood are called "transitional" deacons. Formation for both orders requires significant education, which may be undertaken at a residential seminary or one of many non-seminary training programs. The choice will be determined by personal considerations and in consultation with the COM and the bishop.

This Handbook has been revised in 2026 to make it clearer and to reflect the realities of life in today's Episcopal Church. We hope you find it helpful. Yet we know it may inspire as many questions as it answers. Your questions are always welcome, and we hope you will feel free to address your questions to your local priest, members of the Commission on Ministry, and the Bishop's Office.

May God bless your discernment and may we all be effective servants of Christ in the world!

+stl
April 2026

II. Conversations for Deepening Discernment

The Holy Spirit authorizes and empowers every baptized person to carry on various ministries for the good of, and on behalf of, the congregation and the world. The Episcopal Church (TEC), by way of its canons (governance documents, laws), calls for each diocese to affirm and develop the ministry of all baptized persons. The Church ordains some to serve through ordained ministry. Most of us act on Christ's love by sharing at home, in our communities, or worldwide the variety of gifts and talents that God has entrusted to us. Parish clergy and/or the diocese train members to serve as licensed Eucharistic ministers, Eucharistic visitors, and worship leaders.

Our individual calls affect the life and ministry of the whole body, just as the companionship of the body shapes and feeds each individual call. Discerning a call to ministry thus involves prayerful attention to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit among us. Whether God's call seems clear or is difficult to hear, we discern it most faithfully with other members of Christ's body, whether in small groups who study and pray together, in discussion with spiritual mentors, or by experiencing the practice of various ministries.

A. Initial Conversation with Clergy Sponsor

When an individual is ready to enter a formal process of discernment for any ordained or licensed lay ministry, the first step is to engage in conversations with a clergy sponsor. A clergy sponsor is generally responsible for oversight of the parish/worshiping community in which the explorer is a confirmed and active member and in which these conversations will take place. Conversations may cover a wide range of topics, including the explorer's:

- spiritual history
- experience of community
- physical and emotional health
- commitment in relationships
- financial status
- education
- gifts and passions and
- prior service in the church.

The goal of these conversations is to gain some sort of clarity about the explorer's call to ministry. During this period the explorer should become familiar with The Book of Common Prayer, 1979, especially the sections regarding baptism and ordination. The explorer should also review the Canons of the Episcopal Church, "Title III: Ministry," which speaks of both ordained and licensed lay ministries.

B. Aspirants Weekend

The Commission on Ministry for the Diocese of WNY hosts Aspirants Weekends for an overnight gathering. Aspirants Weekends would include anyone exploring a potential call to ordained ministry through the church. Persons who are exploring a potential call to ordination attend along with members of the Standing Committee and Commission on Ministry.

Aspirants Weekends explores the practice of Christian discernment in general, as well as offering information about current and/or expected opportunities for ministry. The gathering includes presentations and discussions about what it is like to serve in an ordained role. It also provides information about the diocesan discernment process.

III. Discerning and Preparing for Lay Ministries

By virtue of our baptism, we are all called to ministry. The Holy Spirit authorizes and empowers every baptized person to carry on various ministries for the good of and on behalf of the congregation. For some Christians, this means being called to ordained ministry. For most of us, this means being actively involved in lay ministry or ministries.

After engaging in conversation with a clergy sponsor and attending the Aspirants Weekend, explorers may discern a call to a deeper engagement in lay ministry. If so, they are encouraged to continue receiving spiritual direction for ongoing discernment and support, and to participate in regular Christian formation. Adult education classes, small groups, Bible studies, and prayer groups provide opportunities for learning and growth in the Christian faith. Those who are interested in an in-depth study of scripture and theology may enjoy participating in Education for Ministry (EFM), a program offered at parishes around the diocese.

While the possibilities for lay ministry are limitless, The Episcopal Church canons outline specific licensed ministries for which the diocese provides formation and support. For ministries within the church, "a confirmed communicant in good standing … may be licensed by the Ecclesiastical Authority to serve as Worship Leader, Preacher, Eucharistic Minister, or Eucharistic Visitor.

Eucharistic ministers, Eucharistic visitors, and worship leaders are generally trained in their own parish setting, usually by the rector. The Congregational Management page of the diocesan website includes detailed information about:

- Descriptions of lay licenses
- Required training for lay licenses
- Requesting and renewal of licenses

Information on these licenses are available at www.episcopalwny.org/congregational-management/

IV. Discerning and Preparing for Ordained Ministries

A. First Conversation with the Bishop

If, after participating in the Parish Discernment process and attending the Aspirants Weekend, an explorer considering ordination and their clergy sponsor believe that further formal discernment regarding Holy Orders would be appropriate, the clergy sponsor will set up a meeting at with the bishop. At the meeting, the explorer, the clergy sponsor, and the bishop will discuss next possible steps.

