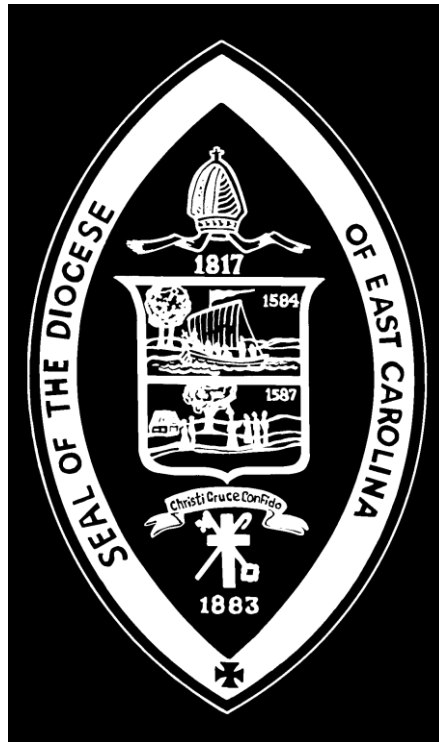


Steps Toward Ordination to the Diaconate



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Introduction

This document contains guidelines, canonical requirements, applications, endorsement forms, and checklists necessary to engage the process of discernment for the Diaconate in the Diocese of East Carolina.

It is the responsibility of the individual sensing a call to enter into this process to read and become very familiar with the current Title III Canons related to discernment and ordination and to ensure that all canonical requirements are met. A fitting place to start for all persons sensing a call to ordination would be to read carefully:

- Canon III.1: Of the Ministry of All Baptized Persons
- Canon III.2: Of Commissions on Ministry
- Canon III.3: Of Discernment
- Canon III.4: Of Licensed Ministries
- Canon III.5: Of General Provisions Respecting Ordination
- Canon III.6: Of the Ordination of Deacons
- Canon III.7: Of the Life and Work of Deacons
- Canon III.8: Of the Ordination of Priests
- Canon III.9: Of the Life and Work of Priests
- Canon III.10: Of Reception of Clergy from other Churches

The Episcopal Church maintains current versions of the Constitution and Canons on its website (www.episcopalchurc.org). The Constitution and Canons are updated every three years after a convening of the General Convention. One should also read carefully the Ordination Liturgies (pp. 510-555) and Catechism (especially pp. 854-856) in the Book of Common Prayer.

Discernment to the Diaconate is not a quick process, nor one to be taken lightly. All efforts are made to help the Aspirant clearly define God's call. Each step of the process is an important part of development and cannot be rushed. The whole process spans at least three years, often longer.

The Commission on Ministry is a group of lay and ordained members of the Diocese of East Carolina who have accepted an invitation from our bishop to enable the Canons relating to ordination to be met. This includes the process of discernment outlined in this document as well as other ways of building up the ministries of the diocese.

We are grateful that God continues to equip the church with disciples, dedicated to service and love in Christ Jesus. Ordination is not a "goal" to be achieved, but a particular calling that is no more necessary to the vitality of life and ministry of the church than positions of lay leadership. It is our great joy to accompany members of this diocese in their process of discerning how God is calling them to live into the building up of God's Kingdom.

If at any time you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact your clergy or other faith community leader, your mentor, the Chair of the Commission on Ministry, or the Office of the Bishop.

Faithfully Yours,

The Members of the Commission on Ministry

STEPS TOWARD DISCERNMENT OF VOCATION

Stages of Formal Discernment Process

Aspirant	A person beginning the discernment process towards ordained ministry.	Discernment within the Parish or other Faith Community
Nominee	A person who has been nominated by a sponsoring community of faith to become a postulant.	
Postulant	A person who tests a vocation. Postulancy is an initial time of preparation and testing for ordained ministry, typically involving academic and formation experiences.	Discernment within the Designated Program of Formation for Ordained Ministry
Candidate	A person in the final stage of the canonical process leading to ordination during which canonical requirements for ordination are satisfied.	
Deacon	Ordained persons exercising a 'special ministry of servanthood' directly under a bishop, especially serving those in need.	Ordained Ministry

Requirements to be Admitted for Postulancy & Expectations of Postulants

Part I. Discernment within the Parish or other Faith Community

All required documentation required in these steps must be received by the Office of the Bishop no later than June 1 in order for a Nominee to be considered for the Fall overnight retreat with the Commission on Ministry, normally taking place in November.

1. Upon sensing a call to enter into this discernment process, and, normally, having been resident in a local Episcopal faith community for at least one year, the Aspirant consults the Rector of the parish (or equivalent leader of the faith community)¹ and writes a Spiritual Autobiography. This autobiography should be typed, double-spaced, and no longer than five single-sided pages. It should include basic personal data listed in Canon III.6.2(b) and describe the Aspirant's spiritual journey leading toward the perceived call to ordained ministry. The questions in Appendix 1 may be used as a guide in developing the Spiritual Autobiography.

