

GUIDELINES FOR RECTOR OR PRIEST-IN-CHARGE IN DISCERNING A CALL AND FORMING A CONGREGATIONAL DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

As the rector or priest-in-charge of a parish you have a special responsibility. An aspirant initiates his or her process towards discernment by visiting with you. Before you form a discernment committee to aid a member of your community in ascertaining his or her call, pray to determine whether you personally believe in this person's vocation. If you have some reservations about a person's call but see sufficient evidence of a vocation to warrant forming a committee, share your misgivings with the aspirant transparently and kindly from the outset. If you simply cannot discern that this person has a vocation as either a priest or a deacon, share that fact with him or her. Do so kindly, honestly, transparently, and with love – but do so! And do not form a discernment committee! While being this honest and transparent with a parishioner may be painful, far less damage will ensue for the aspirant, your parish, or you than if you are not clear and honest about your perceptions.

There is no justifiable warrant for forming a discernment committee for a person whom you cannot in good conscience support for ordination.

- Generally if you discern a person may have a call, the discernment committee that you appoint will likewise discern a call. However, this is not guaranteed. Should a discernment committee fail to affirm a person's call, it is your responsibility to share that fact with the aspirant. Do so with honesty, transparency, and – above all – kindness and love. Do not delegate this responsibility to anybody else! Nobody else in the parish is as well equipped as you are to deliver this news.
- If you personally discern that there is sufficient evidence of a person's call to warrant forming a discernment committee, please contact Bishop Vono, Mary Jewell (the bishop's executive assistant), and the Canon for Formation to let them know that you are forming a committee. Also, please share with them the aspirant's full name and contact information.
- ***It is your responsibility as the rector or priest-in-charge to form the aspirant's discernment committee.*** Please choose no more than six members of the congregation to serve. If you choose to serve, this number should include you. When possible, these six should be friends with the aspirant. However, it is not the task of the discernment committee to simply corroborate the aspirant's self-perception. The members of the committee must proceed with an awareness that their task on the CDC is to create a safe space for the aspirant to hear the Holy Spirit, but that may entail asking hard questions and, ultimately, drawing the conclusion that individually or collectively they do not affirm the aspirant's perception that she or he has a call. Again, honesty, kindness, and love are the order of the day. The members of the committee must be mature Christians able to gently communicate to an aspirant things she or he may not want to hear.
- In conclusion, the six congregants who comprise the committee should be mature Christians (cf., Philippians 3:15) with a demonstrated commitment to Jesus Christ. Their faith should be apparent for all to see. They should be emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically healthy. Above all, they should be kind.

They should also be willing and able to commit to a lengthy process involving reading at least two books and attending ten meetings with the aspirant.