



Guidelines for the Presenting Priest

Broad Outline

See the [discernment webpage](#) for more information on the stages of the discernment process.

- The presenting priest requests that the seeker attend discernment retreat (there are typically three a year, dates posted on webpage above).
- Sessions One and Two between the presenting priest and seeker.
- Seeker attends discernment retreat.
- Seeker begins *Exploring the Church*.
- Session Three between presenting priest and seeker.
- Seeker completes/submits a draft of Exploring the Church report to presenting priest.
- Session Four between presenting priest and seeker.
- *Pre-Parish Discernment Check-in*: Should the presenting priest continue to affirm the seeker's continued discernment, and the presenting priest wishes to request a Discernment Facilitator be assigned to begin the Parish Discernment Committee process, the following should be submitted to the diocesan offices: The *Exploring the Church* Resume and Report; Proof of Baptism; Proof of Confirmation/Reception; the presenting priest attests that they're a Confirmed Adult Communicant in Good Standing.
- Following the Parish Discernment Committee, the presenting priest and seeker meet again to discuss the sense of call, then the priest either contacts the diocesan offices to request a contact from the Committee on the Diaconate/Priesthood and the seeker begins the process of applying for postulancy, or discuss other avenues for lay discipleship.

Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the parish:

- When a parish sends someone forward for ordination, it commits to (Canon III.6/8.2.a):
 - “Pledge to contribute financially to that preparation.”
 - The Diocese of Virginia asks that the parish commit to paying for the psych eval, which will cost around \$1000 should the aspirant apply for postulancy. This comes after the formal discernment process, but we mention it now so the parish can budget for the expense.
 - “Involve itself in the [seeker/aspirant's] preparation for ordination.”
 - Sign a vestry letter attesting to their support for postulancy (as well as subsequent stages, God willing).

Responsibilities of the presenting priest:

- To name and celebrate gifts in all their parishioners, with a particular eye to encouraging them to explore how God might be calling them in to discernment.
- To read these guidelines. If the updated date (at the bottom of each page) is more than six months old, please ask [Sarah Kye Price](#) if you have the most current version of the guidelines before working with a seeker.
- To guide the seeker. The presenting priest is the first person to have a formal role in a seeker's discernment process. You will be one of the first people to help them clarify their call.
- To be honest with the seeker. If you can't in good conscience support the seeker for ordination, you need to be honest with them about that. Patterns of misbehavior, dysfunction, dishonesty, entitlement, an unwillingness to grow, or lack of evidence of gifts for leadership might be a reason to stand firm in a 'Holy No.' Lack of exposure to the Church, or ongoing/unresolved major upheaval or trauma in the seeker's life might be a reason to say, 'not yet.' The process outlined below is intended to help the presenting priest and seeker clarify the call.
- To ensure the seeker meets the basic requirements to move forward: Namely that they're Baptized and Confirmed/Received and have been faithful in attending worship (see below under "Before Session One" for further info).
- We ask that the presenting priest be the rector, vicar or priest-in-charge of the parish. All clergy share in the call to celebrate and name gifts in those they serve – and deacons have a vital role to play in encouraging those who might be called to the diaconate – but the Bishops ask that the rector, vicar or priest-in-charge take on the formal role of presenting priest.

Responsibilities of the seeker:

- To be open, honest and courageous in the discernment process, tuning their ears to hear the movement of the Spirit in themselves and the widening communities of discernment.
- To read all the materials provided on the [discernment process webpage](#) as well as any subsequent materials provided. This is not just so the seeker 'knows the rules' but so that the seeker can be an informed self-advocate.
- To be self-motivated in moving through the discernment process, while recognizing at each stage of the discernment process there will be times that they need to wait on the consent of/feedback from their presenting priest, their parish, the diocesan offices, diocesan committees, and/or the Bishop.
- To find and meet regularly with a Spiritual Director.

Responsibilities of the diocese:

- To "make provision for the affirmation and development of the ministry of all baptized persons, including (a) assistance in understanding that all baptized persons are called to

minister in Christ's name, to identify their gifts with the help of the Church and to serve Christ's mission at all times and in all places (b) assistance in understanding that all baptized persons are called to sustain their ministries through commitment to life-long Christian formation," (Episcopal Church Canons, III.1).

- To "provide encouragement, training, and necessary resources to assist each congregation in developing an ongoing process of community discernment appropriate to the cultural background, age and life experiences of all persons seeking direction in their call-in ministry" (III.3.1) and to "assist [with the discernment community] in a process of ministry discernment to determine appropriate avenues for the expression and support of their ministries, either lay or ordained," (III.3.3).
- To answer questions the presenting priest and/or seeker might have throughout the process specific to them, or to direct them towards someone to answer their questions.
- To be open to feedback and focused on providing a formative, Spirit-led process, while respecting the wisdom and authority of the larger Episcopal Church, as contained in its Constitution and Canons.