¹ For simplicity, the term "Rector" is used throughout this document to refer to the leader exercising oversight of the sponsoring faith community. Similarly, the term "Vestry" will be used throughout to refer to the comparable leadership body of the faith community. **In the event that the community of faith does not have clergy, the leader exercising oversight of the faith community should contact the Office of the Bishop to determine the most appropriate way in which to proceed.**

2. After the Aspirant presents the Spiritual Autobiography to the Rector, they meet for a minimum of four spiritual direction sessions. During these sessions, the Rector and the Aspirant should use the questions from Appendix 1 to guide discussion around the process of discernment and review all canonical requirements for ordination listed in Canon III.6. After these sessions, the Rector should either encourage the Aspirant to explore other avenues of living out the fullness of the ministry of the baptized or endorse the Aspirant in writing to the Bishop to continue in the formal discernment process. This letter will include the Aspirant's Spiritual Autobiography and a current photograph. The Office of the Bishop will respond to this letter and include a copy of these guidelines to both the Rector and the Aspirant.
3. A Discernment Committee, normally consisting of members of the sponsoring community of faith, and Chair are appointed by the Rector after consultation with the Aspirant. The Rector is not to be a member of the Discernment Committee. Appendices 2 & 3 provide guidance regarding the work of the Discernment Committee.
4. After considering the work of the Discernment Committee, the Rector and Vestry shall determine whether or not to nominate the Aspirant to continue in the formal discernment process.
 - a. If not, the Aspirant is to be supported in exploring other avenues of living out the fullness of the ministry of the baptized and the Bishop is to be notified by the Rector.
 - b. If so, the Aspirant is nominated for Postulancy for the Diaconate in a letter to the Bishop that is signed by the Rector and at least two-thirds of the Vestry (Appendix 4).² The individual evaluation forms of the members of the Discernment Committee (Appendix 3) and the Discernment Committee's overall report are sent by the Rector to the Office of the Bishop along with the nomination. At this point, the Aspirant becomes a Nominee.

The nomination commits the community of faith to "pledge to contribute financially to the preparation" of the Nominee and to "involve itself in the Nominee's preparation for ordination to the Diaconate."³

Part II. Application to the Bishop for Postulancy

5. After all the requirements from Part I are complete, the Nominee accepts the nomination in writing and submits an application for Postulancy, a current resume, and the information required in Canon III.6.2(b) to the Bishop. The application is provided in Appendix 5. ***This information must be received by the Office of the Bishop no later than June 1.***
6. A meeting with the Bishop will be scheduled by the Office of the Bishop. The meeting will take place no later than September 15. After this meeting, the Bishop will either encourage the Nominee to explore other avenues of living out the fullness of the ministry of the baptized, counsel or insist on more time before proceeding in the formal discernment process, or make provision for the Nominee to meet with the Commission on Ministry (COM). This is communicated to the Nominee by October 1.
7. If the Bishop wishes the Nominee to proceed, the Office of the Bishop provides the Nominee's packet of information to the COM no later than October 1. The Nominee then meets with the COM at an overnight retreat, normally in the first week in November. The purpose of this retreat is to enable the COM to understand the Nominee's sense of call and to "prepare an evaluation of the Nominee's qualifications to pursue a program of preparation for ordination to the Diaconate."⁴ The COM delivers its recommendation to the Bishop and informs the Nominee of the same.

² Canon III.6.2(a)

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Canon III.6.3(b)

8. The Bishop then makes a determination regarding admitting the Nominee as a Postulant for ordination to the Diaconate and communicates this decision to the Nominee in writing. If the Nominee is made a Postulant, the Bishop informs the Rector, the COM, and the Standing Committee. Once a program of formation has been determined, the Director of the Postulant's program of preparation will also be notified.⁵

Part III. Expectations of Postulants

9. In consultation with the Bishop, the Postulant normally applies to the Diocesan School for Diaconal Formation, or develops an otherwise detailed plan for formation. **No application is made to any seminary, or course of study initiated, without first securing the Bishop's permission.**
10. The Postulant is expected to correspond with the Bishop via Ember Day letters to be received by the office of the Bishop during the week following each of the four Ember days: the First Sunday in Lent, the Day of Pentecost, Holy Cross Day (September 14), and the First Sunday of Advent.⁶ Also, the Postulant is expected to notify the Bishop regarding significant life changes (i.e., engagement, significant illness or death of spouse or child, loss of employment, etc.).
11. Upon admission as a Postulant, a "COM Partner" who is an active member of the COM will be assigned. The Postulant is expected to meet regularly in person, by phone, or video conversation with the COM Partner. The role of the COM Partner will be to ensure the Postulant understands his/her responsibilities in the process and be a collegial connection between the Postulant and the Diocese. It is the Postulant's responsibility to initiate the scheduling of meetings.
12. Upon the beginning of the program of formation, the Postulant meets with the COM every year at the February meeting and is expected to attend the Diocesan Convention that follows. The Postulant also ensures that current transcripts and an update to the Spiritual Autobiography (no more than 2 pages) are received by the Office of the Bishop no later than December 31 each year.
13. The Postulant must have physical and psychological examinations⁷ with professionals designated by the diocese. All forms and instructions on how to schedule the examinations will be provided to the Postulant by the Office of the Bishop after admission to Postulancy. All completed forms and reports must be received by the Office of the Bishop during the summer of the 2nd year of the program of formation. The individual is responsible for the first \$500 charge for the psychological tests and screening, and the Office of the Bishop will cover the remaining balance.

