



Called to Ministry

Section 3: Holy Orders

Doc 3G: Guidelines for Discernment Committees

**Guidelines for Ministry of all the Baptized,
Lay Licensed Ministries, and Holy Orders**

for the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe

Commission on the Ministry of the Baptized

The Commission on the Ministry of the Baptized serves to guide and empower all baptized people in discerning their ministries.

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Guidelines for Discernment Committees

Contents

I. The Functions of the Discernment Committee.....	3
II. Confidentiality	3
III. Meetings of the Discernment Committee.....	3
IV. Responsibilities of the Members of the Discernment Committee.....	3
V. Responsibilities of the Chairperson.....	5
VI. Responsibilities of the Discerning Person	5
VII. The Role of the Clergy or Leader	5
VIII. Acknowledgement.....	5
Appendix I: Qualities sought in ordained persons	6
A. Relationship with God	6
B. Personal Talents and Gifts.....	6
C. Commitment to the Church’s Mission and its Ministry	7
D. An Understanding of the Variety of Ministries.....	7
E. A Willingness to Wrestle with the Church’s Prophetic Role in Society	7

Guidelines for Discernment Committees

I. The Functions of the Discernment Committee

Depending on the decision of your Member of the Clergy in charge or Pastoral Leader, and the size of your congregation, your committee consists of a minimum of three and a maximum of six members.

Members of the Discernment Committee must not be members of the Vestry or Bishop's Committee.

The Member of the Clergy will appoint the chairperson of the Discernment Committee.

II. Confidentiality

The Discernment Process requires that the discerning person share fully his or her life's story and may well include sensitive topics. The discerning person must be able to trust that the Discernment Committee members will respect this process and will keep all interactions in the strictest confidentiality. Committee meetings should always be a safe space for all participants.

III. Meetings of the Discernment Committee

The Discernment Committee usually meets monthly for a period of six to twelve months. This gives both the members of the Discernment Committee as well as the discerning person time to reflect on each meeting.

At the beginning of the process, a preparatory meeting should take place in the presence of the Member of the Clergy and in absence of the discerning person to discuss any questions which the members of the Discernment Committee may have.

It might also be helpful to have a meeting of the members of the Discernment Committee at the end of the discernment process as a time to reflect together on the process.

IV. Responsibilities of the Members of the Discernment Committee

1. Attending all meetings

It is important that the discerning person experience continuity of presence. It is therefore mandatory that all members attend all meetings. No member should miss more than one meeting.

2. *Listening to the discerning person express his/her story*

Listening to somebody's story is a great gift. Pay attention especially to everything which the person shares that you feel has an impact on what the person's call might be.

3. *Engaging in discussion about the meaning and the varieties of ministry in our Church*

Not every call is for ordained ministry. It is therefore important to engage in discussion about all ministries within the Church.

4. *Ascertaining the discerning person's motivation for exploring a call*

A call requires the mutual discerning of both the discerning person and the Discernment Committee.

Often the discerning person is unsure about the nature of the call. Any call ought to be supported. This does not mean that the call which the person is discerning will necessarily be the call that the Discernment Committee may recognize at the end of the process.

5. *Empowering the discerning person to understand the ways in which he or she is perceived*

Often people have a different picture of themselves than others have. Especially for those seeking an ordained ministry, it is important to know how others perceive them. You will be crucial for the exploring person in offering this experience to him/her.

6. *Exploring qualities*

Through questions, sharing and conversation, the Discernment Committee explores all of the areas in "Qualities we seek in Ordained Persons" (Appendix I of this document) under the major headings:

- a) relationship with God
- b) personal talents and gifts
- c) commitment to the Church's mission and its ministry.

7. *Prayerful and honest assessment*

Prayerful and honest assessment as to whether the discerning person should be encouraged to continue their baptismal ministry or a licensed or ordained ministry, and articulate why.

8. *Writing of a final statement*

At the end of the process, each member is asked to formulate a statement regarding his or her opinion of the discerning person's call. It should focus on the strengths

which the person brings as well as an honest expression of any concerns that may have arisen during the discernment time.

V. Responsibilities of the Chairperson

The Chairperson is responsible for overseeing (not leading) the process as a whole of the discerning person. At the end of the discernment process, he or she will collect statements from each member of the Committee and integrate the comments so that the members are not identified. It is important that both concern as well as support find their expression in this document. The document will be handed to the Member of the Clergy for further use.

