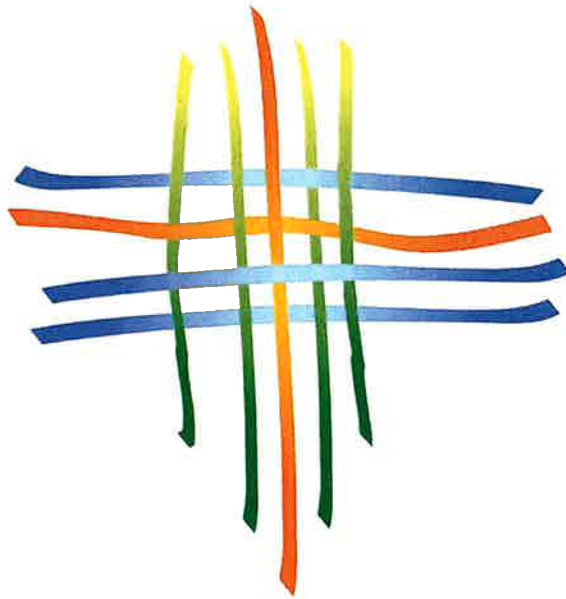


Discerning a Call to Ordained Ministry

September 2025

A Handbook for
The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts
Compiled by the Commission on Ministry



September 27, 2025

Dear friends in Christ,

Welcome to this year's Ministry Discernment Day, which we hope will give you an opportunity to ponder more deeply how God is calling each of us into ministry and to learn more about our discernment process in the Diocese of Massachusetts. This time is for you to listen to the stories of others who have gone through this process, to ask questions about what discernment may be like for you, and to meet others who will share in the work of discernment with you.

Members of the Commission on Ministry share the blessing and privilege of working alongside our Bishop as she guides the formation of postulants and candidates in preparation for ordination to both the diaconate and priesthood. We serve as liaisons to parish discernment committees, advisors to postulants and candidates, and work in collaboration with the Standing Committee to make the ordination process in this diocese as accessible as possible to everyone who feels called to explore a vocation to ordained ministry.

As we enter this new season of discernment, we ask you to pray for us, as we pray for you.

Yours faithfully in Christ,

The Members of the Commission on Ministry

The Rev. Dr. Maggie Arnold, Co-chair
The Rev. Edwin Johnson, Co-chair
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The Rev. Dr. Richard Burden, Chaplain for Academic Formation
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I. ORDAINED LEADERS FOR THE CHURCH

Equipping the Saints

Our mission goals call for us to turn every Episcopal congregation into a center of preparation for active discipleship. Ordained leaders must be able to build spiritually healthy and energetic Christian communities, whether in traditional parishes or in other institutional settings, and to equip the saints for participation in Christ's mission. They must understand that worship, witness, and pastoral care do not stop at the church door, and must be ready to do God's reconciling work in the world.

We have matched our diocese's vision for mission with some particular traits of leaders who could fulfill that vision. We hope that these descriptions will help inquirers, sponsoring priests, and Discernment Committees to recognize someone who is especially suited for ordained leadership—as a deacon or priest—in the Diocese of Massachusetts or to guide someone toward a renewed understanding of lay ministry.

As you begin your discernment, please bear in mind:

- Everyone is called by God. Our Baptismal Covenant makes that clear. In baptism we promise to “proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.”
- Lay leadership and lay ministry are essential to the Church and require many of the same qualities as ordained leadership
- The mission priorities of this diocese at this time are specific ways to turn our vision into reality. They call for enterprising leaders who can see possibilities, overcome obstacles, and draw many others with them to bring in the Kingdom (*Addendum A*)

We need deacons and priests who:

- **will be strong leaders.** Whatever their style of leadership, they must be able to bring a community to life in Christ.
- **are committed to following Jesus Christ** and are growing toward spiritual maturity. In a culture where many people do not understand what it means to be a Christian, they must live as witnesses to our faith.
- **are willing to take risks for the sake of the Gospel.** They are adventurous self-starters who can seed new communities or revitalize dying congregations. They are flexible and willing to go where the Church needs them.
- **reflect the racial, ethnic, cultural and theological diversity of our diocese.** They will be willing to learn another language and have cross-cultural and cross-class experience.
- **communicate Christian hope.** In the face of loss, disappointment, uncertainties and other challenging situations they can hold onto the hope of new life and to awaken that hope in others.
- **are in love with the faith.** They can articulate the gospel of God revealed in Christ Jesus clearly and passionately to all kinds of people, inside and outside the Church.
- **can build up the body of Christ.** They recognize the importance of lay people in the Church and are able to identify, recruit and encourage strong lay leaders. Their spirit of warmth and hospitality invites people into community.
- **are reconcilers.** They address conflict and work for understanding and healing.
- **have a sense of inner authority and a center in God.** They have a prayerful, vital relationship with God. They are emotionally stable, able to tolerate stress, aware of their limitations, and willing, when necessary, to seek appropriate help and support. They understand and accept the costs of becoming a public figure.

- **act as God's instruments in bringing in a realm of justice and mercy.** Like the ancient prophets, they love their communities enough to call them to account.

Within these broad guidelines, we intend to ordain deacons and priests with a wide variety of gifts, while actively seeking those who can fill needs at this time. We are especially interested in finding applicants for ordination who:

- are skilled in working with believers and seekers of all ages and in attracting new people to the Christian faith
- can empower the poor and outcast to work for justice
- are willing to go where the church needs them
- are bi-vocational—able to serve small congregations on a part-time basis

The Bishop and the Commission on Ministry do not impose a limit on how many applicants may be considered for ordination at any one time. Practically speaking, however, the Bishop and Commission on Ministry consider the number of postulants and candidates they can guide effectively during their formation and how long those who are ordained will be able to serve the Church. Inquirers under age twenty-two or over the age of sixty seeking ordination must speak with the Canon for Ordained Vocations about special age-related circumstances, before beginning a discernment process.

The role of the congregation or other faith community

The Episcopal tradition understands that a call to ordination comes in the context of Christian community. Sometimes it is the community which first discovers a potential deacon or priest among its members and asks that person to consider discernment. Sometimes it is the person who first feels a call and looks to the community to test it.

The Commission on Ministry works with both aspects of call. We help individuals use the resources of their faith and diocesan communities in clarifying a call. We also strongly encourage local congregations to recruit potential leaders who have the gifts needed in the Church in this diocese.

We depend primarily on congregations for recruitment. The local congregation can recognize those with gifts of spiritual leadership, prophetic voices, and the ability to build Christian community. Congregations can discover promising young people with gifts for ordained leadership that are just becoming visible. We encourage congregations to contribute to the diversity of our ordained leadership in seeking those who represent many different parts of God's church.

If you are discerning a call, consider carefully:

- Do you recognize in yourself the qualities the Church today needs?
- **Does your community see these qualities in you?**
- Why is ordination essential to your sense of call?
- Do your gifts and aspirations match the work of deacons or of priests? [see the next page for detailed descriptions of these two orders of ministry.]
- What work might need to be done before you begin a discernment process?

When you begin to explore a call, speak with a potential sponsoring priest—likely a clergy person at your parish or a chaplain at your educational institution. Work with them to consider opportunities to experience new ministries in your faith community, such as participation on the liturgical team, serving with outreach programs, volunteering with children's and youth classes, engaging in Bible Study, etc. Attend a Ministry Discernment Day in September to learn more about the discernment process for many

kinds of vocation, lay and ordained. Take advantage of group discernment resources (e.g. Loving the Questions)—visit the St. Paul Center for Theology and Prayer at [St. Paul Center for Theology & Prayer — The Cathedral Church of Saint Paul, Boston](#). Explore your sense of call with a spiritual director ([Contact — Bethany House of Prayer](#)). Learn more about the different roles of deacons and priests by visiting other congregations and talking with our Archdeacons and Regional Canons.

If you are a potential sponsoring priest, or a member of a Discernment Committee working with inquirers for Holy Orders, consider these questions:

- Is the inquirer the sort of person who springs to mind as you read this profile?
- Can I see this person as my deacon or priest? Or as a helpful colleague in ministry?
- Is there someone else in your congregation who does and who might be encouraged to think about this path?
- What other means would be appropriate for testing this vocation?
- What roles must an inquirer step away from during a discernment process? If the inquirer is a Vestry member or officer, they must take a leave from that role during their discernment process. If the inquirer is a paid staff member at the church, they must contact the Canon for Ordained Vocations to be connected with an alternate sponsoring priest.
- When a sponsoring priest and congregation accept the responsibility of accompanying someone in discernment, that responsibility continues afterwards, whether in supporting their formation for ordained ministry, or even more so, in supporting their formation for an affirmation of lay ministry.

