

**THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS  
FOR THE DIACONATE**



**IN THE  
DIOCESE OF EAST TENNESSEE**

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# THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS

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

## **Introduction**

The canonical process and requirements for ordination are covered in detail, in Title III of the Canons of the Episcopal Church, but each diocese designs structures and systems to implement them. This handbook has been prepared by the Commission on Ministry of the Diocese of East Tennessee. It is designed to help you explore your call to ministry. It will also help those who support and evaluate you through the process which may lead to ordination.

Within the canonical framework of the Episcopal Church, this handbook describes the steps in this discernment process. The timetable and the required actions and responses of all parties in the process are outlined herein. A Checklist for Aspirants summarizing the required steps of the discernment process is attached and the necessary forms are located in the appendix.

## **Acknowledgments**

The inspiration for this handbook came from the Commissions on Ministry of the Dioceses of Tennessee, West Tennessee, South Carolina, Minnesota and Missouri. In some instances, we have used their exact words in describing our process. We thank our sisters and brothers in other dioceses for their assistance.

## **Call to Ministry**

We are all Christian ministers by virtue of our baptism. "Each Diocese shall make provision for the development and affirmation of the ministry of all baptized persons in the Church and in the world (Canon III.1)." For most of us this means active involvement in lay ministries. Some Christians are called to ordained ministries.

Understanding the direction of your ministry is a matter of prayerful deliberation. The Church responds by its own discernment process. The process of discernment is continuous. Fulfilling the requirements of the process is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for ordination.

The question of call will come up throughout the entire process. The word "call" means different things to almost everyone. Some people will identify in their life experiences a specific call: they perceive it comes from God and asks them to reach out for a specific form of ministry, i.e. ordination. The call is often very strongly felt. The questioning of the call is always a challenging process.

While aspirants feel a call on a personal level, the other aspect of call concerns the Body of Christ. In some circumstances, communities reach out to certain members in the church and ask them to serve in a specific function or capacity. Calls also come from the Church at large and express the need of a particular diocese.

This process is intended to affirm and make possible calls to ordination - calls both felt by aspirants and discerned by others - or, in some instances, to reaffirm persons continuing in lay ministry. From the perspective of the Bishop, the Commission on Ministry, and the Standing Committee, the call needs to be affirmed by both the aspirant and the Church.

At any stage in the process you may realize that you are not called to the ordained ministry. Such a decision might display much wisdom. Conversely, at any stage in the process, permission to proceed toward ordination may be withdrawn. This decision may initially be disappointing, but we trust that ultimately it will be a door to more meaningful ministry as a layperson. From the perspective of the aspirant and his/her congregation, this turning point will require reflection and prayer in efforts to discern God's will.

Throughout this process, the role of the Bishop is pivotal and central. The Bishop's responsibilities include acceptance of postulants and candidates, and recommendations to the Standing Committee. No one can be ordained Priest or Deacon without the approval of the Standing Committee. The Commission on Ministry oversees the discernment and formation process and makes recommendations to the Bishop at various stages.

In case of conflict between the statements contained in this manual and Title III of the Canons of the Episcopal Church, the Canons of the Episcopal Church shall prevail. It is recognized that this manual and the Canons of the Church are subject to change, modification, and revision, and, unless otherwise stated, any such change, modification, or revision shall be applicable to all persons in the process at the time of the adoption thereof.

The process described here is intended to assist you as you test your perceived call to Holy Orders. This challenging time in your journey will be one of learning and growing. Ordination is not viewed as the only successful outcome. Rather, the opportunity to explore your gifts and faith can deepen your discernment and enable you to consider new avenues for lay ministry.

Self-motivation is essential during this journey. The responsibility rests on you to keep track of your own process and to complete any paperwork and assignments on time (see attached [Checklist for Aspirants](#)). If you have questions at any point, do not hesitate to contact your COM liaison or any member of the Commission on Ministry.