Note: A Postulant may be removed at the sole discretion of the Bishop. The Bishop shall give written notification of removal to those listed in #8, above. The Bishop shall also not consider accepting as a Postulant any person refused admission as Candidate in any other Diocese, or who having been admitted, ceased to be a Candidate, until receipt of letter from the Bishop who refused admission, declaring cause.⁸

⁵ Canon III.6.3(d)

⁶ Canons III.6.3(e) and III.8.5(h)

⁷ Canons III.6.5(j)

⁸ Canon III.6.3(c) and (f)

Requirements to be Admitted as Candidate for Ordination to the Diaconate and Expectations of Candidates

A Postulant engaged in the traditional model of formation for ordination submits an application for admission to Candidacy prior to the completion of the 2nd year of formation. All supporting documents must be received by the Office of the Bishop no later than December 31, prior to the February meeting of the Commission on Ministry.

1. All items on the Checklist 2 (Postulant: Expectations of Postulants & Steps Toward Candidacy) must be completed before meeting with COM. In cases where any part of the checklist is not able to be completed by the deadline, the Postulant must communicate this information with the Office of the Bishop as soon as possible.
2. The Postulant will meet with the COM and Standing Committee prior to the commencement of the Diocesan Convention in February.⁹ The COM delivers its recommendation to the Bishop and informs the Nominee of the same.
3. The Bishop, having considered the reports from the COM and Standing Committee, makes a determination regarding admitting the Postulant as a Candidate for Ordination to the Diaconate. The Bishop communicates this decision to the Postulant. If the Postulant is made a Candidate, the Bishop informs the Rector, the COM, the Standing Committee, and the Director of the Candidate's program of preparation.¹⁰
4. **The Candidate shall not make plans regarding future placement for post-ordination diaconal ministry without first receiving permission from the Bishop to do so.¹¹**

Note: The Candidate must remain in canonical relationship with the Diocese in which admission has been granted until ordination.¹² The Bishop may remove a person from the process at any point at his/her discretion.¹³

⁹ Canon III.6.4(b)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Canon III.6.5(b)

¹² Canon III.6.4(c)

¹³ Canon III.6.4(d) and III.6.4(e)

Requirements for Ordination to the Diaconate

A Candidate engaged in the traditional model of formation for ordination submits an application for ordination to the Diaconate prior to the completion of the 3rd year of formation. All supporting documents must be received by the Office of the Bishop no later than December 31, prior to the February meeting of the Commission on Ministry.

1. The Candidate must be at least 24 years of age.¹⁴
2. All items on Checklist 3 (Candidate: Expectations of Candidates & Steps Toward Ordination to the Diaconate) must be completed before meeting with COM. In cases where any part of the checklist is not able to be completed by the deadline, the Candidate must communicate this information with the Office of the Bishop as soon as possible.
3. The Candidate shall be evaluated by the Diocesan Board of Examining Chaplains and demonstrate basic competence in all subjects required by the Canons.¹⁵ This will normally take place in November of the 3rd year of formation. If any subjects are failed, the Diocesan Board of Examining Chaplains shall re-examine the Candidate in the applicable subject(s).
4. The Candidate must submit documentation of training regarding the prevention of sexual misconduct, civil requirements for reporting, and pastoral opportunities for responding to evidence of abuse, the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church (particularly Title IV), and the Church's teaching on racism.¹⁶
5. Physical and psychological examinations, as well as a background check must have been completed within 36 months prior to the prospective date of ordination as a Deacon.¹⁷
6. The Candidate normally meets with the COM and the Standing Committee.
7. Should the COM recommend the Candidate for ordination to the Diaconate¹⁸, the Standing Committee certifies that the canonical requirements for ordination to the Diaconate have been met and presents a testimonial stating the same to the Bishop.¹⁹ If the Bishop agrees to ordain, the Bishop then proceeds to set the ordination date and location. **No plans or announcements regarding ordination date or location should be made by any Candidate or congregation until the Bishop has made this decision.**
8. Each newly ordained Deacon shall be assigned a mentor Deacon by the Bishop in consultation with the COM. The mentor and new Deacon shall meet regularly for at least a year to provide guidance, information, and a sustained dialogue about diaconal ministry.²⁰

Note: A person ordained to the Diaconate under Canon III.6 who is subsequently called to the Priesthood shall fulfill the Postulancy and Candidacy requirements set forth in Canon III.8.²¹

¹⁴ Canon III.6.6(a)(2)

¹⁵ Canon III.6.5(f)

¹⁶ Canon III.6.5(g)

¹⁷ Canon III.6.5(j)

¹⁸ Canon III.6.6(b)(5)

¹⁹ Canon III.6.6(c)

²⁰ Canon III.7.4(g)