As you do this important work of raising up leaders for the Church, lay and ordained, we encourage you not to overlook people because they do not fit a conventional image of clergy. Scripture reminds us that God often calls those that are least expected into positions of leadership. We encourage you to pay attention also to those whose gifts and styles of ministry are different from your own.

Deacon or Priest?

Discerning whether you are called to be a deacon or a priest is a central question for everyone involved in exploring a call to ordained leadership in our Church.

The Role of a Deacon

Deacons serve a particular congregation taking a full role in the liturgy and life of the congregation, but their charge is to use their specific skills in service to the needs of the community and to lead and equip the Church to bring the ministry of Christ to those outside their doors. We are looking for deacons who are ready to challenge the Church to understand and address needs in places where the Church may not have gone before. Deacons are called:

- to be bold community agents who make their Christian faith visible where they live and work
- to interpret “the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world” to the Church (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 543)
- to serve as catalysts and guides for people engaged in the outreach work of the Church
- to assist bishops and priests in proclaiming the Gospel and administering the sacraments (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 856)
- to “equip the saints,” and to inspire and challenge them to fulfill their Baptismal Covenant through their work in the world

The Role of a Priest

The priest exercises the ministry of Christ on behalf of the local community, “particularly as pastor to the people” (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 856). A priest serves as an evangelist and builder of the Body of Christ, through sacramental ministry in a faith community. Priests may also exercise their ministry in other sites, both within the church (for example as diocesan administrators, seminary professors, missionaries, members of religious orders, and spiritual directors) and outside of the church (working in non-profits, or as chaplains in medical or educational settings). Some priests maintain a bi-vocational ministry, combining church work with a secular profession. Priests are called:

- to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to life by word and deed
- to teach the faith, administer the sacraments, and bless and declare pardon in the name of God
- to share with the bishops in building up the Church
- to “equip the saints,” and to inspire and challenge them to fulfill their Baptismal Covenant through their work in the world

II. INTRODUCTION TO THE STAGES OF THE ORDINATION PROCESS

Three Components of the Ordination Process

The ordination process in this diocese has three components: discernment, decision and formation.

Discernment is the work of prayerful attention to God's will for the Church and the people within it. All of us are called to service as members of the body of Christ. Our life together in congregations includes the responsibility to discern who is being called by God to serve as an ordained leader in the Church. The call to ordination is not a private matter, any more than Christian faith is purely individual. In the Episcopal Church, there will always be a local congregation that explores and assesses a person's own sense of being called. The local congregation is usually the parish or mission where the inquirer is a member. Sometimes, discernment will take place more appropriately in a different sort of faith community such as a college chaplaincy. Chaplains should talk to the Canon for Ordained Vocations before beginning a discernment process for an inquirer.

Decision refers to the Diocesan Bishop's decision to invite a person to become a postulant for Holy Orders. The Commission on Ministry helps the Bishop to select, from among those nominated by their congregations, the people whose gifts are most needed in this diocese at this time.

Formation is the ongoing preparation to do God's work—in this case, the work of ordained leadership—authentically and responsibly. It happens before and during the time of discernment as the inquirer learns habits of openness, self-awareness, prayer, discipline and trust that will keep this time centered in God. It happens with particular intensity during the time of postulancy and candidacy, as both the Bishop and members of the Commission on Ministry provide guidance and resources for further learning and experience in leadership.

Stages in the Ordination Process

An inquirer is beginning to consider and discuss the possibility of ordination and takes some intentional steps with the sponsoring priest to explore an ordained vocation. We hope the sponsoring priest will guide the inquirer to meet with a spiritual director, engage in active participation in the ministries of the church that will allow people to see their capacities for ordained leadership, and enter on a group discernment program, such as Loving the Questions or Education for Ministry. Formal parish discernment is initiated by submitting a commitment form to the Office of Ordained Vocations, and then the Commission on Ministry appoints a liaison to work with the Sponsoring Priest to form a Discernment Committee that will meet with the inquirer multiple times and address specific questions (see Addendum D).

A nominee has completed work with the Discernment Committee and, on the basis of the Committee's report, has received the Vestry's endorsement as well as that of the sponsoring priest. At this point, the sponsoring priest will notify the Office of Ordained Vocations that the Vestry has endorsed the nominee, and the nominee will be scheduled for psychological assessment. The nominee submits all required materials to the Bishop and Commission on Ministry for evaluation. Application materials are due in the Office of Ordained Vocations by **August 1**. These materials will be reviewed by the Commission on Ministry; based on this review, the nominee may be invited to the Postulancy Interview Weekend in **November**, which includes a series of small group conversations exploring the nominee's clarity of call and readiness for formation.

A postulant has been accepted formally into the process for Holy Orders by the decision of the Diocesan Bishop, with the advice of the Commission on Ministry and the Standing Committee. The Canon for Ordained Vocations and an advisor provided by the Commission on Ministry work with the postulant to make sure that the postulant knows what is expected and is guided through the ordination process.

A candidate has shown such clear evidence of a call that ordination is expected unless significant issues arise. Members of the Standing Committee and Commission on Ministry interview postulants and then make recommendations to the Bishop who decides whether to grant candidacy. Candidacy is usually granted in the middle of the second full year of formation.

The Role of the Commission on Ministry

The Commission on Ministry helps the Bishop to discern if people with a possible vocation to ordained ministry are truly called to *ordained* ministry and are ready for the work of formation required for these ministries in the Church. In carrying out this task, it considers the assessments of many people who have known the nominee in diverse situations. Admission to postulancy recognizes that many have observed what seems to be a strong call to ordination in the nominee as well as specific skills and gifts that are especially needed in this diocese at this time. Postulancy begins a period of intensified formation, during which the Bishop and Commission on Ministry give support and clear direction.

Planning Formation for Ordained Ministry

The formation process for both deacons and priests, from postulancy to ordination, is three years long at a minimum (even if the nominee has previously attended seminary and completed CPE), with additional formation as required on an individual basis.

For nominees to the diaconate, the Archdeacon for Formation invites and orients them to our diocesan formation program for deacons, which includes academic work, field education, and liturgical practice, in collaboration with the Province One School for Deacons, as well as specific formation experiences related to ministry in our diocese.

For nominees to the priesthood, the Bishop helps to choose the seminary or other program of theological education that will offer the best setting for that postulant's formation, taking into account all circumstances that need to be considered. Those who have attended or graduated from seminary before admission to postulancy for the priesthood may be required to take additional courses and will be expected to supplement academic formation with field education internships during the three-year formation period. In particular, graduates of non-Episcopal seminaries may be asked to complete a program in Anglican studies through an Episcopal seminary.

Inquirers already Ordained in other Denominations

Clergy currently serving faith communities or administrative positions in other denominations are not ready to enter the discernment process for ordination in the Episcopal Church; they must first initiate a thoughtful and responsible leave-taking from their polity and receive a formal release from that ministry. Clergy from other denominations and from Anglican Churches that are not in full communion with the Episcopal Church are required to be confirmed or received in the Episcopal Church, become active members of a congregation, and seek discernment and nomination in that congregation on the same schedule as any other inquirer. When such a previously ordained person is admitted as a postulant in the Episcopal Church, the length of time before ordination may be shortened, depending on how much additional formation is required. For further information about these canonical requirements, please speak to the Canon for Ordained Vocations.

Spouses, Partners and Families

The work of ordained ministry can be exhilarating and joyful. It can also be a source of strain, confusion and sometimes anger for deacons and priests and their immediate families. The Bishop and the Commission on Ministry urge everyone who considers ordination to include spouses, partners and families in the discernment process from the very first. We strongly recommend open and honest conversations about the hopes, demands, and anxieties raised in this process.

III. THE CONGREGATION'S WORK OF DISCERNMENT

As members of congregations, we all promise one another at the time of baptism to do everything we can to support each other in our lives in Christ. From time to time, a member of a congregation experiences a change in their understanding of baptismal call. The community then has the opportunity and sacred responsibility, prayerfully to assist such a person in discerning the nature of this seemingly new call. A small group, the Discernment Committee, working on behalf of the Vestry and the whole congregation, articulates this call over the course of several meetings with the inquirer.

