



Discerning a Call to Ministry

*Discernment Handbook
for the Diocese of
East Tennessee*



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. Overview of Ministry and Ordination—The Right Reverend Brian Cole 2
- II. Conversations for Deepening Discernment 3
 - A. Initial Conversations with Clergy 3
 - B. Conversations with a Spiritual Director 4
 - C. Diocesan Discernment Day 4
- III. Discerning and Preparing for Lay Ministries 5
- IV. Discerning and Preparing for Ordained Ministries 6
 - A. First Conversation with the Bishop of the Diocese 6
 - B. Conversations with Companions in Discernment 6
 - C. Second Conversation with the Bishop of the Diocese 7
 - D. Commission on Ministry Discernment Retreat 8
 - E. Nomination by the Congregation and Application for Postulancy 8
 - F. Postulancy 9
- V. Appendices 10
 - A. Writing a Spiritual Autobiography 10
 - B. Companions in Discernment Session Outlines 12
 - C. Bibliography Suggested for Discussion with Seekers 23
 - D. Timeline for the Seeker’s Journey 24

Note: The forms referenced in this handbook are available at www.dioet.org/discern-a-call/

I. Overview of Ministry and Ordination

—The Right Reverend Brian Cole

Every baptized Christian is *called*.

That call is a gift to us, one we first hear in baptism. Our call is to minister—to grow in the Christian faith and to share that faith with others. The gifts for specific ministries vary, but every believer *is* given gifts for ministry.

So, every Episcopalian in East Tennessee is *called to ministry*.

In the Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee, we are committed to helping every Episcopalian to grow deeper in faith, to become better able to discern and use the gifts for ministry, which each of us possesses. Together, we serve as the Body of Christ. As a body, we need each other, so that we members of the body can offer our ministries and our gifts with and for each other, with and for the world in which we live.

Along with the ministry given to us in baptism, we may hear additional calls through the wisdom of a faithful listening community. A person can be called to a deepened lay ministry. Or, individuals can be called to ordained ministry—either as deacons, priests, or bishops. These calls all require shared discernment, which involves the work of both the individual being called and that individual's trust in engaging other faithful East Tennessee Episcopalians in whatever discernment may be unfolding.

We live in a season of much change regarding the communal life of The Episcopal Church: how our structures, institutions, and shared ministries function. Some of that change is exciting and positive: more lay ministers, for example, are now equipped to serve the church with their gifts, and the church-wide understanding of the diaconal ministry is growing. Some of that change can bring unexpected news. For example, the traditional model of full-time stipendiary priests is now only one of several options for how priesthood is lived out. It will be so for the foreseeable future. Bi-vocational priesthoods—financially supported partly by employment in the church, and partly by other employment—are now becoming a much more common pattern of ordained life than the full-time priesthood to which many of us have been accustomed.

No matter how much change we encounter in the Episcopal Church, one thing has not changed: people are still being called to live out the ministries for which they have been gifted. The Commission on Ministry in East Tennessee, along with the Lay Ministry School, is prepared to identify and equip the mature ministers that the Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee needs now.

The mission of the Episcopal Church is “to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” This ministry of reconciliation, given to us by the work of the Resurrected Christ, is a call to which *all* of us can respond by sharing the gifts we possess, whether as lay and ordained persons. As your bishop, I am humbled to be a part of the careful, shared listening for the specific ministries to which you are now being called.

II. Conversations for Deepening Discernment

The Holy Spirit authorizes and empowers every baptized person to carry on various ministries for the good of, and on behalf of, the congregation and the world. The Episcopal Church (TEC), by way of its canons (governance documents, laws), calls for each diocese to affirm and develop the ministry of all baptized persons. The Church ordains some to serve through ordained ministry. Most of us act on Christ's love by sharing at home, in our communities, or worldwide the variety of gifts and talents that God has entrusted to us. The diocese trains those who seek lay ministry within the church as preachers, pastoral care leaders, and catechists. Parish clergy also train members to serve as licensed Eucharistic ministers, Eucharistic visitors, and worship leaders.