Before meeting with the bishop, the explorer and the clergy sponsor must submit the following materials to the bishop's office for review.

- A1: Explorer's Information Form (with spiritual autobiography and photograph)
    - See Appendix A for a description of the spiritual autobiography

B. Parish Discernment Process

If the bishop, clergy sponsor, and explorer agree that formal discernment regarding ordination should continue, **the clergy sponsor shall notify the COM Chair**. The next step is for the explorer to work with a group in Parish Discernment (PD) within the home congregation. The role of the group is not to decide whether a explorer should be ordained or licensed, but rather to help the explorer clarify and test their understanding of God's call. As their name suggests, they are meant to assist the explorer in listening and in prayer.

The PD consists of four to six members invited by the clergy sponsor. The group should reflect the diversity of the sponsoring congregation, and it may include members from other congregations, as appropriate. One member of the group will serve as the convener, who is responsible for scheduling and facilitating the meetings. Another member will serve as the scribe, whose job it is to keep notes that will help the PD to compose its final report. A member of the Commission on Ministry may also be part of the PD.

The PD will meet with the explorer a minimum of ten times over a period of at least six months. Each session should last between one and one-and-a-half hours, beginning and ending with prayer. PD members should commit to being present for every session in its entirety. The outline of sessions, including topics and homework, is found below (See Appendix B).

The Commission on Ministry recommends that the explorer keep a reflective journal during the process, and that the PD members write down their thoughts and questions after each session as well. For their final session together, the PD will write a report that responds to the questions outlined below. The explorer, too, will write a final reflection. Both written reflections will be shared with the clergy sponsor, the bishop, and the Commission on Ministry. (Conversations between the explorer and the clergy sponsor should continue throughout the Parish Discernment process.)

The PD, in their work with the explorer, should look for the skills and characteristics of an effective ordained leader, including the following:

- Deep faith and relationship with Jesus Christ
- Passion for the Gospel and for making it known
- Commitment to God's mission of reconciliation
- An ability to lead and to equip others for ministry
- Humility and self-awareness
- Healthy relationships and appropriate boundaries
- A sense of creativity and holy imagination
- Perseverance and adaptability
- Intellectual capacity and a commitment to lifelong learning

Please note: Delving deeply enough to get a clear sense of these skills and characteristics will require that the PD members consider the questions in the session outlines as simply starting points for discussion. Listening well to the explorer's verbal and nonverbal replies will reveal other questions for further discussion.

The Commission on Ministry (COM) will appoint a liaison to facilitate coordination between the congregation's PD and the COM. Prior to the first meeting of the PD, the COM liaison will confer with the clergy sponsor and the PD convener to clarify procedures for the PD's work and to answer questions about the process. At the PD's first meeting, the liaison will explain an overview of the PD process and distribute resource materials to guide their work. After that, the liaison will remain available to the convener to provide additional directions and resources, if needed (See Appendix B).

C. Second Conversation with the Bishop

Following the conclusion of the PD's work, the clergy sponsor will set up a meeting at which the explorer, the clergy sponsor, and the bishop can discuss next steps. Before this meeting, the following documents must be submitted to the bishop's office:

- A2: Explorer's Reflection on Parish Discernment
- A3: Parish Discernment Team Report

D. Nomination by the Congregation and Application for Postulancy

If an explorer has been invited by the bishop to seek nomination from the parish congregation, the clergy sponsor meets with the vestry for a vote (2/3 + majority) on whether to nominate the explorer for ordination. The clergy sponsor informs the vestry about what has been discerned by the CID and at the COM discernment retreat. All information about the explorer is shared with the explicit expectation of confidentiality. A vestry's nomination of an explorer to prepare for

ordination constitutes a commitment that the parish will support the nominee financially and spiritually during the journey to ordination. In order to nominate the explorer, the vestry submits

the following form to the bishop's office:

- A4: Vestry Nomination for Postulancy

An explorer who accepts the congregation's nomination for ordination to the diaconate or priesthood submits the following form, along with documentation of Baptism and Confirmation, to the bishop's office:

- A5: Acceptance of Nomination and Application for Postulancy

The application packet for Postulancy includes:

