

Prayer, Bible Study, and Theology Workbook
for
Discernment Committees
of the
Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania



January 2024

The Discernment Committee Process

There are many ways to discern God's will for our lives. Within the Episcopal Church we have a rich treasury of resources. The resources compiled here rely on Scripture (Biblical selections), tradition (The Book of Common Prayer), and reason (sets of questions to provoke deep discussion). A total of 8 sessions with the discernment committee should be held, meeting either weekly or bi-weekly over three to four months.

Members are asked to prepare for each session by reading and contemplating the designated Bible passages, prayers from the Book of Common Prayer, and suggested discussion questions. It is appropriate that meetings begin by offering together "A Prayer of Self-Dedication" (BCP, p. 832, #61). Sessions may conclude by offering the collect or prayer designated for each individual session.

When you gather for each meeting, come with an expectation that the Holy Spirit will help guide your discussions. As you become aware of the insights God reveals to the group, ask, "How do these insights increase our awareness of the meaning and role of the Church, of lay ministry, of ordained ministry, and of the prayer and ministry we all share as Christians? How does all this relate to the vision and call of this particular person to the ordained ministry in the church?"

A Prayer of Self-Dedication (BCP, 832)

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated unto you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Shared Leadership

Just as Christ shares His leadership with His Church, it has been found very helpful to share the leadership in this kind of discernment fellowship. Each and every member of the discernment group is expected to prepare and lead one or more sessions.

Suggested Questions

Following each portion of the study you will find a list of questions. They are meant to stimulate your thinking and not necessarily meant to be asked and answered as written here. In a way they are the questions behind the questions you will frame.

A variety of responses is possible. How the individual responds and how you assess the responses is part of a dynamic process in which you are determining the kind of ministry you might visualize this person as having. In framing questions, it is suggested that you be as pointed and specific as possible. Concrete data will give you a better picture of the person you are considering than will abstract ideas. Ask for plenty of examples.

Ample space is given for you to take notes along the way. At the conclusion of this process, they will be helpful in formulating a report regarding this person's call to ministry.

THE CHURCH

Session 1: *Thanksgiving to God for Parish Life in Christ*

Collect: For the Unity of the Church - BCP 255

Scripture: Deuteronomy 7:6-8

Colossians 3:12-17

St. Luke 24:13-35

Reading: "The Catechism"

The Church - BCP 854-855

The Sacraments - BCP 857-858

Prayer: A Litany of Thanksgiving - BCP 836-837

- a. What does it mean to be God's chosen people? Chosen for what? Why does God consider us His treasured possession?

- b. How does a group of people become bound together in love by the one Spirit? What does a people look like who live this out?

- c. What is the relationship of individual and communal discernment of God's will for our lives? What might be the role of each?

- d. Why did the disciples on the road to Emmaus not recognize Jesus? What may have gotten in the way? What gets in the way for us?

THE CHURCH

Session 2: The Ministry of the Laity

Collect: The Prayer: Confirmation Service - BCP 418

Scripture: Deuteronomy 10:12-15

1 Corinthians 12:12-28

Ephesians 4:1-16

St. Matthew 28:16-20

Reading: "The Catechism"

The Christian Hope - BCP 861-862

Prayer: A Song of Creation - BCP 88

a. How have we discerned God's will for us in our own present vocations?

b. What are our responsibilities as Christians in our present vocations?

c. What is the relationship of "taking up your cross" to self-examination and increased self-awareness?

d. If you truly see and listen for Christ in your neighbors, how are you compelled to serve Christ in them? What does serving Christ by serving your neighbor mean to you?

THE ORDAINED MINISTRY

Session 3: The Diaconate

Collect: For Social Service - BCP 260

Scripture: Isaiah 58:1-10

Acts 6:1-7

Philippians 2:1-11

St. Matthew 25:31-46

Reading: The Ordination of a Deacon:

The Examination - BCP 543-544

Prayer: For the Poor and Neglected - BCP 826

For the Oppressed - BCP 826

- a. How might a deacon minister in the diocese at large and in the parish?
- b. How does a deacon's ministry differ from that of a lay person?
- c. In what way can a deacon demonstrate to the world that their central task is that of missional service?
- d. Deacons are often employed or self-employed in addition to their diaconal role. How might a deacon balance these roles in their personal life?

THE ORDAINED MINISTRY

Session 4: The Priesthood

Collect: For the Ministry I - BCP 256

Scripture: 1 Samuel 2:35

Hebrews 4:14 - 5:10

St. John 15:1-17

Reading: The Ordination of a Priest:

The Consecration - BCP 533-534

Prayer: Christ Our Passover - BCP 83

a. What is your understanding of Christian Ministry? How do you view the ministry of the whole Body of Christ?

b. In what ways are the roles of lay persons, deacons, priests, and bishops similar to each other? In what ways do they differ?

c. How do you understand the priest's central task in pastoral care? (Solving other people's problems? Giving answers? Helping one come to a resolution on their own problems? etc.)