Our individual calls affect the life and ministry of the whole body, just as the companionship of the body shapes and feeds each individual call. Discerning a call to ministry thus involves prayerful attention to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit among us. Whether God's call seems clear or is difficult to hear, we discern it most faithfully with other members of Christ's body, whether in small groups who study and pray together, in discussion with spiritual mentors, or by experiencing the practice of various ministries.

A. Initial Conversations with Clergy

When an individual is ready to enter a formal process of discernment for any ordained or licensed lay ministry, the first step is to engage in conversations with a clergy sponsor. The clergy sponsor is generally the clergy person responsible for oversight (or a clergy person assigned *by* the clergy person responsible for oversight) of the parish/worshiping community in which the seeker is a confirmed and active member and in which these conversations will take place. Conversations may cover a wide range of topics, including the seeker's:

- spiritual history
- experience of community
- physical and emotional health
- commitment in relationships
- financial status
- education
- gifts and passions and
- prior service in the church.

The goal of these conversations is to gain some sort of clarity about the seeker's call to ministry. As groundwork for these conversations, a seeker should write a spiritual autobiography, to be discussed with the clergy sponsor. The spiritual autobiography explores how significant life events, relationships, and places have influenced one's relationship with God and call to ministry (See Appendix A). Many seekers and clergy may also find it helpful to read and discuss a book (See Appendix C).

During this period the seeker should become familiar with *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1979, especially the sections regarding baptism and ordination. The seeker should also review the *Canons of the Episcopal Church*, “Title III: Ministry,” which speaks of both ordained and licensed lay ministries.

B. Conversations with a Spiritual Director

The Commission on Ministry encourages all seekers, once they have begun conversations with their clergy sponsor, to find and begin meeting with a spiritual director if they have not already done so. Names and contact information for spiritual directors are available from the diocesan office.

C. Diocesan Discernment Day

The Commission on Ministry for the Diocese of East Tennessee hosts *Here I Am* each spring, for a full day on a Saturday. The day is intended for anyone looking to deepen, expand, or develop their ministry as a baptized member of Christ’s body. *Here I Am* may also include anyone exploring a potential call to ordained or licensed ministry through the church. Clergy who are sponsoring persons exploring a potential call to ordination are expected to attend with the person they are sponsoring.

Here I Am explores the practice of Christian discernment in general, as well as offering information about current or expected opportunities for ministry or leadership. The day includes presentations and panel discussions about what it is like to serve in a licensed or ordained role. It also provides information about the diocesan discernment process.

III. Discerning and Preparing for Lay Ministry

By virtue of our baptism, we are all called to ministry. The Holy Spirit authorizes and empowers every baptized person to carry on various ministries for the good of and on behalf of the congregation. For some Christians, this means being called to ordained ministry. For most of us, this means being actively involved in lay ministry or ministries.

After engaging in conversation with a clergy sponsor and attending the *Here I Am* discernment day, seekers may discern a call to a deeper engagement in lay ministry. If so, they are encouraged to continue receiving spiritual direction for ongoing discernment and support, and to participate in regular Christian formation. Adult education classes, small groups, Bible studies, and prayer groups provide opportunities for learning and growth in the Christian faith. Those who are interested in an in-depth study of scripture and theology may enjoy participating in Education for Ministry (EfM), a program offered at several parishes around the diocese, and/or taking classes through diocesan Licensed Lay Ministry formation programs.

While the possibilities for lay ministry are limitless, The Episcopal Church canons outline specific licensed ministries for which the diocese provides formation and support. For ministries within the church, “a confirmed communicant in good standing ... may be licensed by the Ecclesiastical Authority to serve as Pastoral Leader, Worship Leader, Preacher, Eucharistic Minister, Eucharistic Visitor, Evangelist, or Catechist. Requirements and guidelines for the selection, training, continuing education, and deployment of such persons, and the duration of licenses shall be established by the bishop in consultation with the Commission on Ministry” (Title III, Canon 4, Sec. 1(a)).

The Diocese of East Tennessee offers training for lay preachers, pastoral care leaders, and catechists. Eucharistic ministers, Eucharistic visitors, and worship leaders are generally trained in their own parish setting, usually by the rector. The Licensed Lay Ministries page of the diocesan website includes detailed information about:

- Personal qualities needed
- Formation considerations prior to licensing
- Elements of training
- Suggested resources for licensing and renewal
- Renewal of license process
- Community

Please visit <https://www.dioet.org/licensed-lay-ministry/> or contact the Canon for Mission and Lay Ministry to learn more.