- A6: Financial Disclosure Form
- Official Transcripts (undergraduate; and post-graduate-if applicable)
- Seminary Transcript & Evaluation (if applicable) OR Nominee would be examined by our Joint Board of Examining Chaplains
- Date of previous application for Holy Orders or Nomination, if any____/_____/_____
- Executive Assistant begins Background Check process
- Priest Aspirant ONLY
    - A7: Health Questionnaire & supporting documents
    - A8: Authorization to Release
    - A9: Life History Questionnaire
    - A10: Behavior Screening Questionnaire
    - A11: Medical Exam using the required CPG form (by the Nominee's primacy physician)
    - A12: Mental Health Exam using the required CPG Form
    - Report received from physician to the Bishop
    - Report received from psychologist to the Bishop

E. Postulancy

If the bishop accepts an aspirant who has applied for postulancy, the bishop so informs the aspirant. Planning for study and supervision to prepare the postulant for the diaconate or the priesthood then begins in concert with the bishop.

Plans for the education necessary to fulfilling an ordained role are specified in part by canonical requirements of The Episcopal Church and in part by the bishop's discernment of the formation needed by specific individuals. Those preparing to serve as priests normally have a college degree and undertake a three-year seminary education. Vocational deacons receive training focused on their specific ministries in the world, as well as participating with other deacons in studying scripture, church history, theology, and liturgics as appropriate to their role.

Following the meeting with the bishop, the COM chair invites the aspirant for an interview with the entire Commission on Ministry. Based on this interview, COM will issue a recommendation decision to the bishop. A Certificate of Consent from Standing Committee concerning any impediments to postulancy is issued. Upon receiving both the COM and Standing Committee documents, the bishop will either stop the process or accept the aspirant for postulancy.

Upon being informed by the bishop that he has accepted the aspirant for postulancy, COM will appoint a liaison to the postulant. The postulant will communicate to the bishop during Ember weeks (Holy Cross, Advent, Lent, Pentecost) and to include: Spiritual, Educational, Relationships, and Finance subjects; be faithful at worship and in prayer; be in regular contact with COM Liaison; and function in an assigned community, as appropriate.

Deacon Postulants are required to provide the following:

- A7: Health Questionnaire & supporting documents
- A8: Authorization to Release
- A9: Life History Questionnaire
- A10: Behavior Screening Questionnaire
- A11: Medical Exam using the required CPG form (by the Nominee's primacy physician)
- A12: Mental Health Exam using the required CPG Form
- Report received from physician to the Bishop
- Report received from psychologist to the Bishop

F. Letter of Support by the Congregation and Application for Candidacy

If a postulant has been invited by the bishop to seek support from the parish congregation, the clergy sponsor meets with the vestry for a vote (2/3 + majority) on whether to support the postulant for candidacy. All information about the postulant is shared with the explicit expectation of confidentiality. A vestry's support of a postulant to prepare for ordination constitutes a commitment that the parish will support the nominee financially and spiritually during the journey to ordination. In order to support the postulant, the vestry submits the following form to the bishop's office:

- P1: Vestry Endorsement for Candidacy

A postulant who accepts the congregation's support for ordination to the diaconate or priesthood submits the following form to the bishop's office:

- P2: Acceptance of Support and Application for Candidacy

G. Candidacy

Following acceptance by the bishop of the postulant's application for candidacy, the COM will review the postulant's file, and the COM chair will invite the postulant for an interview with the entire Commission on Ministry. Based on this interview, COM will issue a certificate of

recommendation to the bishop and inform the Standing Committee president. The President of the Standing Committee invites the postulant for an interview. Based on this interview, a certificate of recommendation from Standing Committee concerning any impediments to candidacy is issued. Upon receiving both the COM and Standing Committee documents, the bishop will either stop the process or admits the postulant in the process for Holy Orders. If the bishop accepts a postulant who has applied for candidacy, the bishop so informs the postulant.

