Paths to Discipleship: Discernment and Formation

This guide is intended to give a brief overview of discernment and formation in the Diocese of Virginia. Just as Disciples study and follow Jesus Christ, each section provides an overview of how those in discernment and formation prepare themselves through study and practice. Visit the Vocation and Call page and subpages for more details.

Discernment

Stages of Discernment
- The Discernment Retreat
- Personal discernment, conversation with the presenting priest, work on expanding your perspective of the Church
- Some months after the retreat, appointment of a Diocesan Spiritual Discernment Facilitator (DSDF)
- Parish Discernment Committee (PDC)
- Discernment following PDC/Conversation with presenting priest
- Appointment of a COP or COD contact person
- Begin applying for postulancy, with guidance from committee contact person
- Or conversation with presenting priest, diocesan offices about lay formation

Reading during Discernment
- A study Bible, NRSV with Apocrypha
- The Book of Common Prayer, Baptismal and ordination vows
- “Transforming Vocation” by Sam Portaro
- “Praying Shapes Believing” by Leonel Mitchell
  o Readable, illuminating theological commentary on the BCP
- “Let Your Life Speak” by Parker Palmer
- “The Sacred Journey” by Frederick Buechner
- “A Dresser of Sycamore Trees” by Garret Keizer
- Series on the Vocational Diaconate, The Virginia Episcopalian (magazine)
- “Unexpected Consequences: The Diaconate Renewed” by Suzanne Epting

Actions during Discernment
- Strengthen your prayer life.
  o Expand your use and knowledge of the BCP; pray the daily offices.
- Expand your perspective of the Church.
- Visit new Episcopal churches.
- Increase your involvement and/or get involved in a new ministry.
- Talk to many Church professionals about their work and personal life.
- Write and talk about your faith, journey and call.
- Find a spiritual director.

Formation: The Laity

Formation for Lay Discipleship
- Continuing education: VTS, CDSP, Bexley Seabury
- M.A. at VTS
- Education for Ministry (EfM)
• Spiritual direction

Opportunities for Lay Discipleship
• Lay professional: communications, youth ministry, administration, finance, diocesan staff
• Diocesan governance, committees
• Lay positions in the Episcopal Church: http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/jobs/jobs-for-lay-people/
• Lay positions in the Diocese of Virginia: http://www.thediocese.net/Ministries/Transition_Ministry/In_Search/Lay_Positions/

Formation: The Diaconate

About the Diaconate
• Servant leadership, ordained community organizers.
• Interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world.
• Move the Church to use their gifts to meet those needs.
• “A minister of the whole Church:” leaving your home parish.
• Non-stipendiary.

Formation for the Diaconate
• Postulancy
• Spiritual direction
• The Deacons’ School
  • Academic: Nine weekends over 2+ years, 10 hours of homework per week
    ▪ Homiletics, Church history and tradition, pastoral care, human awareness, ethics and liturgics, community organizing
  • Practical: Parish practicum, 7 hours per week during second year
  • Cost: $4,000+ for full program, ideally with minimal financial impact on the student, shared by the sending parish and others
• Misc.: Ember Day Letters, canonical exams, other required training

Formation: The Priesthood

About the Priesthood
• An enthusiastic preacher of the Gospel with an authentic personal faith.
• Sacramental leader, grounded in the BCP.
• Generalist: Pastor, preacher, teacher, conflict and change manager, administrator/delegator/strategist.
• “A minister of the whole Church:” Involves moving.
• Bi-vocational possibilities.

Formation for the Priesthood
• Postulancy
• Spiritual direction
• Academic Formation:
  • M.Div. from Episcopal seminary (normative)
  • Anglican Studies or Reading for Orders
    ▪ For postulants with M.Div. degrees or ordained in other traditions
  • Cost: Consult seminary websites and financial aid offices
• Practical Formation:
Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)
Four semester of field education (field ed)
Full-time summer internship (Mid-Atlantic)

Misc.: Ember Day Letters, General Ordination Exams (GOEs), other required training