IV. Discerning and Preparing for Ordained Ministries

A. First Conversation with the Bishop of the Diocese

If, after meeting for at least six months and attending the *Here I Am* discernment day, a seeker considering ordination and clergy sponsor believe that further formal discernment regarding Holy Orders would be appropriate, the clergy sponsor will set up a meeting at with the bishop. At the meeting, the seeker, the clergy sponsor, and the bishop will discuss next possible steps.

Before meeting with the bishop, the seeker and the clergy sponsor must submit the following materials to the bishop's office for review. (Please check with the Episcopal Engagement Specialist regarding these forms and their deadlines.)

- A1: Seeker's Information Form (with spiritual autobiography and photograph)
- A2: Clergy Sponsor Referral Form
- A3: Authorization to Release of Personal and Health Information, Release of Claims and Indemnity, and Hold-Harmless Agreement
- A4: Background Inquiry Release Form
- A5: Letter of Understanding

B. Conversations with Companions in Discernment

If the bishop, clergy sponsor, and seeker agree that formal discernment regarding ordination should continue, the next step is for the seeker to work with a group of Companions in Discernment (CID) in the local congregation. The role of the companions is not to decide whether a seeker should be ordained or licensed, but rather to help the seeker clarify and test their understanding of God's call. As their name suggests, they are meant to be companions to the seeker in listening and in prayer.

The CID consists of four to six members invited by the clergy sponsor. The group should reflect the diversity of the sponsoring congregation, and it may include members from other congregations, as appropriate. One member of the group will serve as the convener, who is responsible for scheduling and facilitating the meetings. Another member will serve as the scribe, whose job it is to keep notes that will help the CID to compose its final report.

The CID will meet with the seeker a minimum of ten times over a period of at least six months. Each session should last between one and one-and-a-half hours, beginning and ending with prayer. CID members should commit to being present for every session in its entirety. The outline of sessions, including topics and homework, is found below (See Appendix B).

The Commission on Ministry recommends that the seeker keep a reflective journal during the process, and that the companions write down their thoughts and questions after each session as well. For their final session together, the CID will write a report that responds to the questions outlined below. The seeker, too, will write a final reflection. Both written reflections will be shared with the clergy sponsor,

the bishop, and the Commission on Ministry. (Conversations between the seeker and the clergy sponsor should continue throughout the Companions in Discernment process.)

The CID, in their work with the seeker, should look for the skills and characteristics of an effective ordained leader, including the following:

- Deep faith and relationship with Jesus Christ
- Passion for the Gospel and for making it known
- Commitment to God's mission of reconciliation
- An ability to lead and to equip others for ministry
- Humility and self-awareness
- Healthy relationships and appropriate boundaries
- A sense of creativity and holy imagination
- Perseverance and adaptability
- Intellectual capacity and a commitment to lifelong learning

Please note: Delving deeply enough to get a clear sense of these skills and characteristics will require that the CID members consider the questions in the session outlines as simply starting points for discussion. Listening well to the seeker's verbal and nonverbal replies will reveal other questions for further discussion.

The Commission on Ministry (COM) will appoint a liaison to facilitate coordination between the congregation's CID and the Commission on Ministry (COM). Prior to the first meeting of the CID, the COM liaison will confer with the clergy sponsor and the CID convener to clarify procedures for the CID's work and to answer questions about the process. At the CID's first meeting, the liaison will explain an overview of the CID process and distribute resource materials to guide their work. After that, the liaison will remain available to the convener to provide additional directions and resources, if needed (See Appendix B).

C. Second Conversation with the Bishop of the Diocese

Following the conclusion of the CID's work, the clergy sponsor will set up a meeting at which the seeker, the clergy sponsor, and the bishop can discuss next steps. Before this meeting, the following documents must be submitted to the bishop's office:

- A6: Seeker's Reflection on Companions in Discernment
- A7: Report of Companions in Discernment

D. Commission on Ministry Discernment Retreat

Seekers who, after their second meeting with the bishop of the diocese, are invited by the bishop to apply for postulancy, then attend a COM discernment retreat, which is held once per year, usually in the late fall. If seeker is married, partnered, or engaged the seeker's spouse, partner, or fiancé(e) is also invited to participate.

