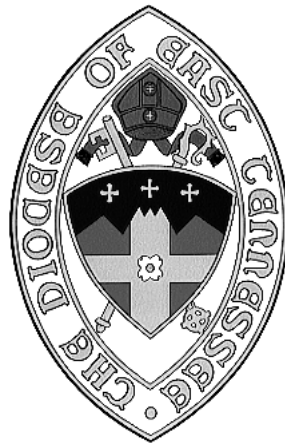


**GUIDELINES FOR  
DIACONAL DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE**



**DIOCESE OF EAST TENNESSEE**

## GUIDELINES FOR DIACONAL DISCERNMENT COMMITTEES

### The Committee

- The committee shall consist of six communicants of the diocese appointed by the Bishop/COM.
- Two members shall be from the Vestry of the aspirant's parish. They shall be recommended by the Rector and Senior Warden.
- At least one member shall be significantly involved in a community helping ministry.
- It is preferable that one member be a Deacon
- The others shall be chosen as may be best suited to provide for the overall make-up and balance of the DDC.
- The chair of the committee shall be one of the members of the Vestry.
- The committee shall reflect the diversity of the diocese with particular emphasis on involvement in servant ministry.
- The committee shall not be a permanent committee. A different committee shall be formed for each person presenting themselves for discernment.
- The committee members shall make a firm commitment to attend and participate in all sessions of the committee's work.

### Meetings

- The process outlined for the DDC involves a minimum of four sessions. This may not allow enough time in all cases for the committee to complete its work. If needed, up to two additional sessions may be scheduled. In no case shall there be more than six meetings total.
- Each session shall last a **maximum** of two hours.
- Each meeting shall begin and end with prayer.
- If deemed appropriate, the DDC may meet without the aspirant prior to the final session. If a separate evaluation meeting is held, the final meeting with the aspirant should be conducted within 24 hours.
- The committee shall report its results to the Vestry within three months after its formation.

### Assumptions

- The Diaconal Discernment Committee is a joint committee of the Vestry and the Commission on Ministry. Its purpose is to enable the Vestry to make an informed decision as to whether or not to support a person as an aspirant for ordained ministry. It has a diocesan flavor because the Order of Deacons is a diocesan order under the direct control of the Bishop.
- The Diaconal Discernment Committee's role is not support, but discernment.
- All material is treated confidentially as are all aspects of the discernment process.
- To be an effective ordained person requires skills in at least these eight areas:
  - **Ministry in the Diocese of East Tennessee**  
Is the aspirant familiar with the tradition and practice of the Episcopal Church? Is he/she familiar with the Episcopal Church in East Tennessee and willing to work within the Church as it is expressed in this area?
  - **Vocation**  
An aspirant should be able to speak of his or her sense of vocation to ministry and mission, referring both to their own conviction and the extent to which others have confirmed it. Their sense of vocation should be obedient, realistic, and informed.

- **Faith**  
An aspirant should show an understanding of the Christian faith and a desire to deepen that understanding. The aspirant should demonstrate personal commitment to Christ and a capacity to communicate the Gospel.
- **Spirituality**  
The aspirant should show evidence of a commitment to a spiritual discipline involving individual and corporate prayer and worship. This spiritual practice should sustain and energize the aspirant's daily life.
- **Personality and Character**  
The aspirant should be sufficiently mature and stable to show that they are able to sustain the demanding role of an ordained minister and can face change and pressure in a flexible and balanced way. The aspirant should be seen as a person of integrity.
- **Relationships**  
The aspirant should demonstrate self-awareness and self-acceptance as a basis for developing open and healthy professional, personal, and pastoral relationships. The aspirant should respect the will of the Church in matters of sexual morality.
- **Leadership and Collaboration**  
The aspirant should show ability to offer leadership in the Church community and in the wider community. This ability includes the capacity to offer an example of faith and discipleship, to collaborate effectively with others, as well as to guide and shape the life of the Church community in its mission to the world.
- **Intellect**  
The aspirant should have the necessary intellectual capacity to undertake satisfactorily a course of theological study and preparation for ordained ministry, and to cope with the continuing intellectual demands of ordained ministry.

