

## CONGREGATIONAL DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE/ CLEARNESS DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

Prior to the first meeting of the Congregational/Clearness Discernment Committee (CDC):

1. The priest in charge of the congregation will have complied with all the requirements stipulated in *Checklist Exploring the Call for Ordination to the Vocational Diaconate or Priesthood* (on the Diocese of the Rio Grande website.)
  - A. Note: in appointing the CDC the priest in charge may choose to be a member him- or herself. Likewise (s)he may appoint either herself<sup>1</sup> or another member of the CDC chair.
  - B. The CDC should be limited to six members in addition to the aspirant.
2. The priest in charge will provide the document *Writing Your Spiritual Autobiography* (on the diocesan website) to every member of the CDC. ***Every member of the CDC will write his or her spiritual autobiography prior to the first meeting, and they will each be asked to bring the autobiography with them to the first meeting. Discernment is a mutual process of listening – listening to God and listening to each other.*** As Episcopalians we believe that all baptized Christians are ministers of the Church.<sup>2</sup> In writing our own spiritual autobiography we become sensitized to the reality that God has acted in all of our lives. This mutual awareness lends itself to our listening well to the aspirant and to our helping him or her discern their call.
3. The Canon for Formation is available to consult with the priest in charge and CDC prior to the first meeting of the group. This would be appropriate where the process described here had not yet been used by the congregation.
4. Please be aware that the papers written by the aspirant during the Congregational Discernment process will be used as a basis for discussion by the Bishop, BACAM and COMB should the aspirant move forward in the ordination process.

### Meeting 1 – Sharing Our Stories

The Congregational Discernment Committee has as its purpose helping an aspirant discern his vocation. In order to achieve that goal, responsibility, care, and – especially – confidentiality are stressed.

This evening's task is telling our stories. Everybody has a story! In telling each other our stories we discover that God has been and is active in all our lives. Additionally, we all have a call, a vocation. God's call is not limited to clergy!

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<sup>1</sup> Inasmuch as both women and men are called to ordination, both masculine and feminine pronouns are used alternatively throughout this document. Regardless of which gender is referenced in a sentence, please know that both genders are included.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., The Book of Common Prayer, p. 855.

Understanding this fact, we realize that in listening to God's action in our lives we become better attuned to listening for God's action in the stories and lives of our sisters and brothers in Christ.

Nobody needs to share anything that makes him uncomfortable, but everybody is encouraged to share as much as they can about how they perceive God to have been active in their own lives.

You'll need a gentle timekeeper! Because the meeting should not last more than three hours, and because you'll need a break in the middle, if you have six CDC members it's probably best to limit each person's time to tell his or her story to 12 minutes.

## **Meeting 2 – Understanding How A Clearness Committee Works**

**Assignment for aspirant:** Write a two-page paper on the topic, "Why I think I'm called to the priesthood or the diaconate."

The priest will have distributed *Some Guidelines for Clearness* (found on the diocesan website). The essence of the Clearness Committee is that the members of the Congregational Discernment Committee are first and foremost the aspirant's *friends* (cf., John 15:12-17). The CDC's task is neither to offer counsel to the aspirant nor be critical, but to create a safe space in which the aspirant can listen for God's voice and call in the depths of her own soul.

Having shared stories and focused on our friendship in Christ, this evening's task is to help the aspirant discern her own call by only asking nondirective questions of the aspirant and by allowing time for deep listening.

Possible questions to ask the aspirant:

- Has the aspirant experienced God calling her to ordination? If so, how and when? What was the experience like?
- How has the aspirant's sense of vocation been shaped by teachers, parents, clergy, books, experiences, etc.?
- How does the aspirant articulate her sense of call? With clarity? Passion? Is she clear about why she thinks she's called to a particular order?

## **Meeting 3 – The Role Of A Spouse In Discernment And The Pursuit Of Ordination**

*[Note: if the aspirant is single the CDC will obviously not need to have this meeting. Questions pertaining to finances and time demands are still pertinent for single people and should be woven into the CDC's considerations of the aspirant.]* If the aspirant has a spouse or partner it is important the CDC meet with him or her to discern whether he or she is supportive of the aspirant's pursuit of a vocation as a priest or deacon. This should be a gentle and joyful conversation in which the spouse's feelings and desires for the future of the union with the aspirant are foremost. Possible questions for the spouse might include:

- Have you and your spouse considered the demands on his time being ordained may make upon your marriage and family?

- Have you and your spouse considered the financial obligations that his pursuing ordination may have for your family?
- Are you, as the spouse of somebody seeking ordination, enthusiastic about his involvement in the life of the Church?
- Are you an active member of the Church? If so, how are you active in the life of the local parish? The larger Church?
- What anxieties do you have about your future and that of your spouse as somebody who may be ordained?
- What can we do to help you in this process?

#### **Meeting 4 – Focus On The aspirant’s Understanding Of Christian Ministry And Vocation To Ordained Ministry**

**Assignment for the aspirant:** Write a two-page paper on her understanding of the Christian ministry and the unique vocation of each of the four orders of minister.

1. Remembering their own stories and the fact that, by virtue of our baptisms, we’re all called to Christian ministry, the CDC discusses the four-fold ministry of the Church. What distinguishes the four orders from each other? (Be sure to reference the section on The Ministry in the “Outline of the Faith” in the Book of Common Prayer, p. 855ff.) Seek for the CDC to develop as common an understanding as possible of the role of the four orders.
2. Having achieved such an understanding, ask the aspirant which order his gifts and vision best fit. *Seek to help the aspirant discern his own call and vision for ministry.* Ask the aspirant questions that help him articulate his understanding of ordained ministry. Ask the aspirant what she thinks the Church will required of him as an ordained person.