The inquirer meets with a Discernment Committee assisted by a liaison from the Commission on Ministry. Their conversations should be prayerful, truthful and confidential. Both the time and the situation are extraordinary, and they call for courage and honesty. The committee should help the inquirer examine their whole self – heart, soul, and mind. Their report to the Vestry must be succinct, direct and candid about their sense of the inquirer's call and that person's strengths and challenges. The process of discernment is neither an employment interview nor an exercise in packaging an image. The Vestry, the congregation and the diocese as a whole need to know that the committee has explored and recognized the authenticity of the inquirer's baptismal call and how it can best be expressed and formed for ministry.

Our ordained and lay church leadership must reflect the entire spectrum of the human condition. Therefore, our ordinands must reflect the diversity of humanity. We are actively seeking applicants from diverse backgrounds.

In addition to the Bishop's role in recruiting candidates for ordination, ethnically and culturally diverse congregations have a very important role to play in the mission to broaden the Church and its leadership. These congregations may see a person who demonstrates leadership but has not thought of ordained ministry as a possibility. They may then encourage such a person to "come and see," and in doing so have a significant impact upon the Church as a whole.

Inquirers whose primary language is English will be strongly encouraged to have or develop proficiency in a second language that will be useful in this diocese; inquirers for whom English is a second language will be strongly encouraged to develop proficiency in English. Resources for this formation are available.

Once an inquirer has become a postulant, the congregation will continue to nurture and support them. Although postulants no longer worship regularly with the sponsoring congregation and are expected to find field placements in other congregations, the sponsoring congregation is still a postulant's first home and is expected to remember them in their hearts and prayers and offer practical assistance, as well as financial support to the extent that it is able.

The Role of the Sponsoring Priest

The role of a sponsoring priest, with deep knowledge of the inquirer, is vital from the first steps of this process, to direct the inquirer's personal discernment, to initiate the work of the Discernment Committee, and to provide pastoral care and support throughout the time of formation for either lay or ordained ministry. The sponsoring priest is an advisor, mentor and guide in deciding when it is time for each next step. The sponsoring priest should maintain a strong, consistent pastoral presence with the inquirer throughout their journey of discernment, whatever direction it may take.

In the early stages of conversation with an inquirer, there are three broad questions that the sponsoring priest should focus on:

- What is the evidence that the inquirer is called not to a committed and disciplined lay ministry but to Holy Orders? (see p.3, above, for descriptions of diaconal and priestly vocations)
- What gifts does the inquirer bring to ordained leadership in today's Church? How have these gifts been offered already within and beyond the congregation?
- What work needs to be done to make the inquirer better known to the congregation, to address limitations and to develop gifts before they are ready to meet with a Discernment Committee?

As discernment moves forward, it becomes the responsibility of the sponsoring priest:

- to encourage personal and communal vocational discernment before beginning the exploration of ordained ministry
- to help the inquirer decide if and when it is appropriate to enter the formal diocesan process
- to discuss how the required education and training might be managed
- to begin pastoral conversations with the inquirer's family members, helping them to consider the implications of this possible change in their lives
- to identify any personal or family-related problems which may be part of this person's history and should be addressed
- to recognize that there may come a point when the best answer is neither "yes" nor "no" but simply "Not now—wait"
- to follow through on the whole process, whatever the formal outcome, by providing support for the inquirer and assuring that the gifts for ministry that have been discerned are recognized and put to use
- to write a one to two-page letter to the Vestry recommending nomination, if applicable

Special cases:

If a congregation is without a member of the clergy, the Canon for Ordained Vocations will appoint another clergy sponsor, such as the dean of their deanery or a priest in a neighboring congregation; there may be a necessary delay in the beginning of a discernment process until a priest is available to fill this role.

If an inquirer is a spouse, partner or child of a priest in the sponsoring congregation, or is employed by the congregation, the sponsoring priest must contact the Canon for Ordained Vocations before forming a Discernment Committee.

Persons in significant lay leadership roles, such as Vestry members and officers, must conclude those roles before beginning an active discernment process.

Beginning the Formal Process toward Ordination

If the inquirer and sponsoring priest agree to go forward with the exploration of a potential call to ordained ministry, the priest accompanies the inquirer to a discernment resource day held annually in September. Potential Discernment Committee members as well as family members of the inquirer are also welcome to attend.

If, after prayerful consideration, they decide to proceed, the inquirer and sponsoring priest notify the Office for Ordained Vocations by the specified date, using the Ordination Process Commitment Form (*Addendum B*). The congregation's work of formal discernment begins with a consultation with a liaison from the Commission on Ministry to review the composition of the Discernment Committee and choose the best timeline for the parish discernment process.

Before meeting with the Discernment Committee, the inquirer writes two statements that will form a basis for initial conversations. The first is a **spiritual autobiography** and the second is a **ministry statement** that describes the inquirer's understanding of the Church's ministry and their call (*Addendum C*). The spiritual autobiography looks back on the journey that has brought the inquirer to this point, and the ministry statement looks forward to where the inquirer sees a call to serve in the future of the church. Both statements are to be given to the Discernment Committee prior to its first meeting. These documents will help to guide the conversations about who the inquirer is, the nature of the inquirer's personal relationships, how they are being called to ordained ministry, and whether there is a clear commitment in the inquirer's life to serving Jesus Christ and working for justice and peace. Members of the Discernment Committee must feel able to address these issues in some form in the report they will submit to the Vestry along with the inquirer's ministry statement. Because of the personal nature of the spiritual autobiography, it *does not* need to be attached to the Committee's report to the Vestry but *will* be included in the application for Holy Orders if the Vestry endorses the inquirer's admission as a postulant.

The Discernment Committee

Composition, Qualifications and Work of the Committee

- The Discernment Committee is composed of four to six members of the congregation. It is appointed by the sponsoring priest with the advice of the Commission on Ministry liaison, as well as the Vestry's consent and one person must be a Vestry member.
- The Committee's charge is to explore and challenge the inquirer's call to ministry.
- Those appointed to the Committee should reflect diverse backgrounds and have differing perspectives but demonstrate the ability to listen and to learn from others.
- They must have room in their schedules for at least eight regular meetings (about ninety minutes each), usually scheduled between October and April.
- Current postulants or candidates for Holy Orders should also not be a member of a Discernment Committee, nor should close friends or relatives of the inquirer be asked to serve on a Discernment Committee. Current employees of the parish or retired clergy in the congregation might be appropriate members of a Discernment Committee—talk with your COM liaison if you are considering one of these as a potential Committee member.

Orientation and Guidance of the Discernment Committee

After the Ordination Process Commitment Form has been received, a Commission on Ministry liaison is appointed and must meet with the Discernment Committee at their first meeting, for orientation; ideally, the sponsoring priest will also be present at the first meeting. **Without this orientation meeting the completed application will not be considered.** Guidelines for meeting with the liaison are found in *Addendum D*.

The liaison is available to the Discernment Committee for consultation during its entire process and should be kept informed about progress. The liaison supports the Discernment Committee, not the individual inquirer. Ordinarily, consultations happen through the Discernment Committee's chairperson though the inquirer may ask for help if major problems arise. Before the Discernment Committee submits its report to the Vestry, it must give a copy to the liaison for review to make sure it is complete. The Discernment Committee is required to meet with the liaison at the end of the parish discernment process to review its experience.

If a congregation or other faith community has had little experience with discernment or seems uncertain of its task, an experienced person from another congregation may be assigned as a trainer or consultant.

The Discernment Committee's Responsibilities

Discernment Committees are asked to make a recommendation to the Vestry as to whether an inquirer should be nominated. The Committee does this by presenting a careful, thorough report of its work and its observations following the format found in *Addendum D*. **The report must not be more than ten numbered pages in length, in 12-point type and double-spaced.**

A Committee should beware of turning into an advocacy group. Withholding information perceived as negative for fear of "hurting someone's chances" is damaging to the integrity of this process and prevents both a sound evaluation and important guidance for growth. The Bishop and Commission on Ministry are not looking for a portrait of a perfect person.

Sometimes the Discernment Committee's wisdom is that the call is not to ordained ministry at this time. When that becomes apparent, the Committee chair should communicate immediately with the sponsoring priest and the COM liaison, so that an appropriate pastoral response can be initiated.

During the months and years that follow, and whatever the final outcome may be, the Discernment Committee has a particular responsibility for making sure that those who have raised up the inquirer continue to hold that person in prayer and in pastoral care.