Before the COM discernment retreat, the seeker must submit the following materials to the bishop's office for review:

- A10: Financial Disclosure Form
- Official college transcripts
- Theological school transcripts and evaluations (if any)
- A11: Mental Health Evaluations
- A12: Physical Health Evaluations

These documents should arrive in the bishop's office no later than one month before the scheduled discernment retreat.

Those whom the bishop has invited to the COM discernment retreat can expect to answer and ask questions about their sense of vocation; their experience of the Church; their spiritual life and practices; their academic capacity for theological education; their relationships with their families, colleagues, and friends; their financial status; and their practices of self-care.

After the discernment retreat, COM members meet to pool their insights and to make recommendations to the bishop next steps for seekers who have participated in the retreat. The bishop then decides whether a seeker will be invited to become a nominee for postulancy.

E. Nomination by the Congregation and Application for Postulancy

If a seeker has been invited by the bishop to seek nomination from the parish congregation, the clergy sponsor meets with the vestry for a vote on whether to nominate the seeker for ordination. The clergy sponsor informs the vestry about what has been discerned by the CID and at the COM discernment retreat. All information about the seeker is shared with the explicit expectation of confidentiality. A vestry's nomination of a seeker to prepare for ordination constitutes a commitment that the parish will support the nominee financially and spiritually during the journey to ordination. In order to nominate the seeker, the vestry submits the following form to the bishop's office:

- A13: Vestry Nomination for Postulancy

A seeker who accepts the congregation's nomination for ordination to the diaconate or priesthood submits the following form, along with documentation of Baptism and Confirmation, to the bishop's office:

- A14: Acceptance of Nomination and Application for Postulancy

F. Postulancy

If the bishop accepts a seeker who has applied for postulancy, the bishop so informs the seeker. Planning for study and supervision to prepare the postulant for the diaconate or the priesthood then begins in concert with the bishop.

Plans for the education necessary to fulfilling an ordained role are specified in part by canonical requirements of The Episcopal Church and in part by the bishop's discernment of the formation needed by specific individuals. Those preparing to serve as priests normally have a college degree and undertake a three-year seminary education. Vocational deacons receive training focused on their specific ministries in the world, as well as participating with other deacons in studying scripture, church history, theology, and liturgics as appropriate to their role.

Appendix A: Prompts for Writing a Spiritual Autobiography

A spiritual autobiography is a tool for listening to your life and for telling others about it. It records not “just the facts, ma’am” but your reading of their significance, also. It focuses on how you engage with the world, yourself, others, and God. It speaks to recurring themes, changes in latitude and attitude, shocks and surprises, tides and turnings, calms in the storm.

For our purposes, your spiritual autobiography should be about five typed pages long, but no less than three typed pages. Use any or none of these suggestions as seems helpful for revealing who you have been, who you are, and who you seem on your way to becoming.

- 1. Think of your life till now as a five-chapter book:** What are the titles of the chapters, and why? Explain what is the same or different about each chapter. Who are the significant characters in each chapter? What are their significant gifts and challenges to you? What tensions (attraction, conflict, companionship) hold these characters in the plot of your life? Which characters have dropped out of that plot, and what difference has that made?
- 2. Think of your life as a series of hit songs:** What are they? Who “sang” them in which era of your life, and why? Who is singing to you now? How have the harmonies and rhythms changed, and what do you make of that? As you seek ordination, are you asking to change key, add a refrain, write another verse?
- 3. If your life were plotted out on a map,** what would be the interstates? What would be the wandering back roads? What would be the dead ends and how did you come to take them? Where are the scenic routes, and what do they show you? Where did you start at birth and how long did you stay there? With whom did you hitchhike along the way? Did you have to walk through any storms? Where were you when the clouds broke? What led you to take the turns that now seem to direct you toward ordination?
- 4. Think of your life as a kayaking trip down a river.** Where did you put yourself and your kayak into the water, and how did you come to that point of entry? Who floats with you on this trip downriver? Where has the river changed course? Where has it deepened and quieted, and what did you do with those pools? Where have you hit the rapids—when and how did you know that things had changed? How did you respond? When and where did you roll over or fall out of the kayak? Have you had to bail yourself out of a sinking situation? If so, how did you do it? Is the river clear and cold, warm and silty, fast or slow now? What kind of water do you think is ahead, and how will you navigate it? What makes you think so?
- 5. Think of your life as a pie chart:** Into how many slices is the pie divided? What are they? What color is each piece and why? How do the pieces compare in size? In what order are they arranged and why? Where and how did you get the data from which this pie chart is drawn? How would your best friend draw a pie chart of your life and why? Your spouse? Your most tenacious detractor? What slices would you change, and how?