Upon being informed by the bishop that he has accepted the postulant for candidacy, COM will appoint a liaison to the candidate. The postulant will communicate to the bishop during Ember weeks, be faithful at worship and in prayer, be in regular contact with COM Liaison, and meet with the bishop regarding placement. In addition, the following is required:

- Supervised Field Education
- General Ordination Examination (GOE)
- Safe Church Training
- Title IV Training
- Racial Reconciliation Healing & Justice Training
- Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) Report
- Seminary transcript & Faculty recommendations

H. Letter of Support by the Congregation and Application for Ordination

If a candidate has been invited by the bishop to seek support from the parish congregation, the clergy sponsor meets with the vestry for a vote (2/3 + majority) on whether to support the candidate for ordination. All information about the candidate is shared with the explicit expectation of confidentiality. In order to support the candidate, the vestry submits the following form to the bishop's office:

- C1: Vestry Letter of Support for Ordination to Diaconate

A candidate who accepts the congregation's support for ordination to the diaconate or priesthood submits the following form to the bishop's office:

- C2: Application for Ordination to the Diaconate

I. Ordination to the Diaconate

Following acceptance by the bishop of the candidate's application for ordination, the COM will review the candidate's file, and the COM chair will invite the postulant for an interview with the entire Commission on Ministry, if needed. COM will issue a certificate of recommendation to the bishop and inform the Standing Committee president. The President of the Standing Committee may invite the candidate for an interview. A certificate of recommendation and certification from Standing Committee concerning any impediments to ordination is issued. Upon receiving both the COM and Standing Committee documents, the bishop will either stop the process or takes order

for ordination. If the bishop takes order for ordination, the bishop so informs the candidate, Standing Comm Pres, COM Chair, Clergy Sponsor, and Canon to Ordinary.
An ordination date as a Transitional Deacon is decided by Bishop and Ordinand. If the Ordinand is continuing as a transitional deacon, COM will appoint a liaison to the Ordinand.

J. Letter of Support by the Congregation and Application for Priesthood
After the following requirements have been met:

- At least 18 mths has elapsed since the date of acceptance by the Nominee for Holy Orders (may include 6 mths as Deacon)
- Faithful at worship and in prayer in a local church
- Regular contact with COM Liaison
- Meet with Bishop re: available positions/assignments
- Served at least 6 months as a Transitional Deacon
- Certificate from the seminary or other program of preparation, written at the completion of the program showing the Deacon's scholastic record in the subjects required by the Canons and giving an evaluation and recommendation.

Then the bishop may invite the ordinand to seek support from the parish congregation. The clergy sponsor meets with the vestry for a vote (2/3 + majority) on whether to support the ordinate for ordination to the priesthood. All information about the ordinate is shared with the explicit expectation of confidentiality. In order to support the ordinate, the vestry submits the following form to the bishop's office:

- O1: Vestry Letter of Support for Ordination to Priesthood

An ordinate who accepts the congregation's support for ordination to the priesthood submits the following form to the bishop's office:

- O2: Application for Ordination to the Priesthood

K. Ordination to the Priesthood
Following acceptance by the bishop of the ordinate's application for ordination to the priesthood, the COM will review the candidate's file, and the COM chair will invite the ordinate for an interview with the entire Commission on Ministry, if needed. COM will issue a certificate of recommendation to the bishop and inform the Standing Committee president. The Standing Committee will review then ordinand's file. A certificate of recommendation and certification from Standing Committee that all canonical requirements have been met. Upon receiving both the COM and Standing Committee documents, the bishop will either stop the process or takes order for ordination. If the bishop takes order for ordination, the bishop so informs the ordinate, Standing Comm Pres, COM Chair, Clergy Sponsor, and Canon to Ordinary.

An ordination date to the priesthood is decided by Bishop and Ordinand.

Appendix A: Writing a Spiritual Autobiography

A spiritual autobiography is a tool for listening to your life and for telling others about it. It records not just the facts, but your telling of their significance. It focuses on how you engage with the world, yourself, others, and God. It speaks to recurring themes, changes in attitude, shocks and surprises, tides and turnings, calms in the storm.

For our purposes, your spiritual autobiography should be about five typed pages long, but no less than three typed pages. Use any or none of these suggestions for revealing who you have been, who you are, and who you seem on your way to becoming.

1. **Think of your life till now as a five-chapter book:** What are the titles of the chapters, and why? Explain what is the same or different about each chapter. Who are the significant characters in each chapter? What are their significant gifts and challenges to you? What tensions (attraction, conflict, companionship) hold these characters in the plot of your life? Which characters have dropped out of that plot, and what difference has that made?

2. **Think of your life as a series of hit songs:** What are they? Who "sang" them in which era of your life, and why? Who is singing to you now? How have the harmonies and rhythms changed, and what do you make of that? As you seek ordination, are you asking to change key, add a refrain, write another verse?