Organizing the Discernment Committee's Work

Like other aspects of discernment, the work of the Discernment Committee is grounded in the baptismal covenant and our promise to support each other in our life in Christ. The COM liaison can help design and schedule the Discernment Committee's process in ways appropriate to each individual context.

Here are some important guidelines:

- Make sure to schedule the first meeting at a time when the liaison can be present.
- Before the first meeting, distribute the following documents and ask all members to read this material thoroughly and note questions.
 - (a) the inquirer's autobiographical statement
 - (b) the inquirer's ministry statement
 - (c) the relevant pages of this Handbook
 - (d) Addendum D at the back of this Handbook
- Devote some time at the first meeting to the purpose of getting to know one another and clarifying rules of confidentiality.
- Also, at the initial meeting, plan all meeting dates to keep attendance high and complete all work before making a recommendation to the Vestry. Allow sufficient time for meetings and identify any members who may have to withdraw because they cannot commit to the full schedule of meetings.
- Acknowledge from the start that the committee may not affirm the inquirer's call to ordained ministry and discuss what will happen then.
- Open and close each meeting with prayer.

Here are some suggestions that others have found helpful:

- Identify a scribe who will keep a record of discussions and draft the final report.
- Structure each meeting around the specific topics that will need to be addressed in the report (*Addendum D*).
- End each meeting by giving the inquirer questions to consider or work to do either before the next meeting or before the final report.

The Role of the Vestry

The final step in the congregation's work of discernment is taken by the Vestry.

As the elected representative body of the congregation, the Vestry has a canonical responsibility in nomination for ordination. When a Discernment Committee and sponsoring priest are ready to recommend an inquirer to proceed, the Vestry reviews and endorses the recommendation.

In deciding whether to nominate the inquirer, the Vestry will review:

- the Discernment Committee report addressing the questions listed in *Addendum D*
- a recommendation from the sponsoring priest of one to two pages that will be submitted with the inquirer's application for Holy Orders (see below)
- the inquirer's ministry statement
- the inquirer and representatives of the Discernment Committee can be invited to be present at the Vestry meeting in which the materials are reviewed, to answer any questions the Vestry may have

After careful review of the above, the Vestry nominates the inquirer for admission to postulancy for Holy Orders. The Endorsement for Admission as Postulant (*Addendum E*) is signed for inclusion in the materials required for application.

A Vestry nomination also includes:

- a pledge to contribute financially to the applicant's preparation, as able. Even if it is not possible for congregations to offer direct financial support, they can still help in other ways, such as providing vestments and other practical items, and offering hospitality and transportation assistance when postulants and candidates studying out of state return to Massachusetts for required events
- covering the parish's share of the cost of psychological testing for postulancy, which is shared among the congregation (\$500), the postulant (\$500) and the diocese (\$500)
- a commitment to remain involved in the inquirer's formation for ordained ministry, as appropriate

The Responsibility of the Nominee

If the sponsoring priest and Vestry agree to nominate the inquirer, it is then the nominee's responsibility to make certain all materials required for the application are sent to the Office for Ordained Vocations by **August 1**. These include:

- Autobiographical Statement
- Ministry Statement
- Discernment Committee Report
- Sponsoring Priest Letter of Recommendation (maximum 1 to 2 pages in length)
- Vestry Recommendation (*Addendum E*)
- Financial Statement (*Addendum F.1 for the priesthood or F.2 for the diaconate*)
- Three Additional Letters of Recommendation (*Addendum H*, maximum 1 to 2 pages in length)
 - one from a clergy person who is **not the sponsoring priest**
 - one from a lay person
 - one from either clergy or laity
- Application for Holy Orders (*Addendum I*)
- Copies of confirmation and baptism certificates
- High-quality headshot photograph (sent by e-mail attachment to edie@diomass.org if possible)
- Resume
- Transcripts from all colleges/universities/seminaries

Following nomination, the nominee will participate in the required psychological assessment, contracted by the Diocese of Massachusetts, scheduled by the Canon for Ordained Vocations.

V. THE WORK OF THE BISHOP AND COMMISSION ON MINISTRY

The final discernment in accepting a nominee as a postulant for Holy Orders rests with the Bishop. There are two stages between the nominee sending in all the necessary written materials and being accepted into postulancy.

- (1) A committee, including members of the Commission on Ministry and the Standing Committee, reviews all the written materials and, on that basis, agrees that the nominee will or will not be invited to an interview. Any nominee who at this stage is not invited to interview may apply again for consideration at a later time.
- (2) Nominees who are invited for interviews meet with the Bishop and members of the Commission on Ministry and Standing Committee in late November or early December.

After consulting with those members of the Commission on Ministry and the Standing Committee who have interviewed each nominee, the Bishop decides whether to invite the nominee to become a postulant. The Canon for Ordained Vocations notifies the sponsoring priest of the Bishop's decision. The decision is confirmed in a letter sent by the Canon for Ordained Vocations to the nominee and sponsoring priest. The sponsoring priest meets with the nominee to discuss the decision as quickly as possible. In the case of a nominee who is not accepted into postulancy, the Canon for Ordained Vocations will also name a member of the Commission on Ministry who may be contacted if further discussion is needed.

V. FORMATION DURING POSTULANCY AND CANDIDACY

Formation in this Diocese

All new postulants will receive a separate Formation Handbook outlining the various steps for each stage of the process, postulancy through candidacy and ordination.

Postulancy and candidacy usually last for eighteen months each, making a three-year period of formation before ordination to the diaconate or transitional diaconate. The fact that a postulant has already earned a seminary degree does not necessarily shorten the process. When someone has already completed the MDiv or equivalent, the three-year formation time focuses on field education in Episcopal contexts and other ordination requirements as advised by the Bishop and Commission on Ministry for each individual.

The period of postulancy and candidacy is a time to develop habits and disciplines that will sustain deacons and priests in their work. During this time, postulants and candidates are guided by the Bishop both directly and through the Commission on Ministry and the Canon for Ordained Vocations so that their formation provides the best possible opportunities to prepare for ordination.

A member of the Commission on Ministry will serve as an advisor to each person in formation and maintains regular contact through postulancy and candidacy until the time of ordination. The advisor also communicates with the whole Commission on Ministry so that its members are kept up to date with the progress of each postulant and candidate. Discernment continues throughout this time of formation.

Spiritual Formation

Postulancy and candidacy are intended to be a period of great spiritual openness in which those who are preparing for ordination are aware of a deep desire to relate and to respond wholeheartedly to God.

It is essential that postulants and candidates learn to ground themselves in the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life that offer rhythm and structure for responding to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Postulants and candidates are expected to participate fully in a worshipping community and to carve out a regular, daily time for prayer. They are asked to make one or more retreats each year and to meet regularly with a spiritual director.

Preparation for the Diaconate

Formation for the diaconate includes academic education, mentored pastoral ministry experiences, and the completion of required diocesan trainings.

Participation in the Province 1 School for Deacons is the primary formation program, complimented by specific formation for ministry in the Diocese of Massachusetts. Postulants and candidates for the diaconate are enrolled in a three-year program of academic formation. The first two years are composed of both online classes (2 hours, once per month, in the evening) in-person weekend retreats (4x per year), and in-person 1-day retreats (3x per year). The final year includes only the in-person 1-day retreats (3x) and the canonical examination prior to application for ordination.

Formation includes five general areas:

- academic studies
- worship
- community building
- spiritual development and discipline
- practical training and experience

Evaluation of the academic component of formation is supervised by the Archdeacon as an ongoing part of formation and through written and oral examinations in six areas of theological study: Holy Scriptures, Christian Theology, Church History, Ethics and Moral Theology, Christian Worship, and the Practice of Ministry. Postulants and candidates for the diaconate are also required to complete two internships, one secular and one in parish ministry, as well as individual learning projects.

Preparation for the Priesthood

Formation for the priesthood includes academic education, mentored pastoral ministry experiences, and the completion of required diocesan trainings.

The traditional and still preferred way of acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary for ordained leadership is a Master of Divinity Degree or equivalent from one of the Episcopal Church's seminaries or allied institutions. Multiple field education placements, as part of the degree program and in addition to it, are an important part of formation for the priesthood. Postulants and candidates for the priesthood are required to complete at least one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education prior to application for candidacy and two years of field education prior to ordination.

