

## **DISCERNMENT FOR THE DIACONATE IN THE DIOCESE OF EAST TENNESSEE**

The Canons of the Church require that an aspirant seeking ordination be a communicant in good standing of the congregation for at least one year before beginning the process. In addition, the preference of this diocese is that one be actively involved for at least two years in the life of the Church.

### **Step One - Aspirant Meets with the Rector**

The first thing you must do is discuss your perceived call to ordained ministry with the Rector of your parish or mission. The Rector will have meetings with you over a period of time, to explore this perceived calling particularly as to how it relates to your current ministry in the world. From these discussions the Rector will decide whether or not you should meet with the Bishop and continue the process.

### **Step Two - Aspirant and Rector Meet with the Bishop**

The following information should be submitted to the Bishop prior to meeting: Aspirant's Application Form, Spiritual Autobiography, Rector Referral Form, Background Inquiry Release Form, Letter of Understanding, and the Release of Information Form. The Background Inquiry Release Form allows the diocese to initiate the required background check. This background check will be conducted by an agency selected by the diocese and the information is reported only to the Bishop. (See Appendix for forms.)

This initial meeting gives the Bishop an opportunity to meet you and to discuss your understanding of your call. The Bishop will also ask you about your personal circumstances. This is also an excellent time for you to ask any questions about our diocesan policies and the requirements of the Canons. If you are married, the Bishop may request that your spouse be present at this meeting.

If the Bishop wishes you to continue in the discernment process at this time, the Bishop will inform your Rector and the Commission on Ministry. If so, a Diaconal Discernment Committee (DDC) will be formed.

### **Step Three - Diaconal Discernment Committee Forms**

#### *1. The Committee*

This committee is formed in the Diocese by the Bishop/COM (See Guidelines for Diaconal Discernment Committee). The committee will consist of six communicants of the diocese, two of whom shall be members of the Vestry of your local congregation. The chair of the committee will normally be a member of your local congregation's Vestry. The remainder will be appointed by the COM. A COM Liaison is assigned to work with the DDC and will be available for consultation throughout the DDC process.

Before the DDC begins its work, the committee representatives and COM Liaison will meet together with the Vestry and aspirant for a preliminary orientation session. It is essential that the congregation and the diocese work together from the inception of this process.

Members of the DDC should become familiar with the steps discussed in this handbook, and also with the complete instructions and suggestions for the process, provided by the Commission on Ministry (DDC Guidelines in this handbook).

The DDC is not a support group. It is a committee charged with assisting you and the Church with the discernment of your call. The committee will report its findings to the Bishop, the COM, your Rector and the vestry/mission council.

2. *Notes for the Diaconal Discernment Committee*

- A. Experience has shown that persons of keen insight and pastoral sensibilities are essential to this committee.
- B. Ordained ministry is but one expression of the ministry of the Church and is not the only ministry one has as a Christian; therefore, committee members will need to study and discuss these differences as outlined in the Prayer Book Rites of Baptism and Ordination.
- C. In the process leading to ordination, God calls and the Church ordains. The aspirant senses a call from God to Holy Orders. The congregation must affirm the call from its understanding of the aspirant and God's call to that person. The diocese must provide its own affirmation of the call. All of these steps are essential to the process.
- D. The DDC should see itself as an integral and important part of the discernment process, but not as the sole determinate of the vocation to Holy Orders.
- E. The discernment committee's task is to become familiar with the aspirant's background, articulation of call to ordained ministry, and present ministry. Appreciation of the aspirant's present ministry is extremely important.
- F. The DDC should explore the applicant's family dynamics and possible ways they might be affected by pursuit of this vocation.
- G. Time for this process must be allowed. A rushed or partial process can be damaging to the aspirant and to the diocese.
- H. The DDC and the aspirant need to maintain strict confidentiality. Discussions and documents may only be shared with appropriate persons with the consent of the aspirant and are to be kept confidential.
- I. The DDC process can be a focal point of spiritual growth for the aspirant, and the committee. Success is measured by this growth and not by whether the aspirant proceeds toward ordination.

