

## **Parish Discernment Committee**

The following information identifies the Role of and the Guidelines for the Parish Discernment Committee.

### **Role of the Committee**

The Parish Discernment Committee is charged to help an aspirant discern the nature of his/her call to ministry. The Committee is formed by the aspirant's rector/vicar, it is intended to supplement the one-on-one discernment discussions that the aspirant will have with a 2nd priest.

The work of the Discernment Committee is to provide an environment in which the aspirant and committee members may freely and openly discuss the aspirant's call to ministry. The committee, and the aspirant, must treat all of their meetings as confidential to this end.

Secondly, the Discernment Committee serves as a support system for the aspirant in his/her discernment process. In that context, the committee should encourage the aspirant to engage in a process of profound and honest self-examination and exploration regarding ordination, and should uphold and support an aspirant's decision either to pursue ordination or to live out his/her ministry calling without ordination. The role of the exploration committee is NOT to evaluate the aspirant's qualifications for ordination, but rather to help the aspirant gain greater self-awareness and a deeper understanding of his or her call to ministry, whether ordained or not.

Rectors/vicars should select persons for the exploration committee who have a good understanding of their own ministries and who understand that a call to ministry does not necessarily mean a call to ordination. Members of the exploration committee should have good listening skills, good pastoral skills, and a thorough understanding of the expectations, duties, and responsibilities of priests. The committee should include an equal number of male and female members and members with a range of ages.

The exploration committee's work does not end with the postulancy conference. If the Commission on Ministry does not accept the aspirant as a postulant, the exploration committee must be prepared to provide pastoral care and help as the aspirant discerns how to live out his/her call in lay ministry. If the aspirant is accepted for postulancy, the exploration committee must be prepared to provide pastoral care and help as the aspirant discerns how to live out his/her call in lay ministry. If the aspirant is accepted for postulancy, the exploration committee should continue to provide a support network as the hurdles of seminary, candidacy and ordination are faced.

This ongoing support must be intentional, using correspondence and periodic meetings throughout the process.

The work of the Exploration Committee does not end until the aspirant has been ordained, or has begun a lay ministry journey.

### **Guidelines**

The following guidelines are intended as an aid to a Parish Exploration Committee in their role to explore an applicant's call to holy orders as well as helping to clarify their understanding of their call and spiritual journey to date.

These guidelines have been divided into four separate but interrelated areas. The first two areas are concerned with an exploration of the aspirant's faith development and vision of the church, specifically the Episcopal Church. Initial questions, which may be used directly or modified in conversation with the aspirant, are in bold type. Those, in non-bold type, are to be considered by committee members thoughtfully and used to form questions arising from such reflections.

It is both urged and recommended that the committee members use all their questions to search for the truth, come whence it may and cost what it will. Hidden agenda in questions should be studiously avoided. It is fully expected that the committee leave the decision of discernment of a call to the aspirant. However, a negative recommendation for the applicant to proceed is still possible based on a perception of the applicant not yet being ready to proceed.

#### **I. Self Knowledge and Awareness:**

**- Where do you see your strengths and weaknesses? How have you become aware of these?**

**- As you become aware of your needs, how do you take care of them? Where do you seek to set limits? What are your priorities?**

**- Are there behavioral patterns handed down from your family of origin that affect you? Where do you put red flags for yourself?**

- Is there ability to reflect on one's own life and have a perspective of how he/she relates to others and God?

- Is the aspirant able to articulate and integrate knowledge and experience appropriately?

- Can this person verbalize and communicate with skill appropriate to

his/her age and experience?

- Does this person understand personal authority without either arrogance or abrogation of responsibility for self?

- Is this person trustworthy and a person of integrity and authenticity?

- Can this person be flexible and vulnerable while respecting and knowing boundaries?

## **II. Leadership Skills**

- **Discuss a time where you were able to take responsibility when there was a difficult decision to be made. What was that like for you?**

- **What vision(s) do you have of the church and where might there be a risk for you if you chose to follow that vision?**

- **How do you see yourself developing leadership skills in others? Can you describe a time when you succeeded? When you failed? What was that like for you?**

- **What kind of leadership style is most comfortable for you? Have there been instances when your favorite leadership model needed to be modified? In what way? Why? What was that like for you?**

- Has this person exhibited an ability to learn and use failure as well as success?

- Does this person exhibit a non-anxious presence? A secure self that evaluates situations realistically?

- Does this person have an entrepreneurial spirit - able to engender a "new vision" in a changing age and for a changing church?

- Does he/she listen with interest, insight, and compassion?

- Is there evidence of any authority problems or idealization of the roles of men or women that might become a problem?

- Would you be comfortable working for this person and/or having this person as your priest?

### III Faith Development

- Please tell me a little about your faith development. Where has your exploration led you? Where are you now? What questions continually surface in your faith journey?

- How would you articulate your faith to a non-believer? To a friend?

- Who is Jesus Christ for you?

- Describe your prayer life. Your study habits. If this is an ongoing commitment, what has it meant to you? Are there times when this has presented difficulties for you? How have you reacted?

- Does this aspirant have an awareness of and a sensitivity to the sacred? How does this person experience the Holy?

- Does this person have a **passion** that says **THIS** matters - **you matter** - that the Gospel is worth living for and indeed worth dying for?

- Can this person appropriately articulate the faith that he/she professes?

- Does this person see discernment and growth as on-going? (Does he/she see this process as a learning experience and an adventure, or as a means to an end?)

- Does this person have a sense of humor? Can he/she see laughter as a mark of trust in God's continual presence in our lives, and see humor as sacred and spiritual?

### IV. Awareness of the Episcopal Church Tradition:

- Describe your experience as a member of the church as a whole and of the Episcopal church, specifically. What draws you to it? What turns you away? How many different liturgies have you experienced? How many congregations?

- What role do you see yourself playing in the church?

- What is your vision of the church of the 21st century?

- Where do you see yourself making a difference in the church? Do you have a plan or a dream?

- Has this person experienced a variety of parish settings?

- Is there an awareness of the diversity of beliefs and worship experiences in the Episcopal Church?

- Has there been enough exposure to the diversity of people who belong to the Episcopal church or has this person simply become comfortable - in love with - his/her own church? In short, is there a need for more breadth and knowledge of the Episcopal tradition?

- Does this person have a tendency to idolize the church or the role of the priest?

- Does this person have an energized and creative vision of the church in the 21st century? Is she/he aware of the changes that will need to occur for the church to continue to thrive and flourish? Is there joy and energy to pursue a vision in the face of day-to-day adversities?