THE ORDAINED MINISTRY

Session 5: The Cost of Ministry

Collect: Holy Cross Day - BCP 244

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:17 - 6:16

St. Matthew 9:35 - 10:39

Reading: "The Catechism"

Sin and Redemption - BCP 848-849

Prayer: A Song of Penitence - BCP 90

a. The scriptures here reference personal costs in engaging in ministry in the name of Jesus. What does it mean to you to "take up your cross?"

b. When a person is under Holy Orders, does the idea of "taking up one's cross and following Jesus" mean something different than it does for a lay person?

c. As a new creation and an ambassador for Christ, how might we work toward reconciliation in the world? When we engage the world around us as ambassadors, what rewards will we have? What costs might we expect?

THE ORDAINED MINISTRY

Session 6: The Discipline of Ministry

Collect: Second Sunday of Easter - BCP 224

Scripture: Exodus 20:1 - 20

1 Corinthians 9:16-27

St. John 21:15 - 19

Reading: "The Catechism"

The Ministry - BCP 855-856

Prayer: The Song of Zechariah - BCP 92

- a. In what way do we demonstrate the new covenant of reconciliation in our lives?
- b. How do we reflect God's place in our lives? How do we feed Christ's sheep? Who are Christ's sheep?
- c. How do we prepare ourselves and nourish ourselves for being ministers of the new covenant?
- d. What examples in these scripture passages help us to shape our daily life and ministry in a disciplined fashion?
- e. What are the disciplines and duties common to all Christians? To particular orders (Bishop, Priest, Deacon, Lay) within the church?

PRAYER AND MINISTRY

Session 7: Prayer of Union

Collect: Of a Saint III - BCP 250

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 6:12-21

St. John 17

Reading: "The Catechism"

God the Son - BCP 849-850

Prayer: The Second Song of Isaiah - BCP 86

a. With whom (or what) do we desire to become united in our prayer of union?

b. What are some ways we can open ourselves to, or increase our awareness of the presence of God and of Christ within us?

c. What does it mean to be united with the saints on earth AND the saints in heaven?

d. In what way can the prayer of silence, non-verbal or listening prayer, be a prayer of union - with God - with others?

e. How can our prayer of union with God and others lead us into mission within the church and outside its walls?

PRAYER AND MINISTRY

Session 8: The Faithfulness of God

Collect: For Quiet Confidence - BCP 832

Scripture: Lamentations 3:21-33

Romans 8:31-39

St. Matthew 5:1-12; 6:19-24

Reading: "The Catechism"

Human Nature - BCP 845 - 846

God the Father - BCP 846

Prayer: You are God - BCP 95

a. In what ways can "sitting in solitude and silence" increase our awareness of God's faithfulness and God's love?

b. What are some of the ways we learn to trust in God?

c. What experiences have you had which have increased your faith and trust in God?

d. How can you show to the world the love of God that is in you?

APPENDIX

Completion of the Final Report by the Discernment Committee

When the material in the Discernment Workbook has been covered, the Discernment Committee will meet without the Discerning Person for a Pre-Review Conversation, to review notes and to use the template to begin the drafting of an initial report, commenting on the gifts, growing edges, and making a recommendation to continue exploring either lay or ordained ministry.

The Discernment Committee, with the Rector (or Bishop's Designee) and the Discerning Person will then meet to share the observations, insights, and recommendations of the Discernment Committee and to engage in a conversation, incorporating the Discerning Person's response and input. If necessary, the Discernment Committee will then meet another time without the Discerning Person to form the final report. The final report is sent to the Discerning Person.

Prayer and blessing will be an integral part of the final meeting, with the option for the laying on of hands in blessing the Discerning Person in their gifts and call to build up the Body of Christ.

If the Discerning Person desires to continue towards ordained ministry, the Discernment Committee sends the final report to the Rector (or Bishop's Designee), the Bishop, and the Vestry. The Discernment Committee's work is done.

Please use the **Final Report Template** provided by the COM. The report should contain the following:

- A summary of discernment committee meetings, participants, and process.
- A profile of the nominee, including time of membership in the congregation, various ministries in the congregation and community, and other background information.
- A candid assessment by the discernment committee as a group and/or if necessary, from individuals not in agreement. It includes details of both gifts for ministry and growing edges.

Next Steps for the Discerning Person:

Complete the Nomination Application Form and send it to the Vestry before they consider the Final Report. Request the form from the Bishop's Assistant.

Next Steps for the Rector and Vestry:

To nominate the person, complete the Parish Letter of Support Form and send it and the Nomination Application Form to the Diocesan Office. Request the form from the Bishop's Assistant.