Anti-Discrimination

The Canons of the Church say, "No person shall be denied access to the discernment process or to any process for the employment, licensing, calling, or deployment for any ministry, lay or ordained, in this Church because of race, color, ethnic origin, immigration status, national origin, sex, marital or family status (including pregnancy and child care plans), sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disabilities or age, except as otherwise provided by these Canons. No right to employment, licensing, ordination, call, deployment, or election is hereby established," (III.1.2).

Beyond the anti-discrimination canon, the presenting priest should continue to commit themselves to the ongoing and lifelong work of anti-racism and anti-bias work. In context of the discernment process, it's vital for the life of the Church that leaders see and encourage all who might be called. We must resist a bias towards only encouraging those who share our own identity markers, especially when the presenting priest is part of the dominant culture.

BEFORE SESSION ONE, Presenting Priest Guidelines

Are they a Confirmed Adult Communicant in Good Standing?

- The canons require that anyone being presented for postulancy must be a Confirmed Adult Communicant in Good Standing (III.6/8.2). Anyone seeking ordained leadership in the Episcopal Church should be regular in attending worship (for a year at the time of nomination for postulancy), baptized, and confirmed/received in the Episcopal Church.
- If someone comes forward who has been faithful in attending worship and engaged in the life of the parish but hasn't been confirmed or received, the presenting priest should first prepare and present them for confirmation/reception before the seeker continues in the vocational discernment process.

- One doesn't necessarily have to delay beginning discernment if they're a mature, faithful Episcopalian in all ways but confirmation/reception, but, according to the canons, the parish cannot nominate someone for postulancy who hasn't been confirmed/received and faithful in attending worship for a year since confirmation/reception, so the time between beginning discernment and being put forward for postulancy will be at least a year for those who haven't been confirmed or received.
- *Ordained in another tradition:* If you're presenting someone who was ordained in another tradition, reach out to Sarah Kye Price with questions. In general, unless they are ordained in a Church in full communion or in the Historic Succession, the canons of the Episcopal Church require that they approach ordination like a lay person. And, in general, the discernment and postulancy application process for those ordained in other traditions follows the same process as other seekers; it's at the time of, God willing, being accepted for postulancy that the Bishop will make the determination about formation.

Competencies and Expectations at the Time of Applying for Postulancy

A question we often hear in the discernment process from seekers and presenting priests alike is, "How do I know I am [they are] ready to go forward?" The canons call on us to recruit for leadership in the Church those who "[have] demonstrated qualities of Christian commitment, potential for leadership, and vision [that] mark them as desirable." Those characteristics can apply to any order of ministry, but the discernment process will aid in providing clarity to what order of ministry the seeker is called.

Below is a list of competencies adapted from the [Anglican Communion's Ministry Grids](#), which lays out competencies for each stage in formation. The adapted competencies below are what might reasonably be expected at the time someone interviews for postulancy.

No two seekers will share all of the same strengths and competencies, and lacking one competency is not a "rule out," but the list below should help the presenting priest and seeker orient themselves, and to consider where the seeker might focus their energy in ongoing formation.

- **Vocation**
 - Awareness of Episcopal tradition, practices of the local church and a willingness to work within them.
 - An understanding of their gifts.
 - Practical, lived experience of lay ministry.
 - A growing willingness to trust the widening circles of discernment involving the parish, diocesan processes/committees, and the bishop.
- **Clarity about the Nature of Ministry**
 - A mature view of ministry, as compared to the average church member.
 - A recognition of the seeker's gifts by the community—specifically gifts for leadership, respect, integrity, loving care, and a willingness to serve.