As time passes, re-consider and re-write your spiritual autobiography. You may notice patterns you didn't see before, or you may have a new awareness of connections between events in your outer life and the ways you experienced of yourself and God as those events unfolded. Let different friends and family members read it. How do they respond to your telling of the story?

Appendix B: Companions in Discernment Session Outlines

Session 1: Introductions and Overview

The seeker, Companions in Discernment, clergy sponsor, and Commission on Ministry liaison attend this first session. The purpose of this meeting is for group members to get acquainted with one another and with the discernment process.

After introductions are made, the COM liaison will discuss the roles and responsibilities of the group's members, and the outline of the discernment sessions. The following list of online links will be made available to each member:

- the current *Canons of the Episcopal Church*, “Title III: Ministry”
- an overview of the diocesan ordination process
- the relevant sections of the Confirmation and Ordination rites from *The Book of Common Prayer*

By the end of this meeting, a scribe should be appointed, and future meeting dates established.

Session 2: Spiritual Autobiography

Preparation

The seeker will write a spiritual autobiography and distribute it to the CID before their meeting.

Readings

Psalm 139:1-18

Luke 24:13-35

Questions for Reflection

- What does it mean for you to live fully in the presence of God?
- How has your relationship with God changed over the course of your life?
- Who is Christ to you?
- Do you have a rule of life, and if so, what does it include?
- How would you describe your practice of prayer?
- Who are the people to whom you can turn for spiritual guidance?

Session 3: Exploring Gifts for Ministry

Readings

1 Corinthians 12:4-13

Ephesians 4:11-16

Questions for Reflection

- What do you love to do? What activities bring you joy?
- Which of your activities do you consider “ministries”? What makes them “ministries”?
- What do you believe are your greatest strengths?
- What strengths have others identified in you?
- Describe a time when you experienced a deep sense of accomplishment.
- What are some of your growing edges?

Session 4: Honoring Our Baptismal Vows

Readings

Mark 1:9-11

Romans 6:3-4

The Book of Common Prayer, pp. 292-294

Questions for Reflection

- What is the story of your baptism?
- Review the vows of the baptismal covenant. Which ones do you find easy to fulfill? Which ones are more difficult for you?
- How do you honor your baptismal vows in your present vocation?
- When have you experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in your life?

Session 5: Participating in God's Mission

Readings

Acts 2:1-21

2 Corinthians 5:14-20

Questions for Reflection

- According to the Catechism, “The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ” (*The Book of Common Prayer*, page 855). What are some factors that inhibit people from living in right relationship with God and each other? In what ways have you seen the Church participating in God’s reconciling mission?
- When have you experienced reconciliation in your own life?
- How does your cultural context affect you and your ministry?
- Who are you drawn to in ministry? Who do you resist being with in ministry?

Session 6: Listening for God's Call

Readings

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Luke 10:1-12

John 20:1-18

Questions for Reflection

- Is there a Biblical call story that resonates deeply with you?
- When you hear the voice of God, what does God say?
- How have others helped you recognize God's call in your life?
- When have you experienced success in ministry? When have you experienced disappointment?
- How do you know when you're being faithful to God?
- At this midpoint in the process, have you discovered greater clarity in your discernment? Are there new questions that have arisen for you?

Session 7: Exploring Orders of Ministry

Preparation

The seeker will meet with the Canon for Mission and Lay Ministry to learn about opportunities for Lay Ministers. The seeker will also interview a deacon and a priest (other than the clergy sponsor) to find out about their experience of call, practice of ministry, and ongoing growth and formation.