The Episcopal Church, through its General Board of Examining Chaplains (GBEC), has identified six areas of knowledge in which candidates for ordination should be proficient. In this diocese, candidates for ordination are expected to take the General Ordination Examination to demonstrate their proficiency. If there are special circumstances (such as documented learning disabilities) that make the General Ordination Examination, as usually administered, inappropriate for a particular candidate, accommodations can usually be made. The six areas of theological study are Holy Scriptures, Christian Theology, Church History, Ethics and Moral Theology, Christian Worship, and the Practice of Ministry. The GOEs must have been completed, and any follow-up work assigned by the Examining Chaplain completed, before applying for ordination.

Other Requirements for Diaconate and Priesthood

All new postulants are invited to attend an orientation meeting with the Bishop.

During the formation period all postulants and candidates are required to be involved in work which continues to prepare them for ordained leadership. In this diocese, they are required to:

- complete a thorough background check arranged by the Office of Ordained Vocations
- complete psychological evaluations and testing, as well as a medical exam in accordance with the requirements of the Church Pension Group
- attend annual retreat for postulants and candidates in March
- attend the annual Diocesan Convention in November
- keep in touch with the Bishop through quarterly Ember Day Letters written every March, June, September and December
- complete anti-racism training
- complete safe church training
- receive education in the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, including the disciplinary sections of the canons (Title IV training)

Addenda

Summary of our Diocesan Strategic Vision [A]

Ordination Process Commitment Form [B]

Autobiographical and Ministry Statements [C]

Guidelines for Discernment Committee Meetings and Report to the Vestry [D]

Vestry Endorsement for Admission as Postulant [E]

Financial Assessment and Planning Guide for Priesthood [F.1]

Disclosure and Planning Guide for Diaconate [F.2]

Timeline and Requirement Checklist [G]

Letters of Recommendation [H]

Application for Holy Orders [I]

Parish Discernment and Ordination Process Pathways

Summary of our Diocesan Strategic Vision

In 2025, we undertook a Diocesan-wide visioning process, commissioned by our Bishop, facilitated by a year-long external consultancy from Ministry Architects, and involving participation from hundreds of Episcopalians in eastern Massachusetts. Building on previous survey and listening work, and following focus groups, interviews, a leadership visioning summit, reviews by Standing Committee, Diocesan Council, and our staff, we are pleased to present our renewed Diocesan Strategic Vision, including newly articulated Core Values, a refreshed Mission Statement, and four Strategic Priorities, all of which respond to what we have heard from laity and clergy in our Diocese.

Five Core Values

Core Values help us to know who we are, and to communicate who we are to those who do not yet know about us and the Episcopal way of being Christian. In that sense, they are both descriptive and aspirational – like the Christian life itself.

Our five Diocesan Core Values are:

Welcome

Courage

Justice

Joy

Love

In all of our listening work, there was surprising consistency around these five words, which resonate with many of us as what we need to be about as Jesus' disciples in this moment. Whatever we do, wherever we go, these are the values that we seek to center. Some of these values, such as welcome and justice, have been words we've named for decades as a Diocese; others, like courage and joy, are newer and respond to the yearnings we are hearing in this present moment of our church and our world. And, of course, love is perhaps the first and oldest Christian value that gives meaning and shape to the other four.

Renewed Mission Statement

Our Mission Statement helps us understand what we do as a Diocesan community and why we do it. Our refreshed mission statement is:

Trusting in the Holy Spirit, the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

Provides **generous and abundant welcome** to life in Christ,

Forms **creative disciples** for **missional lives**,

Fosters **inclusive, diverse, and sustainable worshipping communities**, and

Proclaims the justice of God to a broken and hurting world

As we become the church of the future together.

This mission statement guides and shapes not only the bishop's staff, but also our whole Diocesan community. Our hope is that each of our congregations, parishes, missions, chaplaincies, worshipping communities, Deaneries, committees, commissions, governing bodies, task forces, etc. can see something of their own witness and ministries reflected here. In that way, it becomes a source of unity across our beautifully diverse diocese.

Strategic Priorities

Through our visioning work, we have identified four key strategic priorities to guide us in focusing our time and resources for mission and ministry in the coming years.

Strengthening Worshipping Communities

For too many of our worshipping communities there is too much leadership energy being spent on administrative and infrastructure tasks, which leads to clergy burnout and lay leader frustration. While the challenge is easy to identify, and driven by demographic shifts in the size of our diocese over the past two decades, solutions have been elusive. In the coming three to five years, we will strengthen worshipping communities by increasing the amount of Diocesan-provided infrastructure support available to congregations in areas like communications, payroll, property support, and the clergy transition process. We will also build our capacity as Diocese to discern and support ministry clusters, shared clergy calls, and (where there is willingness) potential mergers. And we will offer more structured approaches to congregational development, so congregations have access to tools alongside resources.

Reframing Communication, Evangelism, and Prophetic Witness

To flourish as Jesus' followers, our faith must be visible and in relationship with those around us. Too often we hide our light under the bushel basket – which isn't meeting the moment in a way responsive to God's call on us. We will re-introduce our way of being Christian to the communities of Eastern Massachusetts. We will work together to encourage public Gospel witness that does what Jesus tells us to do: stand with the vulnerable and suffering, partner across difference, and dismantle systems of oppression in our own hearts and in our public square. And we will strengthen our internal communications as a Diocese for more clarity about what is going on and how you can get involved.

Advancing Formation, Discipleship, and Leadership Development

At a recent Diocesan Council meeting, one of our working groups made the point that evangelism begins with formation and discipleship. Our worshipping communities need more support in becoming places of local formation for children, youth, young adults, and older adults. In the coming years, our Diocese will provide more of this support to congregations and, where appropriate, will offer diocesan-level programming in these areas. Alongside this renewed attention to core Christian formation, we will provide more structured leadership development opportunities both for lay leaders who are asking to be better supported in their leadership vocations within their congregations, and to clergy who are asking for more targeted mentoring, wellness, and formational support.

Improving Diocesan Stewardship and Asset Management

When we talk about assets we are talking of course about money. But we are also talking about the time of our faithful volunteers and staff, about data we can use more intentionally, and we're talking about our physical property as congregations and as a Diocese. In the coming years, we will build our capacity as Diocese and as congregations to better understand and utilize our real estate assets to serve our mission/ministry. We will also improve our systems to both collect, analyze and utilize data to help inform our discernments and measure impacts. And we will look for ways to better align both the size/shape of our volunteer committees & boards, and our staff roles and processes, to be faithful stewards both of our shared mission and our people's gifts.

**THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MASSACHUSETTS
Ordination Process Commitment Form**

This form serves as notification to the Bishop's Office and the Commission on Ministry that the following person will be entering the formal time of inquiry and discernment for Holy Orders (please print clearly).

Inquirer's Name (including preferred pronouns) _____

Inquiring about (*circle one*): Diaconate Priesthood

Address: _____

Telephone: (home) _____ (work) _____ (cell) _____

Email address: _____

Sponsoring Parish:

Sponsoring Priest: _____

Address:

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

Chair of Parish Discernment Committee:

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

Signatures

Inquirer _____ Date: _____

Sponsoring Priest _____ Date: _____

**Please email by October 15 to: edie@diomass.org or mail to
The Office of Ordained Vocations, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts,
138 Tremont Street, Boston, MA 02111**

**THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MASSACHUSETTS
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL AND MINISTRY STATEMENTS**

The autobiographical and ministry statements combined must not be more than six pages total, numbered, 12 pt. type and double spaced.

- The **autobiographical statement** is a brief summary of the inquirer's life, including important formative experiences. Since some of this information may be highly personal, this document should be written separately, and not made available to the Vestry unless the inquirer so chooses. It is to be shared with your discernment committee and it will also be read by the Bishop, the Commission on Ministry, the Standing Committee, and the Canon for Ordained Vocations.
- The **ministry statement** should describe the inquirer's decision to seek ordained ministry, with specific references to the following, and is to be shared with the Vestry:
 - ❖ When did you first decide to seek ordination, and why?
 - ❖ Under what circumstance(s) was your decision tested?
 - ❖ Who are the individuals who influenced you?
 - ❖ What are the needs of the Church as you see them?
 - ❖ What do you hope to contribute?
 - ❖ What alternative callings have you considered?
 - ❖ Why do you seek the priesthood or diaconate rather than another vocation?

Parish Discernment Checklist for Sponsoring Clergy and Inquirers

We hope this checklist will help you form a strong discernment committee for any member of your congregation who wants to discern a call to ordained ministry. A member of the Commission on Ministry will review the composition of your discernment committee before scheduling a first meeting with you to make sure that your discernment process is off to a good start. Please be in touch with Canon Edie Dolnikowski (edie@diomass.org) if you have questions or concerns about any of the recommendations on this checklist.