3. *The Conclusion of the Diaconal Discernment Committee Process*

At the conclusion of the Diaconal Discernment Committee process, the committee members discuss their evaluation and come to a decision whether or not to recommend that the Vestry support the aspirant for postulancy. The committee members discuss the cumulative results of the evaluation with you (the aspirant) and you are informed of the committee's recommendation. Any reservations and observations should be expressed at this time. The chair shall report the recommendation of the DDC to the Rector immediately, and to the Vestry at the next regular Vestry meeting as outlined in the DDC Guidelines. The chair will also send the DDC evaluation material and recommendations to the Bishop.

#### **Step Four - Vestry Sends Written Report to Bishop**

When the Rector, DDC and Vestry concur that discernment of the call is to the Diaconate, the Vestry will complete the Recommendation for Postulancy Form (See Appendix). This form will be sent to the Bishop and Commission on Ministry Chair. The DDC evaluation material should also be submitted (see paragraph above).

#### **Step Five - The Second Meeting with the Bishop**

As preparation for this meeting with the Bishop, you should review The Ordination of a Deacon in the Book of Common Prayer, and the Canons of the Church respecting ordination, specifically Title III.

Additionally, this meeting gives the Bishop the opportunity to hear first-hand of your discernment experience thus far and how it has informed your sense of call by God, the Church, and the Diocese. This is also a good time for you to ask any questions about the process and about the vocation to the Diaconate. If you are married, the Bishop requests your spouse to be present.

The Bishop decides whether or not you may proceed with the process of application for postulancy, or at this point you may be informed of a need for further preparation. The Bishop indicates his decision by letter to you, and a copy is sent to your sponsoring priest.

#### **Step Six - The Bishop Invites the Aspirant to Apply for Postulancy**

Your application for postulancy will include:

- Information Form
- Waiver of Information Form
- The material from the Congregation Discernment Committee
- Vestry Recommendation
- Formal Application for Postulancy
- Results of physical and mental health evaluations
- Transcripts
- Financial Disclosure Form

*Please note: Some of these forms will have been submitted previously. All appropriate forms (except transcripts) are found in the appendix. The Mental Health and Physical Evaluation Forms can be obtained by calling the Bishop's secretary at the Diocesan House.*

For the physical evaluation, you may choose any licensed physician. The mental health evaluation will be done by a person chosen by the Bishop. The purpose of the mental health evaluation is to obtain a psychological perspective on your life history, family dynamics, interpersonal relationships, leadership style, behavior patterns, personality characteristics, emotional fortitude and self-concept. These dimensions will be explored with respect to your readiness and fitness for life as a deacon. If you have been or are currently undergoing counseling or psychotherapy, it is critical that you give written permission for your counselor or therapist to provide information to the professional chosen by the Bishop to conduct your mental health evaluation for the discernment process.

It is anticipated that your individual or group medical plan will cover the cost of the physical evaluation. The diocese will coordinate with those plans to provide financial reimbursement for any out-of-pocket expenses you might incur. The diocese will pay for the mental health evaluation.

### **Step Seven - Aspirant is Invited to the Conference of the Bishop's Advisory Committee on Aspirants for Ministry (BACAM)**

Your file is forwarded to the Commission on Ministry for review. In order to receive further assessment of an aspirant's application for postulancy by the Commission on Ministry, the Bishop may invite applicants and their spouses/fiancées to the annual pre-postulancy conference (BACAM), usually held in October. During the two to three day conference, participants will engage in group discussion, meals, worship, and personal interviews to extend the discernment process. The areas of primary interest during the interviews are the same as listed under assumptions in the DDC Guidelines section of this manual.

Aspirants coming to the BACAM conference are being evaluated and observed by Commission on Ministry members. The principal question being asked by the Commission: "Is the Church calling this person to ordination in this diocese at this time?"

At the end of the conference, the Commission on Ministry will meet to prepare their recommendation to the Bishop.

### **Step Eight - Aspirant is Informed of Decision**

The Bishop will make a decision on postulancy based on the information previously received and the recommendation of the Commission on Ministry. You will be informed of the decision by the Bishop.