



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

1. The Discernment Retreat
2. Exploring the Church
3. Appointment of a Discernment Facilitator (after submitting report on Exploring the Church and resume)
4. Parish Discernment Committee (PDC)
5. Present priest requests appointment of a contact from the Committee on Priesthood/the Diaconate.
6. Begin applying for postulancy, with guidance from committee contact person
7. 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
- Reading detailed in the [Exploring the Church](#) guide

Actions during Discernment

- Strengthen your prayer life.
 - 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 Church professionals about their work and personal life.
- Write and talk about your faith, journey, and call.
- Spiritual direction (required) and therapy (recommended)

The Laity

Formation for Lay Discipleship

- Education for Ministry (EfM)
- Continuing education: VTS, CDSP, Bexley Seabury
- M.A. at VTS or online M.A.
- Spiritual direction

Opportunities for Lay Discipleship

- Lay professional: communications, youth ministry, administration, finance, diocesan staff
- Diocesan governance, [committees](#)
- [Lay positions](#) in the Episcopal Church
- [Lay positions](#) in the Diocese of Virginia

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 (required) and therapy (recommended)
- 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: \$5,400 for full program (nine retreats at \$550/retreat) plus around \$800 for books. Ideally with minimal financial impact on the student, shared by the sending parish and others.
- Misc.: Ember Day Letters, canonical exams, other required training

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, change and conflict manager, administrator/delegator/strategist.
- “A minister of the whole Church:” involves moving.

Formation for the Priesthood

- Postulancy
- Spiritual direction (required) and therapy (recommended)
- 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), typically during the summer between 1st and 2nd year of seminary
 - Four semesters of field education (field ed), typically during 2nd and 3rd year of seminary
 - Full-time summer internship (Mid-Atlantic), typically during the summer between 2nd and 3rd year of seminary
- Misc.: Ember Day Letters, General Ordination Exams (GOEs), other required training