VI. Responsibilities of the Discerning Person

1. Convening the meetings

The discerning person is in charge of the discernment process. Please note that it is an expression of his or her interest in the process and his or her leadership ability to see how the process is proceeding.

2. Writing reflections and distribution to members of the Discernment Committee

After every meeting, the discerning person is to write a reflection on the meeting. This reflection can be used as the basis for discussion for the next meeting. The reflection needs to be handed out to all members of the Discernment Committee at least one week in advance of the meeting.

VII. The Role of the Clergy or Leader

The Member of the Clergy or Leader in charge of the discernment process calls the members of the Discernment Committee. He or she is the resource person for any questions or concerns that may come up during the process.

VIII. Acknowledgement

The members of the Commission on the Ministry of the Baptized of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe wish to express their gratitude to the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania for allowing the use of their Total Ministry Guidebook as a basis for this document.

Appendix I: Qualities sought in ordained persons

These are the qualities that we seek in ordained persons:

A. Relationship with God

1. A faith in God that is grounded in and in harmony with Scripture, reason and tradition as reflected in The Book of Common Prayer.
2. A love of Jesus Christ that can inspire and empower others.
3. Openness to mystery and the work of the Holy Spirit, the fruits of which give one the ability to act with faith in ambiguous situations.
4. A practice of prayerfulness, servanthood and participation in Christian community that demonstrates durable Christian faith and witness.

B. Personal Talents and Gifts

1. Personal maturity and emotional stability enabling one to minister with others.
2. Demonstrated ability to be a leader in the midst of the community of faith, modeling the leadership values described in the ordination services of The Book of Common Prayer.
3. Cognitive abilities – the ability to comprehend, analyze and synthesize complex and diverse information. The ability to communicate orally and in writing the significance of Christian faith.
4. A sense of perspective, often demonstrated through a sense of humor or the ability not to take oneself too seriously.
5. A growing knowledge of one's own gifts and limitations, and the ability to set personal boundaries.
6. An awareness of the struggle to live a healthy, balanced life, recognizing that the capacity to care for ourselves in various aspects of our lives (emotional, spiritual and physical health) affects our ability to care for others and to maintain perspective in the ministry to which we are called.
7. An understanding of who one is as a person and the knowledge that the call to ministry comes from and is sustained by the grace of God. (Validation for ministry comes from both external and internal sources. It is helpful to have the ability to be satisfied and fulfilled in an environment where praise may not be regularly accorded.)
8. Integrity and commitment to the development of moral character patterned after the life of Christ.
9. The ability to relate to people with varying religious and cultural backgrounds.

10. The ability to care for and serve people; the capacity to be with others in times of crisis.
11. The ability to listen to and to accept constructive criticism.
12. A tolerance towards different opinions and the willingness to respect every person.
13. The willingness to meet everybody with compassion.

C. Commitment to the Church's Mission and its Ministry

1. A willingness to explore whether one is being called to an ordained vocation in the Church's ministry implies willingness to accept responsibility, practice obedience, seek God's will, and give of oneself to others (whether ordained or not). Church leadership involves a mixture of privilege, authority, public visibility and accountability, all of which must be acceptable to anyone who enters this process.
2. Recognition and acceptance that ordained ministry is a vocation and not a "career", a service for the benefit and building up of others, not for self alone, entered into for the glory of God.
3. Recognition and acceptance that the Church's governance is based on the belief that God leads through community: through canons, mutual discernment, testing and evaluation, episcopal oversight and councils of the faithful.
4. Confidence that the Holy Spirit works within the structure of the Church to discern and achieve God's purposes.
5. Acceptance of Scripture as the revealed Word of God, containing all things necessary for salvation, and of The Book of Common Prayer as our Church's summary expression of belief, doctrine and liturgy.
6. Acceptance that ordination is for the benefit of others. Commitments made to the ordained person will probably be less than the commitments asked of him or her.

D. An Understanding of the Variety of Ministries

An understanding of the variety of ministries, particularly the ministry of the laity and those ordained, and how they are related to a common and shared ministry.

E. A Willingness to Wrestle with the Church's Prophetic Role in Society

A willingness to wrestle with the Church's prophetic role in society and to recognize the imperative to speak out against any injustice or oppression, of whatever nature, that keeps people from participating and enjoying basic human rights and basic human necessities.