Any exceptions to these recommendations must be approved by the Commission on Ministry *before* you submit the Commitment Form that initiates the formal discernment process.

The inquirer should be

- a baptized communicant in good standingⁱ in the sponsoring congregation for at least one year prior to requesting formal discernment
- confirmed or received into the Episcopal Church
- a legal resident in the United Statesⁱⁱ

The inquirer should NOT be

- a staff member of the sponsoring congregationⁱⁱⁱ
- a close friend or family member of the sponsoring priest

Members of the discernment committee should be

- committed Christians who are active members of the sponsoring congregation
- familiar with the orders of ministry (lay and ordained) in the Episcopal Church
- able to schedule at least eight regular meetings (ninety minutes each) between early March and early June

A well-formed discernment committee will

- comprise four to six members appointed by the priest in charge of the sponsoring congregation
- have ***no more than*** one vestry member, who serves as a liaison between the discernment committee and the vestry
- be as diverse as possible in terms of how well and how long its members know the inquirer
- be as demographically diverse as possible: if the inquirer is a person of color, it is ***especially*** important to invite persons of color to serve on the discernment committee
- be able to converse in the inquirer's first language

People who should NOT be invited to serve on a discernment committee are

- family members of the inquirer
- close personal friends of the inquirer
- postulants or candidates for Holy Orders
- clergy

The sponsoring priest should be

- the rector or priest in charge of the sponsoring congregation^{iv}

ⁱ “All communicants of this Church who for the previous year have been faithful in corporate worship, unless for good cause prevented, and have been faithful in working, praying and giving for the spread of the Kingdom of God, are to be considered communicants in good standing.” Canon I.17.3

ⁱⁱ Although the Canons of the Episcopal Church do not require legal residence of applicants to the ordination process, ordinands cannot be employed in the church without documentation attesting that they can legally reside and work in the United States. The Commission on Ministry strongly encourages inquirers with questions about their immigration status to consult with our Canon for Immigrant and Multicultural Ministry, the Rev. Dr. Jean Baptiste Ntagengwa (jbntagengwa@diomass.org), before submitting an application for Holy Orders.

ⁱⁱⁱ A lay staff member wishing to enter discernment for ordained ministry and the priest of that congregation must contact the Office of Ordained Vocations before submitting a Commitment form to allow time to identify an appropriate sponsoring priest. An inquirer **may not** be sponsored by a priest who is the inquirer’s direct supervisor.

^{iv} If the congregation is being served by an interim priest, the Commission on Ministry will appoint another priest to serve as the inquirer’s sponsoring priest until the inquirer is nominated for and admitted to postulancy.

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MASSACHUSETTS

GUIDELINES FOR MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION ON MINISTRY LIAISON WITH THE DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

The liaison's **initial** meeting with a Discernment Committee is partly to underline information that is already in the Ministry Discernment Handbook; but, just as important, it is intended to give the Commission on Ministry a human face. These points should be covered:

- Coming to the parish and meeting with your Discernment Committee helps the Commission on Ministry to see the applicant in context and to understand their written material more fully.
- According to our Baptismal Covenant, God calls everybody to ministry. It also seems that God is now calling this individual in some special way. Your responsibility is to help them figure out what God has in mind, whether ordained ministry or something else.
- Our Church's understanding is that vocation has two parts. Often it is the individual who first senses a call to new ministry but sometimes God first issues a call to them through other people, the body of Christ, the Church. Together they may confirm a call.
- In the Episcopal Church, the Church is represented both by the local congregation or other faith community where the applicant has been known and tested for some time, and also by designated folks at the diocesan level who see the individual's gifts against the background of the diocese's needs. Each group has an essential perspective; neither is complete without the other.
- The Discernment Committee's task is to come to know the applicant well, especially in terms of qualities needed for leadership in ministry within and beyond the Church, and then to pass on its findings to the Vestry, which must then decide whether to nominate the applicant for ordination. You cannot carry out this task on tiptoes. You will have to ask hard, challenging questions and seek answers in areas that are sometimes considered private. People who are used to being polite may find this work uncomfortable at first but failing to probe deeply will leave the applicant unprepared for the even tougher challenges that come later. Honest, open, even painful discussion often produces wonderful surprises: a deeper, richer sense of God's activity not only in the life of the applicant, but also in the Discernment Committee members' lives as well. Appropriate confidentiality, therefore, is required of everyone engaged in these conversations. Discerning what insights to share in the report to the Vestry, while respecting matters that should remain confidential is an important responsibility of the Discernment Committee.
- Every parish wants to support its members but, in this case, support may mean a faithful refusal to affirm a call for which the applicant is unsuited. Every Discernment Committee must talk with the applicant early on about what would happen if you were to find yourselves unable to encourage them to proceed, as well as what would happen if the Bishop and Commission on Ministry were not to discern a call to ordained ministry in this diocese.

A **second** consultation with the liaison is required as the Discernment Committee ends its work to help shape the report to the Vestry so that its content provides adequate context for reading the applicant's materials.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR WRITING THE DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

Thank you for your willingness to serve on a Discernment Committee for an inquirer in your congregation or faith community who has begun exploring a vocation to ordained ministry in the Diocese of Massachusetts. Discernment is the formal process of discovering where the Holy Spirit is at work in an inquirer's life. Your voices are among many that will provide information about this person, but what you say is critically important. You are the people who have first-hand experience of the inquirer. Others who read your report will discern the inquirer's call to ordained ministry without ever meeting the person you have come to know so well. Be both honest and thorough. We expect you to offer a frank appraisal of this person's gifts for ordained ministry as well as a thoughtful assessment of how the inquirer needs to change and grow. No one comes to ordained ministry fully formed.

Guidance for Meetings with the Inquirer

To engage the work of discernment effectively, your Discernment Committee must be able to meet with the inquirer **at least eight times for ninety minutes each** before beginning to draft your report. The Commission on Ministry will not accept the application of an inquirer whose Discernment Committee cannot commit the time that is necessary for this phase of the discernment process. Pages 11 through 13 of the Ministry Discernment Handbook outline the requirements for forming an effective Discernment Committee and offer useful suggestions for organizing its work. The inquirer should also give each member of the Discernment Committee a copy of his or her autobiography and ministry statements very early in the process. These documents will help to guide your conversations about who the inquirer is, the nature of the inquirer's personal relationships, how they are being called to ordained ministry, and whether there is a clear commitment in the inquirer's life to serving Jesus Christ and working for justice and peace. Members of the Discernment Committee must feel able to address these issues in some form in the report you will submit to your Vestry.

The Commission on Ministry also depends on this report to help us to understand how the Holy Spirit is already moving in the life of the inquirer and where the Holy Spirit is now leading them. Therefore, questions that address the inquirer's regular engagement in the disciplines of prayer and worship, service in the Church, leadership, pastoral care and community-building are particularly important.

See below a list of topics that should be addressed explicitly in the body of your written report.

Your conversations with the inquirer should probe the question of the inquirer's call to *ordained* ministry rather than to a disciplined and committed *lay* ministry. The members of the Discernment Committee should be able to express in its written report the ways in which ordination will serve the inquirer's sense of call and address the inquirer's future needs as you perceive them.

What areas do you see in which the inquirer needs particular care and guidance for further growth? If there are serious considerations that might prevent the inquirer from serving well as an ordained leader, be sure to discuss them with the inquirer and address them in the report. In addition to supporting a recommendation to your vestry to endorse the inquirer for postulancy, your written report gives the Commission on Ministry important information about the inquirer's formation if they are admitted to the ordination process.

Format for the Written Report

Your report should be written in the following format and can be signed by the Chair on behalf of the Discernment Committee or by all its members. The report must not be more than ten numbered pages in length, 12-point type and double-spaced.