To say "yes" to an aspirant for ordination is to affirm that we have a clear sense that the aspirant either already is clearly competent in these areas, or is potentially competent and moving steadily in that direction.

## SESSION INFORMATION

All sessions should be conducted in the context of the description and expectations of The Diaconate, pages 3-4, in this manual.

### I. Orientation Session

Those present: Committee Members, COM Liaison, Aspirant, Vestry and Rector

This session is designed to allow all involved the opportunity to gain understanding of the overall process, ask questions and learn the part each group has to play with in this process.

### II. First Session

Those present: Committee Members, COM Liaison, Aspirant

The beginning of this meeting is a “get-acquainted” session. All persons present should introduce themselves and tell something about themselves. Any basic get-acquainted group exercise could be used for this purpose.

The chairperson states clearly the purpose of the group and the time frame in which it will be working. The other meeting dates are set.

The COM liaison person distributes the following materials to each member:

- A copy of the sections of the national canons which apply to ordination, with special attention to where the local Vestry fits into the process.
- A copy of the diocesan ordination process, explaining that this is the way we fulfill the requirements of the national canons.
- A copy of the relevant sections of the Catechism ordination rite describing the office which the person is considering.

A copy of the book *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community* is to be purchased by the church in which the DDC is formed for each member of the DDC. The Chapter and Verse Bookshop (at the Diocesan House) is able to assist you in ordering the book and tries to have a supply available.

Time is allowed for questions about the process and any of the materials distributed.

### Homework for Second Session

*Aspirant:* Provide a spiritual autobiography to be shared with the committee. This should be a narrative account of your spiritual journey and major turning points in your personal history.

*Committee Members:* Prepare a brief (one page typed) faith pilgrimage statement. This should be a description of your life in relationship to God.

These assignments should be turned into the committee chair, reproduced, distributed, and read by all before the second meeting takes place.

### III. Second Session

Those Present: Committee Members, Aspirant

As an introduction, members may be asked to speak about the elements of the aspirant's spiritual autobiography with which they could identify.

Discuss the aspirants' spiritual autobiography, using these as a guide to what to look for:

- sources of stress and how stress is handled
- situations in which the aspirant felt opposed to an authority figure and what happened
- how the call was recognized, noticed, considered
- ministerial involvement, with evidence of service
- description of situation(s) in which personal growth was experienced
- the best and the worst of family and interpersonal relationships
- awareness of personal weaknesses and areas in which improvement is needed
- significant connections with community
- awareness of personal gifts and abilities

For exploring the aspirant's emotional health:

- Does the aspirant express strong positive and negative feelings? How? How does this match what he/she is saying?
- When dealing with feelings, do physical gestures and movements match the words spoken?
- In what ways does the aspirant look to the ordained ministry as a way of resolving personal or career problems?
- Does the aspirant show the maturity and ability to adapt appropriate to his/her age?

### Homework for Third Session

*Aspirant:* Vision Exercise. This should be distributed to, and read by, the members of the committee before the next meeting.

*All:* Read *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call In Community*.

### IV. Third Session

Those Present: Committee Members, Aspirant

Read aloud the relevant portions of the Catechism and the proper ordination service (deacon or priest) which describe the work of the order being considered.

Discuss the vision of the aspirant's potential ordained ministry outlined in the exercise with these three considerations in mind. How realistic is this vision in terms of:

- The aspirant's own personal gifts and abilities?
- The church's vision of the ordained ministry of a deacon as expressed in the Catechism and ordination rites?
- The way the ordained ministry of a deacon is actually exercised in the Diocese of East Tennessee as expressed in the section of this manual entitled "The Diaconate".

Move on to the questions relating to ordained ministry on pages 92-96 of *Listening Hearts* (the newer version with updated appendices).

Set the date for the final meeting.

**Additional sessions may be needed prior to advancing to the Fourth Session described below.**

**Homework for Fourth Session**

*All but aspirant.* Complete the DDC Individual Report (in this manual following the Vision Exercise) . These forms should be returned to and collated by the chairman before the next meeting. The chairman provides a cumulative report on the evaluations for the next meeting.

**V. Fourth Session**

Those Present: Committee Members, Aspirant

In the first part of the meeting, without the aspirant present, the committee members discuss the evaluation forms and come to a decision whether or not to recommend that the Vestry support the person as an aspirant for ordination.