Readings

Acts 6:2-7

1 Peter 5:1-4

“Ordination: Presentation and Examination” vows for deacons—*The Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 538, 543-544.

“Ordination: Presentation and Examination” vows for priests—*The Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 526, 531-532.

Questions for Reflection

- Share your reflections about your interviews. What did they stir up in you?
How did they inform, inspire, or challenge you?
- What do you believe is the ministry of a deacon? What is the ministry of a priest?
What kinds of gifts and skills are required of each?
- To which ministry do you believe you are called?
- What is your understanding of ordination?
- Why do clergy often get put on pedestals? What are the dangers of this tendency, and how might they be avoided?

Session 8: Practicing Leadership

Readings

John 13:12-17

Philippians 2:1-18

Romans 12:3-8

Questions for Reflection

- How do you relate to people in authority? How do you exercise your own power and authority?
- Tell us about a time of conflict or transition in which you were called to leadership. What did you learn about yourself and others from that experience?
- How have you experienced the transforming power of God in your life?
- How do you empower others in their lives and ministries?

Session 9: Counting the Cost

Readings

Genesis 12:1-9

Mark 6:30-46

Questions for Reflection

- What are your present commitments and responsibilities?
What role do they play in your ongoing sense of call?
- What freedoms and limitations do you experience at this time in your life?
How might those circumstances change if you take on something new?
- Where is home for you? What makes it home?
- Where do you envision yourself ministering? What draws your heart there?

Session 10: Final Reflections

Preparation

After completing the sessions above, the companions will meet without the seeker to reflect on their time together and to share their insights from the process. They will prepare a final reflection to be shared with the seeker and sponsoring clergy. The reflection should address the following questions:

- In what ways has the seeker demonstrated a depth of faith and relationship with Christ?
- What specific gifts for ministry does the seeker possess?
- How has the seeker experienced and exercised baptismal ministry?
- How does the seeker understand and participate in the mission of the Church?
- What is the seeker's understanding of ordination?
- Has the seeker articulated a clear call to a particular order?
- What characteristics of leadership has the seeker demonstrated?
- How does the seeker relate to persons in authority?
- How does the seeker exercise personal authority?
- How would ordination affect the seeker's present commitments?
- What are some areas for further growth and reflection in the seeker?
- Do you have recommendations for next steps for the seeker?

The seeker will prepare a final reflection, as well, responding to the following questions:

- What have you learned about yourself during this process?
- How would you articulate your sense of call at this point?
- What are your hopes and/or concerns regarding next steps?

Process

The seeker, Companions in Discernment, and clergy sponsor will meet to discuss their final reflections. Revisions may be made, based on their conversation during this session. These final reflections should be sent to the bishop's office after the session.

Closing Celebration

After journeying together in prayer and discernment for several months, it is important to have a time of closure. We recommend that the seeker and companions conclude their work with a simple Eucharist and time of fellowship.

Appendix C: Bibliography Suggested for Discussion with Seekers

- Dougherty, Rose Mary. *Discernment: A path to Spiritual Awakening*. Mahwah: Paulist, 2009.
- Farnham, Suzanne G., Joseph P. Gill, R. Taylor McLean, and Susan M. Ward. *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community*. 20th Anniversary Ed. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2011.
- Farrington, Debra K. *Hearing with the Heart: A Gentle Guide for Discerning God's Will for Your Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002.
- Gallagher, Timothy. *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living*. New York: Crossroad, 2005.
- Liebert, Elizabeth M. *The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making*. Louisville: John Knox, 2008.
- Nouwen, Henri. *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2013.
- Palmer, Parker. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

Appendix D: Timeline for the Seeker’s Journey

Timeframe

Steps to be Completed

March or earlier, Year 1

Conversations with Clergy Begin

The seeker engages in conversation about discernment with a clergy sponsor. The clergy sponsor is generally the clergy person responsible for oversight of the parish/worshiping community in which the seeker is a member. These initial discussions should take no fewer than six months.

The seeker becomes familiar with *Canons of the Episcopal Church*, “Title III: Ministry,” which speaks to ordained and licensed lay ministries, and *The Book of Common Prayer 1979*.

Conversations with a Spiritual Director

The seeker begins work with a spiritual director, to continue for the duration of the discernment process.