Name of Parish/Faith Community
Address of Parish/Faith Community
Contact telephone numbers and e-mail address

TO: The Vestry of (*Name of Parish/Faith Community*)
FROM: Discernment Committee for (*Name of Inquirer*)
(*Name, telephone number and e-mail address of Chair; Names of Committee Members*)
DATE: (*Final date of report*)
RE: Discernment Committee Report

Introduction

*In this Introduction, describe the process undertaken by the Discernment Committee. In this section please include the number of meetings held, the name of the Commission on Ministry liaison, whether the report is endorsed by all members of the Discernment Committee and, if not, why. **Remember: The Discernment Committee must meet with the Commission on Ministry liaison early in the process and must review the final report with the liaison before it is submitted to the Vestry.** Failure to meet with the liaison to your Discernment Committee may result in a delay or in a report that will not be accepted by the Commission on Ministry.*

Body of the Report

The Discernment Committee Report may be written as an essay or as discrete responses to questions that arise in your conversations with the inquirer. The questions provided here are meant to serve as a guide to the kind of topics that the Discernment Committee should explore with the inquirer.

1. Who is the inquirer? How do members of the Discernment Committee know them?
2. How is the inquirer experiencing **now** their call to ordained ministry as a deacon or priest? In what ways is the inquirer currently engaged in service to the church through leadership, pastoral care, community service or other specific involvement? What new ministries do they imagine undertaking in the future? Why is this the right time to pursue a call to ordained ministry?
3. How does the inquirer demonstrate a clear commitment to serving Jesus Christ and to working for justice and peace?
4. What is the nature of the inquirer's significant relationships? Has the inquirer tested this call with family and friends?
5. How has the inquirer experienced and integrated loss, change or adversity?
6. How might the inquirer respond to the stresses and expectations of formation for ordained ministry?
7. Does the inquirer have a history of substance abuse or any other situation that might be revealed in a background check that needs to be addressed before entering into formation for ordained ministry? If so, how has the inquirer attended to it?

8. Where is the Holy Spirit at work in the inquirer's life?
9. In what discernible ways is the inquirer already engaged in the disciplines of prayer and worship?
10. In what specific ways does the inquirer believe that ordination would serve their sense of call? Does the inquirer understand that ordained ministry requires leaving the sponsoring congregation to serve the wider Church under the direction of bishops?
11. What unusual gifts, skills, experiences does the inquirer have that would serve the rapidly changing, increasingly diverse and missionary church?
12. What evidence do you see of the inquirer's skills in crossing barriers of class, race, culture, education and age?
13. In what areas does the inquirer need particular care and guidance for further growth?
14. Do members of the **Discernment Committee** feel the inquirer needs to be ordained to pursue this call to ministry? Why ordination rather than a disciplined and committed lay ministry?
15. If the inquirer is *not* invited into the ordination process, where might they be called to serve? What steps might they take to discern and prepare for these lay ministries?

Conclusion

The Discernment Committee must reach a conclusion as to whether the inquirer should be nominated for postulancy for Holy Orders as a deacon or priest. Your endorsement of the inquirer must be part of your report to your Vestry, Commission on Ministry and the bishops.

Optional Attachment of Addendum D

Remember this report is for the Vestry of your parish or faith community and its members may not be familiar with the guidelines for discernment as outlined in this addendum. If this is the case, you may want to attach Addendum D to your report when you submit it to your Vestry.

Certificate Required
Under TITLE III, Canon 5, Sec. 2(c) and TITLE III, Canon 8, Sec. 2(a)

**ENDORSEMENT for ADMISSION as POSTULANT
EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MASSACHUSETTS**

Place _____ Date: _____

TO: The Commission on Ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts:

We, whose names are hereunder written, testify to our belief (based on personal knowledge or on evidence satisfactory to us) that:

is sober, honest, and godly, and a confirmed communicant of this Church in good standing. We do further declare that, in our opinion, the applicant possesses the qualifications as to be admitted as a POSTULANT FOR HOLY ORDERS; and we pledge to contribute financially to and involve ourselves in this person's preparation for ordination.

Signed _____

Minister of _____

VESTRY OF THE PARISH

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

ATTESTATION OF THE FOREGOING CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that the foregoing certificate was signed at a meeting of the Vestry of _____ Parish duly convened at _____ on the _____ day of _____, 20_____ and that the names attached are those of all (or a two-thirds majority of all) the members of the Vestry.

Signed _____ Clerk/Secretary of Vestry

Should there be no Rector or Priest-in-Charge, the letter shall be signed by a Priest of the Diocese acquainted with the nominee and the Parish, the reason for the substitution being stated in the attesting clause.

**Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts
Financial Assessment and Planning Guide for
Nominees to Holy Orders for the Priesthood
(please print)**

Confidential information for the Bishop and her designees

If information requested is not applicable, enter N/A.

Name (including preferred pronouns): _____

Date: _____

Number of dependents: _____ Number of incomes in family: _____

Names and ages of other members of the household:

I. Current Income and Assets

Current Income:

Your salary \$ _____

Benefits \$ _____

Family salary (*not including yours*) \$ _____

Benefits (*not including yours*) \$ _____

Other (*e.g. investments, military pension, etc.*) \$ _____

Total Income

\$ _____

Current assets:

Market value of real estate \$ _____

Market value of automobile(s) \$ _____

Value of stock/bonds \$ _____

Value of trust fund \$ _____

Value of savings account \$ _____

Investments/Retirement \$ _____

Other \$ _____

Total Assets

\$ _____

II. Current Indebtedness and Expenses

Indebtedness:

Balance on mortgages \$ _____
[yearly mortgage payment: \$ _____]

Balance on automobile loans \$ _____

Balance on educational loans \$ _____

Balance on charge accounts \$ _____

Other \$ _____

Total Indebtedness

\$ _____

Expenses (per year):

Total rent and/or utilities \$ _____

Other household expenses \$ _____

Itemize: _____

Charitable contributions \$ _____

Other \$ _____

Total Annual Expenses

\$ _____

III. Future Planning

Research the cost of a theological education and sources for funding:

1. What will each year of seminary cost (tuition, books, CPE, etc)? \$ _____

2. How much will the seminary pay for each year (scholarships, etc)? \$ _____

3. What amount can you expect from other scholarships or assistance? \$ _____

3. How much of your own savings will you use for the first year? \$ _____

For each additional year? \$ _____

4. How much of your own income will you use for the first year? \$ _____

For each additional year? \$ _____

5. How much debt will you incur for the first year? \$ _____

For each additional year? \$ _____

Other considerations (please respond on separate page):

Discuss what concerns you have about repaying any debt incurred.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Addendum F.2

Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts Disclosure Form for Nominees to Holy Orders for the Diaconate (please print)

Confidential information for the Bishop and her designees

As baptized Christians, we are called to give our time, talent, and treasure to God in thanksgiving for all that God has done for us. As you consider a call to ordination as a vocational deacon, please use the following worksheet as a means of understanding the practical issues of such a call.

TIME:

The formation process for the diaconate in the Diocese of Massachusetts requires postulants and candidates to commit fully to both academic and practical preparation for ordained ministry. Academic work and weekend retreats will be organized by the Province One School for Deacons. Three retreat days each year will be planned by the Diocese of MA and held at the Convent of St. Anne, Bethany in Arlington, MA..

The retreat weekend begins at Evening Prayer on Friday and ends at noon on Sunday.

How many hours per week do you work? _____

How many vacation days do you receive? _____

Will you be able to travel to weekend retreats in CT or other regional locations and to retreat days in Arlington? _____

How much weekend time is dedicated to regular activities, family, etc. _____

Diaconate formation requires two internships during your three years in the process of formation.

Will your work and family commitments allow you to work 8-12 hours a week in addition to required programs? _____

Are you prepared to leave your home parish to serve an internship in another parish? This may occur in any one of your three years of formation. _____

TALENT:

Deacons are ordained for the whole church and not for one congregation. You will be required to share your gifts with many in the Diocese at the direction of our Bishop. Although location and special gifts are certainly considered in your placement, you must be prepared to serve a different church every three years and may be asked to accept a wide range of ministries.

Are you prepared to leave any position you hold in your home parish when you begin formation?

Are you prepared to leave your home parish fully once you become a candidate?

What skills have you acquired in your education, work, and church that you feel competent to share?

TREASURE:

Although your formal education is paid for by the Diocese, there are costs which must be considered.

A Deacon in our Diocese holds non-stipendiary status. You will be expected to serve 12-15 hours a week in a parish without compensation. Will your work schedule and your salary allow this? _____

Because you will serve many parishes in the years of your ministry, you must consider the cost of vestments. At the very least, you will need an alb, a set of stoles, a clerical shirt, and a clerical collar. Costs certainly vary, but the following is an approximate cost for each. Will your discretionary money allow purchases of clericals as you need them? _____

Alb - \$250.00

Stole - \$200.00

Clerical shirt - \$50.00

Clerical collar - \$10.00

In your ministry, books may become a valuable resource. Building your personal library may be an ongoing expense. Are you prepared to purchase materials as they are necessary? _____

Continuing education is a cost that some churches pay to deacons as well as to priests. If the parish you are serving does not offer a stipend for education, you must be prepared to absorb the cost.