- An awareness of the differences between lay discipleship, the priesthood, the vocational diaconate, and the Episcopate, and believe themselves called to ordination in a particular order.
 - The formal discernment process will provide for the seeker to gain perspective on this, so this awareness doesn't need to be fully formed in early conversations, but they should be able to speak with some clarity at the time of postulancy interviews.
- **Spirituality and Faith**
 - A personal commitment to Christ and a capacity to communicate the Gospel—to speak and write on how they see the Gospel informing their life and the life of their community.
 - Evidence of spiritual discipline, including individual and corporate prayer and worship.
 - The presenting priest might encourage the seeker to take on forms of prayer and worship they haven't been engaged in until recently – e.g., the daily offices, contemplative prayer, monastic examens.
 - Reads Scripture and prays regularly.
 - Has and meets regularly with a Spiritual Director.
- **Character and Integrity**
 - The seeker is mature, stable, and capable of remaining healthy under the demands of ministry.
 - Exploring the Church, Phase II of the formal discernment process, will provide opportunities for the seeker to gain perspective on the demands of ministry. Should they apply for postulancy, the psychological evaluation will also provide perspective on this.
 - A willingness to learn and change their opinions.
 - Ability to face change and pressure with flexibility while maintaining a clear sense of self.
 - Have a habit of seeking help and support, especially for major personal, spiritual or psychological problems.
 - An awareness of issues of ethics and justice facing the Church, particularly around the Bishop's priorities—healing across differences (particularly the legacy of the sin of racism, and full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons); and honoring and caring for God's creation.
 - Comfort with people, individually and in groups.
- **Leadership and Collaboration**
 - Potential for leadership in the Church and in the wider community.
 - Can collaborate effectively with others.
 - Have potential to guide and shape the life of the church community and God's mission in the world.
- **Awareness of Context**

- Awareness of/sensitivity to their own social and cultural contexts, an ability to make wise observations about the world around them.
- Some experience reaching beyond their own context/being in meaningful relationship with those different from themselves.
- **Biblical and Theological Competence**
 - An understanding of the Christian faith and a desire to deepen their understanding.
 - A broad understanding of the scope of the Bible and understand the importance of biblical interpretation.
 - Have some appreciation of the value of Church history, liturgy, ethics and social justice/action.
- **Practical Competence**
 - Some familiarity with parochial, diocesan, national church structures.
 - Gifts for and a desire to proclaim the Word, communicate the Gospel and teach the faith.
 - General appreciation of the liturgical tradition of the Episcopal Church, and some understanding of the different expressions of that liturgical tradition.
 - Seekers have some experience of basic administration and are willing to learn.
- **Mission and Evangelism**
 - Demonstrate a passion for mission and evangelism that is reflected in thought, prayer and action.
 - Understand key issues and opportunities for Christian mission within culture.
 - Enable others to develop their callings as witnesses and advocates of the Gospel by word and action.

SESSION ONE, Where Is God Speaking in Your Life?

When: We recommend this session takes place before the Discernment Retreat, the first phase of the formal discernment process.

Begin the meeting with prayer. Some suggestions:

- You may want to begin with some time in silence to settle in to God's presence.
- See prayers in BCP pages 832-833 and/or the Thomas Merton Prayer:
 - My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Discernment Conversation Guidelines:

- Invite the seeker to share about their life, work, things that are important about their relationship with the church. Ask the seeker to recount significant points in their life that have led to this place.
 - It might be worth saying to the seeker that not everyone experiences a conversion/Road-to-Damascus moment in their call—sometimes call is experienced that way, sometimes call is experienced as a gradual revealing, but we all work to interpret and articulate the sign posts along the way and the movement of the Spirit in our lives.
 - It also may be worth saying that in the Episcopal Church we discern call in widening circles of discernment, and a requisite part of discernment will be to continually invite others in to your story, which is both scary and affirming. Scary in that we relinquish some control over our story, affirming in that we get to hear others lift up (and challenge) our call, and we don't walk the path alone. At the heart of every call story is also the story of God's work in a community, not just in the life of one person.
- How does the seeker view the ministry of the whole Body of Christ?
- How does the seeking see themselves fitting into the ministry of the Body of Christ now? What is the seeker doing already that should be raised up as ministry? What, if anything, are they avoiding?
- Listen reverently and do not interrupt. You are learning about the seeker and it is important to honor that person's journey. If you need clarification about something, you might ask, "Could you tell me more about ...?"

Afterwards:

- Take a few minutes to review your time together. What questions are coming up at this point?
- Set a date for the next meeting.
- End with prayer.

Assignment ahead of the next meeting:

- Ask the seeker to spend more time reflecting on their faith journey, paying particular attention to places where God seemed either extraordinarily near or absent. Ask the seeker to write on this and share it with you ahead of the next meeting.
- Be prepared to reflect on spiritual practices. Does the seeker have a rule of life? If so, what is it? If not, what might they do to develop one? What aspects of a rule of life are important? What spiritual practices have been nourishing them on a daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly basis?

Session Two, Rule of Life

When: We recommend this session (along with session one) takes place before the Discernment Retreat, the first phase of the formal discernment process.

Begin the meeting with prayer. Some suggestions:

- You may want to begin with some time to settle in to God’s presence.
- See prayers in BCP pages 832-833 and/or the Thomas Merton Prayer (see pg. 6 of this guide).