²¹ Canon III.8.7(f)

STEPS TOWARD ORDINATION TO THE DIACONATE CHECKLISTS AND APPENDICES

Checklists

Checklist 1 – Aspirant: Steps Toward Nomination and Postulancy

Checklist 2 – Postulant: Expectations of Postulants & Steps Toward Candidacy

Checklist 3 – Candidate: Expectations of Candidates & Steps Toward Ordination to the Diaconate

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Questions to guide discernment of a call to Ordained Ministry

Appendix 2 – Discernment Committee Guidelines

Appendix 3 – Discernment Committee Individual Evaluation Form

Appendix 4 – Community of Faith Nomination for Postulancy for the Diaconate

Appendix 5 – Application for Postulancy

Appendix 6 – Application for Candidacy

Appendix 7 – Community of Faith Letter of Support for Candidacy

Appendix 8 – Application for Ordination to the Diaconate

Appendix 9 – Community of Faith Letter of Support for Ordination to the Diaconate

Appendix 10 – Standing Committee Testimonial for Ordination to the Diaconate

Checklist 1

Aspirant: Steps Toward Nomination and Postulancy

To attend the overnight retreat of the Commission On Ministry, all paperwork must be received by the Office of the Bishop no later than June 1 and the Nominee must meet with the Bishop prior to September 15.

- ☐ Aspirant normally resident in local Episcopal faith community a minimum of one year before formal discernment process begins.
- ☐ Spiritual Autobiography given to Rector.²²
- ☐ Minimum of four sessions with Rector for spiritual direction.
- ☐ Letter sent from Rector to Bishop endorsing Aspirant, including copy of Spiritual Autobiography and current photograph.
- ☐ Minimum of six sessions with Discernment Committee.
- ☐ Report from the Discernment Committee including the Individual Evaluations Forms (Appendix 3) given to Rector and Vestry.
- ☐ The Community of Faith's Nomination for Postulancy for the Diaconate (Appendix 4), along with the Discernment Committee Report and Individual Evaluation Forms (Appendix 3) are sent to the Office of the Bishop by the Rector. If Aspirant is not to be nominated, the Bishop is notified by the Rector.
- ☐ Personal letter of acceptance of the nomination is sent to the Office of the Bishop by the Nominee. This must be received no later than June 1. Included in this correspondence are:
 - ☐ Application for Postulancy (Appendix 5)
 - ☐ Current resume
 - ☐ Official transcripts, as applicable
- ☐ Nominee meets with Bishop no later than September 15.
- ☐ COM overnight retreat.
- ☐ Receive letter from Bishop stating admission to Postulancy.
- ☐ Accept admission for Postulancy in writing according to instructions in the Bishop's letter.

²² For simplicity, the term "Rector" will be used throughout this document to refer to the leader exercising oversight of the sponsoring faith community. Similarly, the term "Vestry" will be used throughout to refer to the comparable leadership body of the faith community.

II. Checklist 2

Postulant: Expectations of Postulants & Steps Toward Candidacy

- ☐ Discussion with the Bishop to determine approved seminary or develop an otherwise detailed plan for formation. ***No seminary applications may be made until after having received direction from the Bishop.***

The following are expectations of Postulants throughout their course of formation.

- ☐ Ember Day letters received by the Office of the Bishop. (Canons III.6.3(e) and III.6.5(h))
- ☐ Be in regular communication with the COM Partner, assigned by the COM upon admission as a Postulant.
- ☐ Update to Spiritual Autobiography (no more than 2 pages) and current transcripts submitted to the office of the Bishop by December 31 of each year of study.
- ☐ Meeting with COM and attendance at diocesan convention each February.

The following are requirements of Postulants during the summer of the 2nd year of the program of formation:

- ☐ Physical & Psychological examinations completed. (Canons III.6.5(j))
 - ☐ All psychological examination forms, provided by the Office of the Bishop after admission to Postulancy, mailed to psychologist assigned by the Diocese.
 - ☐ Report of psychological evaluation completed and submitted to the Office of the Bishop.
 - ☐ Report of physical examination completed and submitted to the Office of the Bishop.
- ☐ Authorization and Release Form, provided by the Office of the Bishop after admission to Postulancy, signed and submitted to the Office of the Bishop.
- ☐ Background check completed, initiated through the Office of the Bishop.

The following must be received by the Office of the Bishop no later than December 31 in order to be considered for candidacy at the February meeting of COM. A Postulant engaged in the traditional model of formation for ordination submits an application for admission to Candidacy prior to the completion of the 2nd year of formation. In cases where any part of the checklist is not able to be completed by the deadline, the Postulant must communicate this information with the Office of the Bishop as soon as possible.

- ☐ Application for Candidacy (Appendix 6)
- ☐ Community of Faith Endorsement for Candidacy (Appendix 7)
- ☐ A written report from the Director of the program of formation, including current official transcript and a description of the course of study showing progress of formation in each area required by Canon III.6.5(f).
- ☐ Field Education evaluation (if a parish placement has taken place). (Canon III.6.5(b))
- ☐ Candidacy Interview with COM and Standing Committee. (Canon III.6.4(b))

III. Checklist 3

Candidate: Expectations of Candidates & Steps Toward Ordination to the Diaconate

The following are expectations of Candidates throughout their course of formation.