If you are asked or wish to take a course or attend a workshop, will your budget allow it? _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Addendum G

Postulancy Application Checklists

All of these documents are due by August 1.

Application Form [Addendum I[†]]

Vestry Endorsement Form [Addendum E[†]]

Sponsoring Priest's Letter of Recommendation

Discernment Committee Report

Autobiographical Statement

Ministry Statement

Copy of Baptism Certificate

Copy of Confirmation Certificate

Financial Statement [Addendum F1[†] for the priesthood or F2[†] for the diaconate]

Letter of Recommendation (Clergy—*not* Sponsoring Priest)

Letter of Recommendation (Lay Person—*not* a member of discernment committee or sponsoring parish's vestry)

Letter of Recommendation (either Clergy or Lay Person)

High-Quality Headshot Photo (sent by e-mail attachment to edie@diomass.org)

Resume

Transcripts

[†]In your *Discernment Handbook*

A psychological assessment for postulancy will be scheduled when the sponsoring priest notifies the Office of Ordained Vocations that the vestry has endorsed the enquirer to submit an application for Holy Orders.

Addendum H

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MASSACHUSETTS LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

To Those Writing Letters of Recommendation for Ordained Leadership

Thank you for your willingness to write to the Commission on Ministry on behalf of _____, who has begun a formal exploration of vocation to ordained ministry in the Diocese of Massachusetts. Many others will provide information about this person, but what you say may be critically important. You bring a unique point of view that may complete and confirm a picture of a priest or deacon in the making. We ask you to be honest and thorough. We need a frank appraisal of this person's present gifts and skills, and of needed growth as well, with specific examples to help us understand. The following questions should be addressed. Please attach your answers to this form and limit your response to one to two pages total.

1. How long have you known the applicant, and under what circumstances?
2. What evidence have you seen that the applicant is called to ordained ministry, rather than to disciplined and committed lay ministry?
3. Has the applicant shown evidence of strong leadership? How, and in what circumstances? How would you describe this person's style of leadership? Please be specific.
4. What unusual gifts, skills, and experience does the applicant bring that might be useful in a rapidly changing, increasingly diverse, missionary Church? (Examples: proficiency in a second language, time spent in a culture or class different from one's own.)
5. What areas do you see in which this person needs particular care and guidance for further development during the postulancy/candidacy period? Are there any serious considerations, which might prevent the applicant from serving well as an ordained leader? Have you discussed these matters with the applicant?

Name _____

Address _____

Signature _____ (date) _____

Telephone (home) _____ (work) _____

Please e-mail to edie@diomass.org or mail to the Office of Ordained Vocations, The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, 138 Tremont Street, Boston, MA 02111

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MASSACHUSETTS
APPLICATION FOR HOLY ORDERS
(please print)

Confidential information for the Bishop and designees

To: The Rt. Rev. _____, Bishop of Massachusetts

I, _____, wish to apply for admission as a
(full name and pronouns)

Postulant for the: Diaconate Priesthood *(circle one)*

1. Date of birth: _____ Place of birth: _____

Are you a US Citizen? Yes / No *(circle one)*

If no, state status and attach copy of all applicable documentation: _____

Marital status: _____ Name of partner/spouse: _____

Names and ages of children: _____

2. Length of time resident in the Diocese: _____

3. Baptized by _____ on _____ *(date)*

At _____

(name and address of church)

4. Confirmed in the Episcopal Church by Bishop _____ on

_____ at _____

(date)

(name and address of church)

5. I have / have not previously applied for admission as a Postulant for Holy Orders.

If previously applied, state name of Diocese and date. Explain circumstances on separate page and attached to this document _____

6. Grounds for seeking Holy Orders: to be included in Ministry Statement.

7. Present occupation and name and address of employer:

8. Level of education attained _____

Degree(s) conferred:

Institution	Degree Conferred	Date Conferred	Area(s) of Specialization

9. Have you ever been convicted of a misdemeanor or felony? _____

If yes, explain on separate page and attach to this document.

Signed _____ Date _____

Address _____

Telephone: (home) _____ (work) _____ (cell) _____

Email address _____

Sponsoring parish (name/address) _____

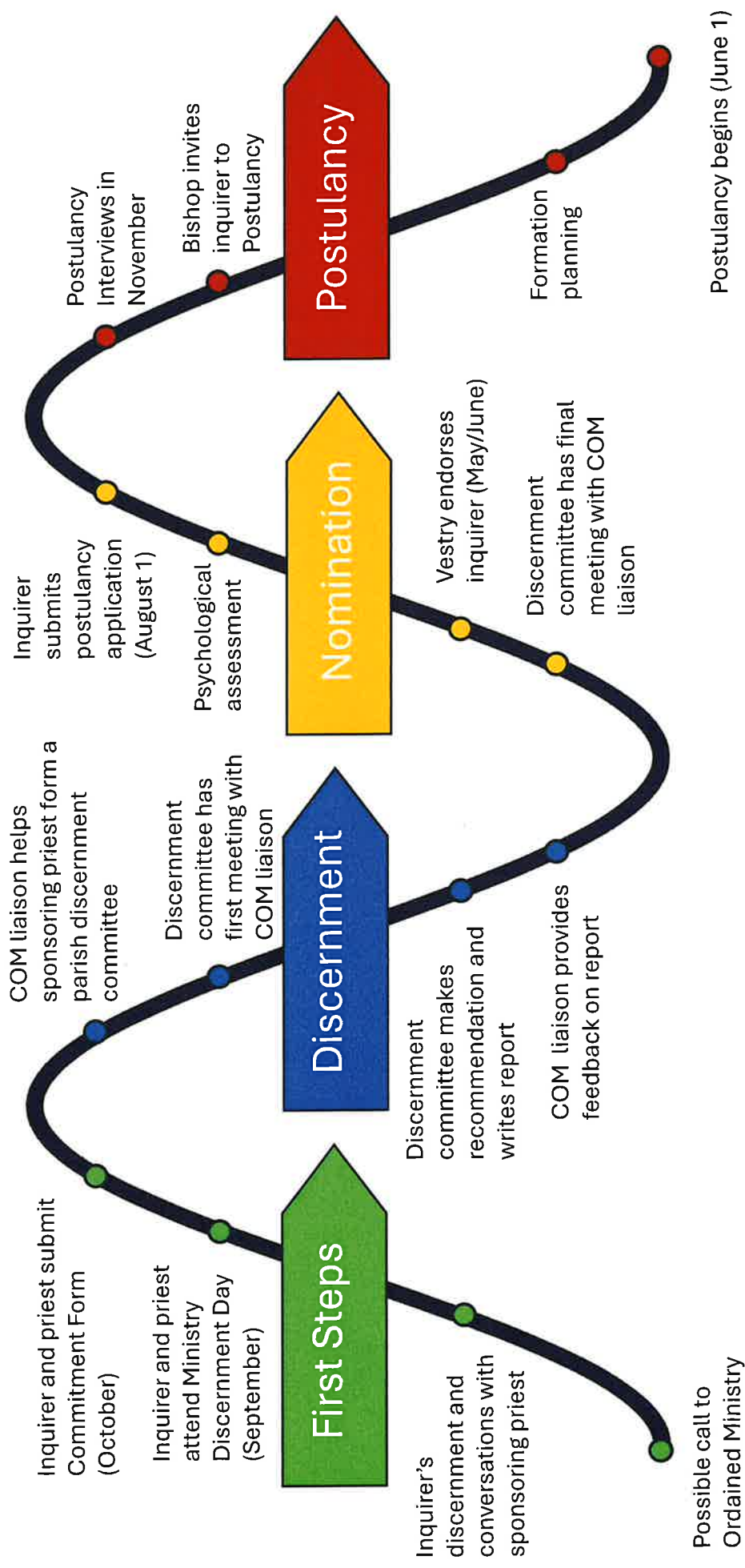
Sponsoring priest _____

Chair of Parish Discernment Committee (name/address/telephone/email): _____

Please refer to the Application Checklist for the list of other materials to submit with your application:

Send application and materials by August 1 to: edie@diomass.org or mail them to The Canon for Ordained Vocations, The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, 138 Tremont Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02111

Parish Discernment Process



The Ordination Process