Conversation:

- Check in for a few minutes about how the seeker is doing since you last met.
- Review what the seeker wrote on their spiritual journey and when God felt extraordinarily near or absent. What is new from what was shared in the last meeting? What did the seeker learn from the process of writing about the important waypoints in their life?
- Ask the seeker to share four aspects of their relationship with God.
 - Describe your prayer life.
 - How has your relationship with God changed over time?
 - Who is Christ in your life?
 - Who has been an important role model for you in your life of faith?
- It might be worth saying that all Christians are asked to reflect and give testimony on their personal relationship with God – and the stereotype is that most do this better than Episcopalians – but giving testimony on who Jesus is to them is something they’ll be asked at many stages throughout the process.
- After a period of silence and reflection, share your reflections on what the seeker has said. (“What stood out for me in what you said was. . .”)
- Ask the seeker to continue to talk about the intersection of their faith and daily life. The following questions will give some focus, but are not exhaustive.
 - Share how, specifically, you take care of yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
 - Share how you are still questioning, searching and probing the mysteries of the faith.
 - Share a time when a situation came up in your daily life that challenged your faith or practices. What was the challenge? How did you meet it?
- Discuss the importance of a Rule of Life in the Christian life. If the seeker does not yet have a Rule of Life, help the seeker consider a structure for one based on the practices described above. We also recommend [*The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* by Joan Chittister](#).
 - One reason for establishing (or reevaluating) a Rule of Life during discernment is the seeker will be asked to make new space in their life for the work of discernment, which will mean adjusting and reprioritizing the rhythm of their already full lives.

After conversation:

- Take a couple of minutes to review your time together. What questions are coming up at this point?
- Set a date for the next meeting.
- End with prayer.

Assignment for the next meeting:

- Ask the seeker to sketch out their rule of life. What, if anything, needs attention or could be added? What is missing? Is anything not working?
- Begin to reflect on the questions in the next section, “Session Three: Self-Awareness” and come prepared to discuss at the next meeting.

SESSION THREE, Self-Awareness

Timing: We recommend this session take place after the seeker has attended the diocesan discernment retreat.

Begin the meeting with prayer. Some suggestions:

- You may want to begin with some time to settle in to God’s presence.
- See prayers in BCP pages 832-833 and/or the Thomas Merton Prayer (see pg. 6 of this guide).

Conversation:

- Check in for a few minutes about how the seeker is doing since you last met.
- Review the written draft of the seeker’s rule of life. Did they recognize any gaps? What changes would they like to make?
- Questions:
 - What are you passionate about?
 - What are your short-term and long-term goals for further spiritual growth? What skills do you already have and what skills would you like to develop?
 - Our deepest callings can bring a range of emotions. What emotions have been present for you as you have continued to be faithful to this discernment?
 - What “pushes your buttons”/makes you really angry? What about you seems to irritate or push the buttons of others?
 - What conflicts have you had in your life and how have you handled them? How might you have handled them better? How did your faith make a difference in the midst of conflict?

- Talk about a time in life when you felt like a failure or disappointed yourself. How did you handle that? Did you turn to others in that situation? Have you found grace in those experiences? What did you learn from that experience?
- What do you fear most about your sense of call? About the journey ahead? What is the most intimidating thing about following a call?
- Following a period of silence to reflect on what has been heard, share your reflections with the seeker. (“What stood out for me in what you said was . . .”)
- Give time for the seeker to respond.
- For the seeker:

After conversation:

- Take a couple of minutes to review your time together. What questions are coming up at this point?
- End with prayer.

Assignment ahead of the next meeting

- The seeker should submit a completed draft of their *Exploring the Church* report and resume, so the time between Session Two and Session Three will be bracketed by the amount of time it takes the seeker to complete that work.

SESSION FOUR, Exploring the Church

Begin the meeting with prayer. Some suggestions:

- You may want to begin with some time to settle in to God’s presence.
- See prayers in BCP pages 832-833 and/or the Thomas Merton Prayer (see pg. 6 of this guide).

Conversation:

- Check in for a few minutes about how the seeker is doing since you last met.
- Ask the seeker to reflect on (rather than report on) their interviews with Church professionals during Exploring the Church.
 - What was stirred up for the seeker?
 - Were there any surprises?
 - Were there expectations confirmed or disconfirmed in the interviews?
 - What gifts and skills did you notice in the person chosen to interview?
- Following a period of silence to reflect on what has been heard, share your reflections with the seeker. (“What stood out for me in what you said was . . .”)
- Allow time for the seeker to respond.

- Ask the seeker to reflect on where they see this process going. Do they recognize any changes in themselves since this process began? Has the sense of call become any clearer? What path are they leaning towards following? Does the seeker sense this is a call to lay or ordained ministry?