3. **If your life were plotted out on a map,** what would be the interstates? What would be the wandering back roads? What would be the dead ends and how did you come to take them? Where are the scenic routes, and what do they show you? Where did you start at birth and how long did you stay there? With whom did you hitchhike along the way? Did you have to walk through any storms? Where were you when the clouds broke? What led you to take the turns that now seem to direct you toward ordination?

4. **Think of your life as a kayaking trip down a river.** Where did you put yourself and your kayak into the water, and how did you come to that point of entry? Who floats with you on this trip downriver? Where has the river changed course? Where has it deepened and quieted, and what did you do with those pools? Where have you hit the rapids—when and how did you know that things had changed? How did you respond? When and where did you roll over or fall out of the kayak? Have you had to bail yourself out of a sinking situation? If so, how did you do it? Is the river clear and cold, warm and silty, fast or slow now? What kind of water do you think is ahead, and how will you navigate it? What makes you think so?

5. **Think of your life as a pie chart:** Into how many slices is the pie divided? What are they? What color is each piece and why? How do the pieces compare in size? In what order are they arranged and why? Where and how did you get the data from which this pie chart is drawn? How would your best friend draw a pie chart of your life and why? Your spouse? Your most tenacious detractor? What slices would you change, and how?

Appendix B: Understanding the Call: Discerning Ministry in the Community

Session 1: Introductions and Overview

The discerner, parish discernment group members, clergy sponsor, and a Commission on Ministry member attend this first session. The purpose of this meeting is for group members to get acquainted with one another and with the discernment process. The COM member leads this session. Have BCPs available for all sessions.

Opening Prayer (For All Christians in Their Vocation - BCP 256)
Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified: Receive our supplications and prayers which we offer before you for all members of your holy Church, that in their vocation and ministry they may truly and devoutly serve you; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introductions

Overview (Presented by the COM member)
The COM member discusses the roles and responsibilities of the group's members in support of the discerner's exploration, and the outline of the discernment sessions. See resources and information attached after the Closing Prayer.

Practical Matters
The group will decide on several items:

- Who will scribe for the sessions. The scribe will make note of decisions made, and write a short summary of each session, including a summary of the reflections of the discerner. These notes will be shared with the parish discernment group. The scribe will also send the final reflections from Session 11 to the COM and include all dates the group met.
- How often the group will meet and how long each session will be.
- When the group will meet. Monthly is recommended but can be adapted.
- Which person from the parish discernment group will lead each session.

Questions to Ponder (Sharing happens after the time for Silent Reflection)
Entire Group:

- What questions do you have about the process?
- How will you, personally, engage this process in the role you have?

Discerner:

- Are there specific hopes you have for this process that you can name at this time?
- Are there specific needs you have that would be good for the group to know at the start of the process?

Time for Silent Reflection

Shared reflections by the Entire Group
Questions raised will be addressed by the person most appropriate to address them.

Reflections shared by the Discerner

Closing Prayer (Psalm 121, BCP 779)

I lift up my eyes to the hills; *
from where is my help to come?
My help comes from the Lord, *
the maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved *
and he who watches over you will not fall asleep.
Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel *
shall neither slumber nor sleep;
The Lord himself watches over you; *
the Lord is your shade at your right hand,
So that the sun shall not strike you by day, *
nor the moon by night.
The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; *
it is he who shall keep you safe.
The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, *
from this time forth for evermore.

Three Important Resources for Ministry Discernment in EDWNY

- The current Canons of the Episcopal Church, "Title III: Ministry"
  https://generalconvention.org/constitution-and-canons/
  The html version is easy to navigate online. Title III is found by scrolling down in the Table of Contents.

- An overview of the diocesan ordination process in EDWNY
  https://episcopalwny.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/WNY-Discernment-Handbook-6.16.26.pdf
  This handbook is the basis for the overview presented in this session.

- The relevant sections of the Confirmation and Ordination rites from The Book of Common Prayer
  Confirmation: BCP 413-419
  Ordination to the Diaconate: BCP 536-547, especially 543 and following
  Ordination to the Priesthood: BCP 524-535, especially 531 and following

An Overview of the Sessions

Session	Title	Focus
Introduction		
1	Introduction and Overview	Laying the foundation
Discernment		
2	Discernment in Life	Discerning God's movements in our lives
3	Discernment in Community	Discerning calls in community*
Ministry of All the Baptized		
4	Ministry of All the Baptized	Ministry rooted in our baptism
The Ministry of Leadership		
5	The Gifts of Leadership	Leadership in all types of ministries
6	The Ministry of Leadership	The exercise of leadership
The Cost of Ministry		
7	The Cost of Ministry	The cost of ministry
Ordained Ministry		
8	Ordained Ministry	Overview of ordained ministry⁺
9	The Diaconate	The ministry of the deacon
10	The Priesthood	The ministry of the priest
Final Reflections		
11	Final reflections	Gathering and sharing the fruit of reflection

