



STEPS IN THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS TOWARD ORDINATION

The process falls under **Title III of the Canons of the Episcopal Church**. The baptized and confirmed person entering discernment is first guided by the sponsoring priest (head of congregation*) in consultation with the Commission on Ministry, as needed. The process requires in-depth, open dialogue with the sponsoring priest prior to and during the entire discernment and application process and following any decision by the bishop and Commission on Ministry. In this document, the person in discernment will be referred to as the “Aspirant.”

DISCERNMENT and APPLICATION

Participation in a Discovery Retreat weekend is highly recommended to those in discernment, though no longer required.

Steps in the discernment process up to enrollment in a program of formation.

1. **PREPARATORY EXPLORATION**: Seeker or Aspirant initiates meeting with Head of Congregation to share their perceived call. (A “seeker” might be someone who feels a tug toward ministry, but does not know to what they feel called; “aspirant” is a traditional term for someone who has personally felt a call to ordained ministry.)
 - If the Seeker/Aspirant has attended or will attend a Discovery Retreat, this meeting with the Head of Congregation may be before attending the Retreat, but a meeting *must* occur after the Retreat to ensure that all parties agree on which direction to progress with the discernment process.
 - Seekers will need help to determine to what ministry, lay or ordained, they are feeling called, and to assess whether they are ready to proceed to discernment at the diocesan level if discerning a call to ordination as a priest or deacon.
 - If an aspirant for Holy Orders does not attend a Retreat, after the meeting with the Head of Congregation proceed to the next step.
2. **REQUESTING AN APPLICATION**: If the Head of Congregation agrees to proceed, *the Head of the Congregation requests* the appropriate application from Assistant to the office of the Commission on Ministry:
 - Canon 6 - Application for Holy Orders to the Diaconate
 - Canon 8 - Application for Holy Orders to Priesthood (same application is used for those pursuing stipendiary and bivocational priestly service)
 - Canon 10 – Reception of Clergy from Other Churches

Note: Applications will be sent only to the Head of Congregation



3. **PREPARING THE APPLICATION:** Once received, the Head of Congregation forwards the application to the Aspirant. This is to ensure that the Head of Congregation is fully aware of and supports the application. Completion and submission of the application and all its components are the responsibility of the applicant.

4. **FORMING A DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE:** The Head of Congregation forms a local discernment committee or requests assistance to form a regional discernment committee. Discernment committees are typically 5-6 people.
 - If a regional discernment committee is preferred, 2-3 members from the Aspirant's congregation should be identified to serve. One of these should be a Vestry/Bishop's Committee member. One of these should be appointed to serve as Facilitator. The other 2-3 members should be recruited from area Episcopal churches. *A list of trained discernment committee ministers is available from the Assistant to the Commission on Ministry. If there are problems finding committee members in your area, please contact the Chair of the Commission on ministry for assistance.*
 - If a local committee is preferred, the Head of Congregation and the Aspirant work together to identify 5-6 members from within their congregation who are willing to serve. One of these should be a Vestry/Bishop's Committee member. Some should not already know the aspirant well. One of these should be appointed to serve as Facilitator. If none have served on a discernment committee in the last 2-3 years, contact the Chair or the Assistant of the Commission on Ministry to arrange training.
 - Discernment committees follow the Diocese of Texas manual.

In preparation for the discernment committee and the application, the Aspirant will be required to write a spiritual autobiography of no more than 5 pages. Instructions for writing the spiritual autobiography are in the application packet. The spiritual autobiography is also submitted with the application for Holy Orders.

5. **WORK OF THE DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE:** Once the committee is trained and the spiritual autobiography is completed, the discernment committee will begin meeting.
 - There are 6 scheduled sessions. Each session is approximately 2 hours. Expect 8-16 weeks for the committee's work.
 - A manual is provided to each committee member and the Aspirant. The manual provides an agenda and details for each session.
 - The result is a mutually agreed upon discernment committee report. A template for the report is provided in the manual.



The discernment committee report is given to the Head of Congregation who then provides a *verbal* presentation to the Vestry/Bishop's Committee. The discernment committee report is also submitted with the application for Holy Orders.

6. **VESTRY/BISHOP'S COMMITTEE REPORT:** If the Vestry/Bishop's Committee agrees to proceed and support the Aspirant, they complete and submit the *Vestry/Bishop's Committee Nomination and Commitment* form (included in the application). All congregations are expected to provide some financial support toward the formation of the aspirant.
 - ***Please note:*** *The final decision about whether a person should be ordained is made at the diocesan level. Completion of the discernment process at the local level is simply the first step of the process.*
7. **ACCEPTING THE NOMINATION:** The Aspirant must formally accept the nomination of the vestry. The Aspirant may now submit the application when all additional required components are complete.

APPLICATION DEADLINE and REVIEW

All required portions of the application are due in the Austin office by **SEPTEMBER 1ST** for those seeking to be ordained or wishing to be received into the Episcopal church from another denomination.

8. **APPLICATION REVIEW:** The Executive for Ministry reviews all applications. If approved to move forward, the Aspirant will be notified and given instructions to complete the following as required by National Church canons:
 - a medical exam,
 - a psychological exam, and
 - consent to a full background check.

MEETING WITH COMMISSION ON MINISTRY/COMMITTEE FOR THE DIACONATE

9. **INTERVIEW WITH THE COMMISSION:** If application and exams are completed, the aspirant will be scheduled to meet with members of the Commission on Ministry or the Committee for the Diaconate, generally in November. The Head of Congregation and spouse of the aspirant, if married, will be expected to attend this meeting.



10. **BECOMING A POSTULANT:** The Executive for Ministry, with input from the Commission/Committee makes the final decision to accept the aspirant as a Postulant or re-direct the aspirant for further discernment or other ministries.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION and FORMATION

11. **APPLYING TO EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS:**

- Postulants for Priest attending Seminary: The Executive for Ministry, in conversation with the Postulant (formerly aspirant), makes the final decision on which seminary to attend for full-time formation.
- Postulants for Bi-vocational Priest or Deacon: Postulants on these tracks will attend the Iona School for Ministry.
- Clergy from other traditions applying under Canon 10: Consult with the Executive for Ministry on their formation requirements.

12. **INTERVIEW FOR CANDIDACY:** In the second year of seminary/Iona, postulants meet a second time with the COM or CFD and the Standing Committee to seek approval to become a candidate. This meeting occurs at the January Vocations Conference.

13. **INTERVIEW FOR ORDINATION:** In the final year of seminary/Iona, the Candidates meet with the Examining Chaplains, the COM or CFD and the Standing Committee to be approved as an ordinand, in preparation for ordination as a Transitional or permanent Deacon. These meetings are also held at the January Vocations Conference.

14. Ordination to the diaconate may not occur less than 18 months after the aspirant accepts nomination for ordination. (See step 9 above.)

*Head of Congregation. In the absence of a Rector/Vicar, the head of congregation will be the Interim Rector/Vicar, Priest in Charge, Locum Tenens or the Senior Warden.