#### **Meeting 5 – Focus On The aspirant’s Willingness To Grow**

**Assignment for aspirant:** Write a two-page paper on “How I have and continue to grow spiritually” and “What I do to maintain my spiritual and physical health.”

- Ask the aspirant how she is growing in the Christian faith.
  - How have personal and spiritual growth been apparent in the past?
  - What challenges to growth does the aspirant experience? What inhibits the aspirant’s ability to grow?
  - What potential for continued growth does the aspirant display?
  - How is the aspirant progressing in articulating her sense of vocation during the CDC’s meetings?
- How does the aspirant demonstrate self-care? What does she do to order her life? To balance the various demands placed upon her?
  - Does she have a spiritual director? What is that experience like for her? How long has she been seeing a spiritual director?
  - Does she have a rule of life, a disciplined prayer life, and a spirituality that is life giving?

- What is the aspirant's self-awareness? Does she have self-esteem without falling prey to the temptation to arrogance? Is she humble without being self-denigrating? Does the aspirant like herself? What challenges in this regard does the aspirant face?
- What does the aspirant identify as her emotional strengths and weaknesses? How do they affect her present ministry?

### **Meeting 6 – Focus On The aspirant's Gifts, Talents And Resources**

Focus on the aspirant's gifts, talents, and resources in relationship to our mutual understanding of the Church's ministry. How would the aspirant's gifts, skills, current ministries, lifestyle, commitment, and vision best fit the call to ordained Christian ministry? The purpose of this meeting is to help the aspirant discern what gifts and resources God has uniquely given him that can be developed for service as a priest or a deacon.

**Assignment for the aspirant:** Write a two-page paper on the talents and strengths God has gifted him with to serve as a priest or deacon. In the same paper the aspirant should share what he thinks some of his challenges as a priest or deacon may be.

- What priestly and/or diaconal functions has he demonstrated in the congregation?
- How do the aspirant and the CDC envision the aspirant's growth as a priest or deacon?
- What are the aspirant's strengths for ordained ministry?
- What are the aspirant's weakness? His "growing edges"? How aware of these is he, and how willing and able is he to grow in these areas?

### **Meeting 7 – The Demands Of Professional Ministry**

How firm a grasp of the demands of the professional ministry does the aspirant have? Can the aspirant say no? Establish clear boundaries? Be sure to consider the demands of:

- Time
- Limited financial resources
- Expectations (legitimate or otherwise) placed on the aspirants family

**Assignment for the aspirant:** Write a two-page paper on how she would maintain her spiritual and psychological health were she ordained. What kind of boundaries would she establish? Is she able to say, "No"? What is her rule of life?

### **Meeting 8 – What Has The aspirant Learned Through This Process?**

**Assignment for the aspirant:** This is the aspirant's opportunity to sum up his experience of the discernment process. This paper may be up to five pages. In this paper he should describe in detail what he's learned about himself through the process, and he should articulate well his continued conviction that he is called to the priesthood or the diaconate.

**Meeting 9 – Committee writes its report and submits it to the priest in charge, who likewise writes his or her report. All reports are submitted to the bishop.**

Things to be considered include:

1. Does the aspirant display a maturing Christian faith that reflects an understanding of Christ's presence, conveys a sense of being called to service and of sharing the Gospel. Does the aspirant's life give evidence of being lived in the Spirit? Does she exhibit love and openness to all of Christ's people?
2. Is the aspirant willing to speak in an open and personal way of her experience of God, Jesus, and the Spirit?
3. Is the aspirant possessed of personal integrity? Does she display authenticity (i.e., "what you see is what you get")? Is she trustworthy and dependable?
4. *At a level appropriate to her training*, does the aspirant display an adequate intellectual grasp of concepts? Again, at a level appropriate to her training, does the aspirant have the ability to express her faith theologically, the ability to think reflectively, and to articulate her understanding within the context of the Anglican and the Episcopal tradition?
5. Will she be able to do the practical work of ministry? Does she have a pastoral and kind presence? Does she manage time well? Does she know how to prioritize?
6. Does the aspirant display sound judgment and clear boundaries – personal, ethical, and communal?
7. How does the aspirant display a loyalty to and love for the Church? Does she understand the role of holy obedience in the life of an ordained person? This matters because she will vow that she is "loyal to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of Christ as this Church has received them", and she will promise to "obey your [sic] bishop and other ministers who may have authority over you [sic] and your[sic] work."<sup>3</sup>
8. Does the aspirant have:
  - a. A sense of humor?
  - b. A mature sense of appropriate Christian sexual behavior?
  - c. The ability to manage finances, personally and in a corporate setting?
  - d. Tough skin? How does she receive criticism and feedback? How resilient is she?
9. When in a leadership position, does the aspirant articulate vision well and take the initiative? Does she have a good sense of when – and when not to – take risks?
10. How does the aspirant:
  - a. Handle and resolve conflict?

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<sup>3</sup> BCP, p. 526

- b. Engage and participate in community life?
- c. Delegate responsibility?

### Meeting 10 – **Celebrate!!**

The CDC shares with the aspirant their report. If the CDC discerns the aspirant's vocation to ordained ministry, this is a time for celebration! It is completely appropriate to treat this last meeting as a party, celebrating the aspirant's vocation as well as the vocation of all other members of the CDC.

Note: On those occasions when a CDC fails to affirm an aspirant's vocation to ordination, and the aspirant continues to believe that he is so called, the rector or priest-in-charge must communicate this news to the aspirant.