- ☐ Ember Day letters received by the Office of the Bishop. (Canons III.6.3(e) and III.6.5(h))
- ☐ Be in regular communication with the COM Partner, assigned by the COM upon admission as a Postulant.
- ☐ Complete a Field Education internship outside of the sponsoring parish. (Canon III.6.5(b))
- ☐ Update to Spiritual Autobiography (no more than 2 pages) and current transcripts submitted to the office of the Bishop by December 31 of each year of study.
- ☐ Report from the program of formation on the academic performance and personal qualifications of the Candidate. This should be received by the Office of the Bishop no later than December 31. (Canon III.6.5(i)) If this deadline is not possible, it is the responsibility of the Postulant to communicate with the Office of the Bishop about the expectation of when the evaluation will be received.
- ☐ Meeting with COM and attendance at diocesan convention each February.

A Candidate engaged in the traditional model of formation for ordination submits an application for ordination to the Diaconate prior to the completion of the 3rd year of formation. All supporting documents must be received by the Office of the Bishop no later than December 31. In cases where any part of the checklist is not able to be completed by the deadline, the Candidate must communicate this information with the Office of the Bishop as soon as possible.

- ☐ Candidate must be 24 years of age on day of ordination to the Diaconate. (Canon III.6.6(a)(2))
- ☐ Comprehensive exams passed. (Canons III.6.5(f) and III.6.5(i))
- ☐ Provide documentation of training regarding prevention of sexual misconduct and civil requirements for reporting and pastoral opportunities for responding to evidence of abuse. (Canons III.6.5(g)(1) and III.6.5(g)(2))
- ☐ Provide documentation of training regarding the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, particularly Title IV thereof. (Canon III.6.5(g)(3))
- ☐ Provide documentation of training regarding the Church's teaching on racism. (Canon III.6.5(g)(4))
- ☐ Background Check completed or updated within 36 months from date of ordination to the Diaconate. (Canon III.6.5(j)(1))
- ☐ Physical Examination completed or updated within 36 months of ordination to Diaconate. (Canon III.6.5(j)(2))
- ☐ Psychological Examinations completed or updated within 36 months from date of ordination to the Diaconate. (Canon III.6.5(j)(2))
- ☐ Application requesting ordination as a Deacon under Canon III.6. (Appendix 8) (Canon III.6.6(b)(1))

- ☐ Letter of support from the Candidate's congregation or other community of faith. (Appendix 9) (Canon III.6.6(b)(2))
- ☐ Certification from the program of formation, including current transcripts, and giving an evaluation with recommendation as to the Candidate's other personal qualifications for ordination together with a recommendation regarding ordination to the Diaconate under Canon III.6. (Canon 6.6(b)(4))
- ☐ Certificate from COM giving recommendation regarding ordination to the Diaconate under Canon III.6. (Canon III.6.6(b)(5)) *No action required by the Candidate unless notified otherwise.*
- ☐ Standing Committee certification that all in is order. (Canon III.6.6(c)) *No action required by the Candidate unless notified otherwise.*

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DISCERNMENT OF A CALL TO ORDAINED MINISTRY

1. How long have you been an intentional Christian? In what ways has your faith been tested? How do you feel about your current vocation?
2. Why do you want to be ordained? What can you do as a deacon that you believe you are not otherwise able to do? What are some reasons you may have for not seeking ordination? What sacrifices will have to be made if you enter this process? Who would have to make them? What effect will the transitions that will occur have on your personal and family life? To what extent have you discussed and evaluated all of this with other persons? How openly have the members of your family been in expressing their opinions and feeling about your decision?
3. How certain are you that you have the ability (intellectual, financial, etc.) to do the academic preparation that the Church expects for the formation toward ordination? How has your life experience prepared you for ordained ministry? How do your abilities, talents, and skills match those that are expected of and needed by an ordained person? In what ways are you perceived by others as having the "people skills" required of ordained persons?
4. Give some examples of tough decisions you have made in the past. Give evidence of having made some good decisions. Discuss how you have been able to follow through on some of your decisions. Give examples of how you have exercised leadership.
5. What should your Bishop know about you so that the Church is not surprised? What are some of your weaknesses? Where and when are you the most vulnerable? How willing are you to allow your personal life to be other people's business? What experience have you had living a public life?
6. What are some of your thoughts about the diaconate for which you aspire? How many deacons do you know well? Who are you role models, and why? How well do you know the Church? What are some things you would like to change about the Church?
7. The "call" to the ordained ministry is not an individual decision; it is a communal process. We are called by and through the Church. Have you spoken with other ordained persons or people familiar with the process of discernment about ordained ministry and the process of formation? To what extent have you sought the opinions, advice, and evaluation of others?
8. The process of discernment will challenge many of your opinions and beliefs. The Gospel, when truly engaged, never allows one to remain comfortable. To what extent do you believe yourself to be flexible and open to being challenged and changed? How do you relate to people who hold different beliefs or convictions from yours?
9. Do you think of yourself as a self-starter or do you depend more upon others to motivate and keep you to a task? Do you tend to get work done ahead of schedule, or do you work better under the pressure of the last minute? Discuss your level of self-discipline. What effect does the authority of others have upon you and how do you respond to external discipline?
10. What does "success" mean to you? How do you define and measure success? How do you deal with failure or the lack of success? What is your level of need to control things, events, others? How much toleration do you have over others' attempts to control you?