At the end of the first part of the meeting, the aspirant joins the group. This should occur no more than 24 hours following the first part of the meeting (above paragraph). The committee members discuss the cumulative results of the evaluations with the aspirant, and the chairperson informs the aspirant of the committee's recommendation.

The Rector needs to be available if called by the DDC during this final evaluation meeting.

If the DDC decides not to recommend the aspirant for postulancy, they should discuss how the congregation can support the aspirant and uphold his or her lay ministry.

The chair shall report the recommendation of the committee to the Rector immediately, and to the Vestry at the next regular Vestry meeting.

If the Vestry recommends the aspirant for postulancy, copies of the spiritual autobiography, the vision exercise, and all evaluation forms shall be provided to the Bishop. The Vestry Recommendation Form for Postulancy is submitted to the Bishop. The Faith Statements of the DDC members should not be forwarded.

If the Vestry does not recommend the aspirant for postulancy, all written documents related to the DDC process should be destroyed.

## VISION EXERCISE

*In this exercise, you will focus on two accomplishments as a means to identify skills you have successfully used. These reflections will then serve as a springboard for your vision of your potential work as an ordained minister. Please take plenty of time to complete this exercise. Choose your accomplishments carefully, and try to remember them in as much detail as possible.*

*Please complete this exercise on separate sheets of paper.*

### **Step One - Accomplishments**

List two accomplishments in your life. The main criterion here is not “biggest”, but “best”. Choose times when you felt most secure and confident in your skills and talents, and in your ability to use them effectively. A detailed description is not necessary, a few lines is enough.

Now do the following exercise for each accomplishment you listed:

1. List the accomplishment at the top of the page.
2. List the steps that were necessary for this accomplishment - what did you have to do to accomplish this? Number each step. It is helpful to list them chronologically.
3. Look over your list of steps and identify the skills you exhibited each step of the way. List each skill, and beside each list the number of the step (or steps) in which you used that skill. Obviously, the same skill may be used in more than one step. Be thorough - and don't be bashful.

### **Step Two - Vision**

As you consider your calling to ordained ministry, what would be the ideal position for you to carry out that ministry? What is the job you see yourself holding? Please describe this vision.

What tasks and/or roles make up this position? What are the responsibilities of a person in this position? Please list them.

What skills are necessary if these tasks and responsibilities are to be successfully met? List them. Then, review the previous pages and place a star beside the skills you have already demonstrated.

**THE DIACONAL DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE  
INDIVIDUAL REPORT**

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Parish \_\_\_\_\_

Aspirant's Name \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you known the aspirant and in what ways?

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It is a high calling to serve God and the Church in Holy Orders. The aspirant, Vestry, and diocese share in discerning this call. The following information, your thoughts and impressions, will assist in this process. Please answer prayerfully and to the best of your knowledge.

Circle your answer. 1 = Poor; 3 = Adequate; 5 = Superior

Does this person have a regular and mature prayer and worship life?	1	2	3	4	5
Is this person committed and active in public worship?	1	2	3	4	5
Does this person exhibit emotional maturity appropriate to his or her age?	1	2	3	4	5
Can the aspirant be described as a person of Christian character in his/her community? (Canons of the Episcopal Church)	1	2	3	4	5
Can the aspirant be described as having leadership skills?	1	2	3	4	5
Does this person have a stable family life?	1	2	3	4	5
Does this person have healthy long term relationships?	1	2	3	4	5
Does this person have a stable employment history?	1	2	3	4	5

What experience does the aspirant have in lay ministry and service within the Church *and* outside the Church, particularly as it relates to service to the poor, sick, suffering and helpless?

Since you have heard the aspirant share his or her spiritual journey and desire for Holy Orders, briefly state your understanding of the aspirants' spiritual journey and desire.

Would you want this person to serve and represent you, your parish, and the Episcopal Church as a Deacon?                      Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

What do you consider to be at least three strengths of the aspirant's character? Use more paper if needed.

What do you consider to be at least three areas in which the aspirant needs to grow? Use more paper if needed.

Can you in good conscience recommend this person for Holy Orders? If "no", please explain.            Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Feel free to add any additional comments. Use more paper if necessary.