March/April, Year 1

Diocesan Discernment Day

The seeker and clergy sponsor attend the *Here I Am* discernment day, a gathering of persons exploring a call to focus, deepen, expand, or develop their ministries, whether lay or ordained. This event is held annually in the spring and is hosted by the Commission on Ministry for the Diocese of East Tennessee. It is open to all.

Discerning/Preparing for Licensed Lay Ministries

If, after their initial conversations and participation in the *Here I Am* discernment day, the seeker and clergy sponsor believe that there may be a call to licensed lay ministries, the seeker contacts the Canon for Lay Ministries at the diocesan office. Read more about licensed lay ministries at <https://www.dioet.org/licensed-lay-ministry/>.

May/June, Year 1

First Meeting with the Bishop

If, after their initial conversations and participation in the *Here I Am* discernment day, the seeker and clergy sponsor believe that the seeker should continue to discern about holy orders, the clergy sponsor asks the bishop for an appointment at which the seeker, clergy sponsor, and bishop discuss the possibility of next steps.

Before a first meeting with the bishop, the seeker must complete the following forms and send them to the bishop's office for review:

- A1: Seeker's Information Form (with Spiritual Autobiography and photograph)
- A2: Clergy Sponsor Referral Form
- A3: Authorization to Release of Personal and Health Information, Release of Claims and Indemnity, and Hold-Harmless Agreement
- A4: Background Inquiry Release Form
- A5: Letter of Understanding

After meeting with the seeker and clergy sponsor the bishop advises continuing discernment for a call to ordination, the bishop may instruct the clergy sponsor to form a Companions in Discernment group in the local congregation, with whom the seeker will continue to explore a call.

If the seeker is advised to continue discernment for a licensed lay ministries, the seeker contacts the Canon for Lay Ministries at the diocesan office. More information about licensed lay ministries is found at <https://www.dioet.org/licensed-lay-ministry/>.

August, Year 1–April, Year 2

Meeting with Companions in Discernment

The Commission on Ministry (COM) assigns one of its members as a liaison to a Companions in Discernment (CID) group. The COM liaison provides an orientation and ongoing consultation for the group.

The CID meet with the seeker at least ten times over no fewer than six months. At the end of their time together, the Companions and the seeker write reflections on what the process has revealed. Those reflections are shared with the bishop, the clergy sponsor, and the COM. (See Appendix B)

Conversations between the clergy sponsor and the seeker continue for a total of no fewer than twelve months. The seeker should continue also to meet with the spiritual director.

May/June, Year 2

Second Meeting with the Bishop

Following the conclusion of the work of the Companions in Discernment, the clergy sponsor, seeker, and spouse/partner attend a second meeting with the bishop.

In preparation for this meeting, the following forms are submitted to the bishop's office:

- A6: Seeker's Reflection on Companions in Discernment
- A7: Summary Report of Companions in Discernment

The bishop may invite the seeker to attend a discernment retreat with the Commission on Ministry or may make other recommendations regarding next steps.

November, Year 2

Commission on Ministry Retreat

If invited to a Commission on Ministry retreat, the seeker must submit the following forms at least one month in advance to the bishop's office:

- A10: Financial Disclosure Form
- Official college transcripts
- Theological school transcripts and evaluations (if any)
- A11: Mental Health
- A12: Physical Health Evaluations

After the retreat, Commission on Ministry provides its feedback and recommendations to the bishop.

The bishop then decides whether to invite the seeker to apply for postulancy and informs the seeker (and spouse/partner/fiancé(e), if desired) of next steps.

Application for Postulancy

If a seeker has been invited to by the bishop to apply for postulancy, the clergy sponsor meets with the vestry for a vote on whether to nominate the seeker for ordination and commit to giving financial and spiritual support during postulancy.

In order to nominate the seeker for postulancy, the vestry submits the following form to the bishop's office:

- A13: Vestry Nomination for Postulancy

If nominated, the seeker may accept nomination and apply for postulancy. The seeker submits the following form to the bishop's office:

- A14: Acceptance of Nomination and Application for Postulancy

The bishop informs the seeker (and spouse/partner, if desired) of the decision regarding postulancy.

If made a postulant, the seeker develops a formation plan, following the direction of the bishop and guidance of the Commission on Ministry.