11. Are you more of a "people person" or do you prefer to be alone? To what extent can you tolerate being alone? To what extent do you see yourself living on the edge of the prevailing culture? What experiences have you had in being "different" from those around you?

12. Do you prefer certainty or are you more comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty? How do you feel about issues, people, or problems that cannot be fixed? How do you deal with questions for which there are no clear answers?

DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE GUIDELINES

Mission Statement

The mission of the Discernment Committee on Vocation is to encourage, challenge, guide, and support Aspirants exploring a call to ordained ministry. To be included in this endeavor is the identification and exploration of the Aspirant's gifts for varieties of ministry, lay and ordained.

The following guidelines apply:

1. Normally, five to seven active members of the community of faith should be selected by both the Rector²³ and the Aspirant to serve on the committee. Members of the committee commit the process of discernment and all involved to their regular prayers. The Rector is not to be a member of the Discernment Committee.
2. All committee activity is treated confidentially. It is not appropriate to disclose to the congregation the identity of an Aspirant engaged in this discernment process until after (and only if) a recommendation has been made by the Rector and vestry to the Bishop for the Aspirant to become a Nominee and continue in the formal discernment process.
3. The committee is to meet with the Aspirant a minimum of six times. It is recommended that meetings be held at least once every four to six weeks, and not more frequently than once per week.
4. It should be understood by the committee and the Aspirant that their journey together is only the beginning of a period of exploring and testing that may or may not end in ordained ministry.

The parish, or other faith community, traditionally calls people to various orders of ministry, lay and ordained, both in the Church and the world. The faith community is the spiritual and pastoral home of the one seeking vocational clarity. It is through the life of the faith community that gifts are made manifest and offered “to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship and governance of the Church.”²⁴

Ordination, properly understood, is not a goal to be achieved. God calls each member of the Church to particular orders of ministry, none of which are more important than others. All of them are necessary. In this context, the committee’s role is to help the Aspirant to discern and affirm gifts for ministry, and to encourage and support the Aspirant in the exercise of those gifts in lay or ordained orders of ministry.

If the committee recommends that the Aspirant be nominated to continue in the formal discernment process, consideration should be given for how the faith community should continue to support the individual through further stages of the process. If it is the committee’s recommendation that the Aspirant not be nominated to continue in the formal discernment process, consideration should be given for how the faith community should continue to encourage and support the individual in further development of his or her gifts for lay ministry.

The committee serves to facilitate one step of a multi-step process of discernment. In this, they assist the Aspirant to articulate God’s call on his or her life and determine if this call is particular to ordained orders of ministry. Throughout their time together, the committee helps the Aspirant to discern specific gifts for

²³ For simplicity, the term “Rector” is used throughout this document to refer to the leader exercising oversight of the faith community. Similarly, the term “Vestry” will be used throughout to refer to the comparable leadership body of the faith community. In the event that the community of faith does not have clergy, the leader exercising oversight of the faith community should contact the Office of the Bishop to determine the most appropriate way in which to proceed.

²⁴ Book of Common Prayer, 855.

ministry and reach consensus with regards to the Aspirant's suitability for a season of formation in Postulancy.

This step of the process culminates in individual evaluations of the Aspirant (Appendix 3) written by members of the committee to file with the Rector and a formal report of the group to the Rector and vestry.

The following are meant to guide the meetings of the discernment committee:

1. All sessions are to be framed in prayer.
2. Committee members should come to this process having recently spent time reflecting upon their own spiritual journey, particularly the manner in which their gifts of ministry have been articulated and made manifest through life in the church.
3. Throughout the process, attention should be paid to the following characteristics of the Aspirant as factors of discerning particular gifts for ministry:
 - a. communication skills
 - b. ability to relate to others
 - c. personal integrity and self-esteem
 - d. physical health and energy
 - e. intellectual gifts and abilities
 - f. sense of own strengths and weaknesses
 - g. emotional maturity and stability

The following is a suggested outline for discernment committee meetings and responsibilities:

- **First Meeting** - The committee meets with the Rector for an introduction to the discernment process and to clarify the purpose of the discernment committee.
- **Second Meeting** - The committee meets with the Aspirant and all share their life stories. Focus on some of the following areas may prove fruitful:
 - a. What is your earliest memory of religious life/church/God?
 - b. What are two highlights (major events or important details of significance) of your personal spiritual journey?
 - c. What practices sustain you spiritually?
 - d. How has God changed you?
 - e. How has God's call been made manifest to you by others?
 - f. Recall two persons you have known who have been influential in your spiritual life. How have they changed you?
- **Third Meeting** - The committee meets with the Aspirant to discuss his or her present ministry and sense of vocation. Particular emphasis on the following questions is recommended:
 - a. Why do you believe in God?
 - b. How have you experienced a call to ordained ministry?
 - c. What can you do as a deacon that you cannot otherwise do?
 - d. How do you feel about the possibility of being ordained? What excites you? What do you think will be particularly challenging?
 - e. How have others made you aware of God's call?
 - f. Who are your role models?
 - g. How is your present ministry different from your present sense of call?
- **Fourth Meeting** - The committee meets with the Aspirant to explore current gifts of ministry and how these may relate to ordained ministry.
 - a. Do you have the academic skills necessary to prepare for this vocation?
 - b. Do you have the emotional stability to meet the challenges of this vocation?
 - c. Is your family supportive of the possibility of ordained ministry for you? How is their support shown?

- d. What is your financial situation? How will you manage the financial demands and impacts of the program of formation?
- e. How do you relate to others?
- f. How do you respond to ideas that are challenging to you?
- g. Are you open to changing your mind?
- h. How do you deal with conflict?
- i. How do you deal with authority and community discipline?
- j. What is a deacon?
- k. What weaknesses will you bring to the diaconate?
- l. What strengths will you bring to the diaconate?
- ***Fifth Meeting*** - The committee meets with the Aspirant to discuss the Christian life of faith and how one lives out the Christian vocation. Some areas listed here may have already been explored during earlier sessions:
 - a. Spiritual discipline and prayer
 - b. Sacraments and worship
 - c. Scripture and Bible study
 - d. Authority and obedience within the church
 - e. The interior life of the Christian community
 - f. Servant ministry to the larger community
- ***Sixth Meeting*** – The committee meets with the Rector and the Aspirant. Prior to this meeting, the committee should convene privately to reflect on and summarize the findings of previous meetings. From this discussion, a written outline of reflections should be prepared to share with the Aspirant. This will include the decision whether or not to recommend the Aspirant to the Rector and vestry to be nominated to continue in the formal discernment process.

Included, also, should be specific recommendations, questions, or concerns regarding the Aspirant's particular sense of call. Examples could be spiritual direction, mentoring, reading list, retreats, conferences, lay leadership training, or other disciplines intended to strengthen or expand and encourage the Aspirant's capabilities and understanding and to further his or her growth in ministry.

- ***Submissions of the Committee***
 - a. ***Individual Evaluations*** - Each individual member of the committee is to complete an evaluation of the Aspirant (Appendix 3). These evaluations will be given to the Rector who will only share them with the vestry. If the Rector and vestry determine to nominate the Aspirant to become a Postulant, then these evaluations will also be shared with the Office of the Bishop.
 - b. ***Discernment Committee Report*** - The committee shall draft, approve, and sign a letter to the Rector and vestry which describes the committee's work and overall evaluation. This report is particularly helpful to the Bishop and Commission on Ministry in explaining the process of discernment at the faith community level, since these experiences are known to vary based on location.

Continued involvement in the vocational journey of the Aspirant by one or more of the committee members is expected, whether this be to support and encourage the Aspirant continuing in the formal discernment process or continuing in clarify the Aspirant's call within the order of lay ministry.

DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE INDIVIDUAL EVALUATION FORM

CONFIDENTIAL

Aspirant's Name: _____

Discernment Committee Member's Name: _____

Parish: _____ Date _____

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

It is a high calling to engage in discernment with other people about God's call on their lives. The aspirant, faith community, and diocese all share in discerning a call to ordained ministry. The following information, giving your thoughts and impressions, will assist in this process. Please answer prayerfully and to the best of your knowledge. Mark your answers: 1 = poor, 2 = marginal, 3 = adequate, 4 = good, 5 = superior

Does this person exhibit emotional maturity?	1	2	3	4	5
Can he/she be described as, "A person of Christian character, proven fitness, and leadership in his or her community..?"	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Does this person have a stable family life?	1	2	3	4	5
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Does this person have stable relationships?	1	2	3	4	5
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Does this person have a stable employment history?	1	2	3	4	5
Prayer and worship life?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
To what degree does this person exhibit leadership ability?	1	2	3	4	5
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

What experience does this person have in lay ministry and service within the Church and outside the Church? _____

After hearing this person share his or her spiritual journey and call toward Holy Orders, briefly state your understanding of this person's spiritual journey and call.

Would you want this person to serve and represent you, your congregation or faith community, and the Episcopal Church as an ordained person?

☐ Yes

☐ No

What do you consider to be three positive and three negative character traits of this person?

Positive: _____

Negative: _____

Can you in good conscience support this person in his or her journey toward ordination?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Uncertain

If "No" or "Uncertain", please explain: _____

Other comments: _____

**COMMUNITY OF FAITH
NOMINATION FOR POSTULANCY FOR THE DIACONATE**

Canon III.6.2

To the Right Reverend _____ Bishop of East Carolina

From _____ (Parish or faith community's name)

We, the Vestry (or other leadership body of this faith community) duly convened at

_____ on the _____ day of _____, in the year of our Lord

_____, do support _____ to be admitted as a Postulant. We declare that, in our

opinion, this person possesses such qualifications as would be fitting for admission as a Postulant. This

judgment is based on our personal knowledge or other evidence.