*Discerner Spiritual Autobiography distributed before this session, details in Session 2
⁺Discerner interviews of a deacon and a priest done before this session, details in Session 5

The EDWNY COM gratefully acknowledges the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado for sharing their parish discernment process. Elements of that program have been adapted and combined with the prior one from Western New York for use in this process

Session 2: Discernment in Life

Opening Collect (Collect for Guidance, BCP 100)

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Lessons

Psalm 139:1-17

BCP 794

Colossians 3:12-17 (NSRV)
As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

BCP Reading

The Catechism: The Holy Spirit

BCP 852-853

Questions for Reflection (Sharing happens after the time for Silent Reflection)

Entire Group:

- What are some ways we recognize the Holy Spirit within others, within creation, within ourselves?
- In what way can "sitting in solitude and silence" increase awareness of God's faithfulness, God's love?

Discerner:

- How would you describe your practice of prayer?
- Who is Christ for you?
- What do you believe are your greatest strengths?
- Describe a time when you experienced a deep sense of accomplishment.

Time for Silent Reflection

Shared reflections by the Entire Group

Reflections shared by the Discerner

Writing a Spiritual Autobiography (due to the group the day before Session 3)

Closing Prayer (Litany of Thanksgiving)

BCP 836-837

Session 3: Discernment in Community

Opening Collect (Prayer for Mission, BCP 125)

O God, you manifest in your servants the signs of your presence: Send forth upon us the Spirit of love, that in companionship with one another your abounding grace may increase among us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Lessons

1 Samuel 3:1-10 (NSRV)
Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.' " So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening.

Acts 6:1-6 (NSRV)
Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

BCP Reading

The Catechism: The Church

BCP 854-855

Questions for Reflection (Sharing happens after the time for Silent Reflection)

Entire Group:

- What is the relationship of individual and communal discernment in God's will for our lives?
- What most struck you in the discerner's Spiritual Autobiography? Why?

Discerner:

- Who are the people to whom you can turn for spiritual guidance?
- How have others helped you to recognize God's call in your life?
- What most struck you as you wrote your Spiritual Autobiography? Why?

Time for Silent Reflection

Shared reflections by the Entire Group

Reflections shared by the Discerner

Closing Prayer (Collect for Proper 10, BCP 231)
O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of we, your people, who call upon you, and grant that we may know and understand what things we ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Session 4: Ministry of All the Baptized

Opening Collect (The Prayer - Confirmation, BCP 418)

Almighty God, we thank you that by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ you have overcome sin and brought us to yourself, and that by the sealing of your Holy Spirit you have bound us to your service. Renew in these your servants the covenant you have made with them at their Baptism. Send them forth in the power of that Spirit to perform the service you set before them; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Scripture Lessons

Deuteronomy 10:12-15 (NSRV)
So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the LORD your God, the earth with all that is in it, yet the LORD set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today.

Romans 6:3-4 (NSRV)
Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

BCP Reading

Baptismal Covenant

BCP 292-294

Questions for Reflection (Sharing happens after the time for Silent Reflection)

Entire Group:

- How have we discerned God's will for us in our own present vocations?
- What are our responsibilities as Christians in our present vocations?

Discerner:

- Which of the baptismal covenant vows are easy for you to fulfill and which ones are more difficult?
- How do you honor your baptismal vows in your present vocation?
- Who are you drawn to in ministry and who do you resist?

Time for Silent Reflection

Shared reflections by the Entire Group

Reflections shared by the Discerner

Closing Prayer (Second Song of Isaiah, BCP 86)

Seek the Lord while he wills to be found; *
call upon him when he draws near.
Let the wicked forsake their ways *
and the evil ones their thoughts;
And let them turn to the Lord, and he will have compassion, *
and to our God, for he will richly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts, *
nor your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth, *
so are my ways higher than your ways,
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
For as rain and snow fall from the heavens *
and return not again, but water the earth,
Bringing forth life and giving growth, *
seed for sowing and bread for eating,
So is my word that goes forth from my mouth; *
it will not return to me empty;
But it will accomplish that which I have purposed, *
and prosper in that for which I sent it.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: *
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. *Amen.*

Additional Sessions will be added shortly by COM