We do pledge to be involved in _____'s ongoing process of preparation for ordination to the Diaconate and to contribute financially to this end. The names attached are those of at least two-thirds of all the members of the leadership body.

(Signed) _____ (Clerk)

(Signed) _____ (Clergy or comparable leader of faith community)

To be signed by at least two-thirds of the Vestry and a Member of the Clergy or other comparable leaders of the faith community.

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

APPLICATION FOR POSTULANCY**Canon III.6.2**

To the Right Reverend _____ Bishop of East Carolina

I _____, a Nominee, request admission to Postulancy.

(Signature) _____

(Date) _____

Address _____ City _____ Zip _____

Phone (home) _____ (cell) _____ Email _____

Clergy _____ Parish _____
(or comparable leader exercising oversight)

Length of time in Diocese _____ Length of time active in faith community _____

Date of Birth _____ Date of Baptism _____ Place of Baptism _____

Date of Confirmation _____ Place of Confirmation _____
(Attach a photocopy of baptismal and confirmation certificates or parish records)Have you previously made application for Postulancy or been nominated in another Diocese? ☐ Yes ☐ No

*If yes, please list the Diocese and date _____

Describe the process of discernment by which you have been identified for ordination. (Use additional space if needed.)

Education (Use additional space if needed.)

	Name/Address	Dates Attended	Diploma/Degree
High School			
College			
Graduate School			
Other			

This application should be printed, signed and mailed to the Bishop's office along with other required documentation as described in the [Steps Toward Ordination to the Diaconate](#).

APPLICATION FOR CANDIDACY

Canon III.6.4(a)

To the Right Reverend _____ Bishop of East Carolina

I _____, a Postulant from the Diocese of East Carolina,
request admission as a Candidate for Holy Orders.

(Signature)

(Date)

Name _____

Address _____ City _____ Zip Code _____

Phone (home) _____ (work) _____ Email _____

Rector _____ Faith Community _____
(or comparable leader exercising oversight)

Date admitted as a Postulant

Please be sure to attach a letter of support by the congregation or other faith community.

**COMMUNITY OF FAITH
LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR CANDIDACY**

Canon III.6.4(a)(2)

To the Right Reverend _____ Bishop of East Carolina

From _____ (Parish or faith community's name)

We, the Vestry (or other leadership body of this faith community) duly convened at

_____ on the _____ day of _____, in the year of our Lord

_____, do support _____ to be admitted as a Candidate for

Holy Orders. We declare that, in our opinion, this person possesses such qualifications as would be

fitting for admission as a Candidate for Holy Orders. This judgment is based on our personal

knowledge or other evidence. The names attached are those of at least two-thirds of all the members

of the leadership body.

(Signed) _____ (Clerk)

(Signed) _____
(Clergy or comparable leader of faith community)

To be signed by at least two-thirds of the Vestry and a Member of the Clergy or other comparable leaders of the faith community.

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

**APPLICATION FOR
ORDINATION TO THE DIACONATE**

Canon III.6.6(b)(1)

To the Right Reverend _____ Bishop of East Carolina

I, _____, a Candidate in Good Standing of the
Diocese of East Carolina, respectfully apply for ordination to the Diaconate.

Date of Birth _____

Date Admitted as a Postulant _____

Date Admitted as a Candidate _____

(Signature)

(Date)

**COMMUNITY OF FAITH LETTER OF SUPPORT
FOR ORDINATION TO THE DIACONATE**

Canon III.6.6(b)(2)

To the Right Reverend _____ Bishop of East Carolina

From _____ (Parish or faith community's name)

We, the Vestry (or other leadership body of this faith community) duly convened at

_____ on the _____ day of _____, in the year of our Lord

_____, do support _____ for ordination to the Diaconate, and

attest that the names attached are those of at least two-thirds of all the members of the leadership
body.

(Signed) _____ (Clerk)

(Signed) _____
(Clergy or comparable leader of faith community)

**To be signed by at least two-thirds of the Vestry and a Member of the Clergy or other
comparable leaders of the faith community.**

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

**STANDING COMMITTEE TESTIMONIAL
FOR ORDINATION TO THE DIACONATE**

Canon III.6.6(c)

To the Right Reverend _____ Bishop of East Carolina

We, the Standing Committee of the Diocese of East Carolina, having been duly convened at _____, do testify that _____, desiring to be ordained to the Diaconate under Canon III.6, has presented to us the certificates as required by the Canons indicating _____’s preparedness for ordination to the Diaconate under Canon III.6; and we certify that all canonical requirements for ordination to the Diaconate under Canon III.6 have been met; and we find no sufficient objection to ordination. Therefore, we recommend _____ for ordination.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands this _____ day of _____, in the year of our Lord _____.

(Must be signed by a majority of members.)

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