

**The Episcopal Diocese of Long Island
Commission on Ministry**

*Process, Timeline, and Benchmarks for those
Discerning a Call to the*

Priesthood

The following document outlines the process for those exploring a call to the priesthood in the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island as though a “seeker,” God willing and the People consenting, were to proceed entirely through every step that leads to ordination.

Part I: Discernment, Exploration and Assessment

Anytime

Clergy and lay leadership encourage and identify members of the congregation who exhibit compelling signs of a call and evidence of gifts indicative of the priesthood. If there is a strong sense of call, the rector or clergy in charge may accompany the “seeker” to the Diocesan Day of Discernment for Ordained Ministry. (n.b. a “seeker” is a lay member who is interested in exploring the formal discernment process).

1st Saturday in March (9am-12pm) - Mercer School of Theology

Day of Discernment

This is a morning-long event sponsored by the Commission on Ministry for “seekers” exploring a call to the diaconate, priesthood or religious life. Lay leaders from the diocese who satisfy the following requirements may attend:

- a. Must have the clear and compelling support of their rector/clergy-in-charge
- b. Must be Confirmed/Received active, faithful members of a local congregation
- c. Have a strong sense of call to the ordained ministry
- d. Have an earned Bachelor’s degree
- e. Evidence gifts necessary for serving the needs of the changing church
- f. Rector/clergy-in-charge agrees to attend the Day of Discernment with the “seeker.”

At the conclusion of the Day of Discernment each “seeker,” if there are compelling reasons for them to enter discernment, completes a **Notice of Interest (Form S-22)** stating their desire to further explore ordained ministry as well as a Letter of Endorsement by the “seeker’s” cleric, submitted to the Commission on Ministry at 36 Cathedral Avenue, Garden City, N.Y. 11530

- a. **Notice of Interest (Form S-22)** (completed by the “seeker” – submitted by the clergy)
- b. **Letter of Endorsement** from the rector/clergy-in-charge stating their support for the “seeker” who feels called to enter the formal discernment process.

Late March/Early April

Diocesan Discernment Committees begin their work

The Commission on Ministry will create discernment groups for those who continue to show a strong sense of call to the priesthood (n.b. We do not encourage or recognize parish-based discernment committees and processes). Each committee will be composed of no more than three to four aspirants, in addition to each aspirant’s companion (selected in consultation with his/her priest). Two members of DCOM will also serve on the **Discernment Committee**, with one of these DCOM members serving as the Committee chair. *Attendance by ALL members at*

ALL meetings is mandatory. The work of this committee is outlined in “Guidelines for Discernment Committees.” During this timeframe, aspirants must complete and submit to The Commission on Ministry, 36 Cathedral Avenue, Garden City, NY.

- a. **Confidentiality Release (Form A-21)**
- b. Resume/CV
- c. College Transcript/s
- d. Autobiography with the theme of one’s unfolding sense of call;
- e. Evidence of SHE-CAP training (check Mercer catalog for schedule)
- f. Evidence of having participated Racial Awareness Program (cf. Mercer)
- g. Reflective Response and Evaluation of Discernment Committee (what has been gleaned from participating in the Discernment Committee)

Discernment Committee work concludes late summer with reports being presented to the Commission on Ministry Core group no later than August 1st

Late August/ Early September

Discernment Committee Assessments are completed

Discernment Committee Assessments must be completed and submitted to the Commission on Ministry at 36 Cathedral Avenue, Garden City, N.Y. 11530. COM Core Team reviews assessment forms. At this point some will be invited to take the next step in the discernment process. Those who are not continuing on in the ordination discernment process will be invited to explore a deepening call to lay ministry. These communications will come from the Commission on Ministry in the form of a letter to each aspirant.

Continuing Discernment

Aspirants continuing on in the discernment process will be required to complete the following tasks by December 1st.

- a. Application of Nominee for Postulancy (**Form P-21**)
- b. Vestry Endorsement of Nominee for Postulancy (**Form P-22**)
- c. Behavioral Screening Questionnaire (**Form P-23**)
- d. Psychological Evaluation (Kenwood Psychological Services) (**Form P-24**)
- e. Release of Information to Diocese (**Form P-26**)
- f. Required Medical examination (**Form P-27**)
- g. Assessment of Aspirant by Priest (**Form P-28**)
- h. Criminal Background Check
- i. A check for \$1,100.00 made payable to Diocese of Long Island to partially offset the costs for the Psychological Evaluation and background check (\$550 from the sponsoring parish; \$550 from the individual). This figure can change from year to year depending on fluctuating costs of exams.

The sponsoring clergy will receive notice that the aspirant has been invited to the continue on in the discernment process and in the spirit of Canon III.8.2a(1) will be requested to cover 1/3 of

the costs of the psychological examinations and background check. Notice of the parish's financial support for the nominee should be conveyed to the Commission in writing.

Invitation to Postulancy Conference

With all the foregoing data, discernment group process and information in hand, the Commission and the Bishop will make final decisions as to those who will be invited to attend the Postulancy Conference. Invitations to the Postulancy Conference will come mid December, prior to Christmas. Those not continuing on toward the Postulancy Conference will be encouraged to further discern a deepening call to lay ministry or another ministry in service of the Gospel.

The Postulancy Conference - 1st Saturday in February

The Postulancy Conference is a day-long retreat with the Commission on Ministry and the Bishop that seeks to prayerfully consider the nominees strength of call, fitness and readiness, and knowledge, gifts and skills for ordained ministry. This is the meeting from which an aspirant will or will not become a postulant. **Rectors/clergy-in-charge and discernment committee “companions” are not invited to the Postulancy Conference.** An invitation to the Postulancy Conference does not ensure that an aspirant will be made a Postulant.

Following the Postulancy Conference the Bishop considers the recommendations of the Commission. All participants receive notice of a decision as to whether or not they are being made a postulant by phone in about two weeks following the Postulancy Conference; formal letters to follow.

Part II: Postulancy, Formation, and Ongoing Discernment

Early March (following Postulancy Conference)

Postulant Retreat with Bishop and COM Chair

The Bishop meets with the new postulants in order to share his vision for ministry, outline expectations, discuss formation plans, and to establish a relationship with the new postulants. This generally occurs as an overnight retreat held on Long Island. Following the retreat, each postulant will be assigned a “shepherd,” a lay or ordained member of the Commission on Ministry who serves as a companion and resource for the postulant.

Formation Plan Established

Postulants will work with the chief academic officer of Mercer to explore an appropriate formal seminary setting, though on some rare occasions alternative formation plans are developed for postulants studying for the priesthood. These formation plans will be handled on a case-by-case basis. The bishop must approve the final formation plan. It is very important at this point that aspirants understand the various seminary deadlines and work expeditiously to submit their applications in a timely manner, as necessary.

Ember Day Letters

All postulants are expected to submit letters to the bishop at the 4 Ember Days of the liturgical calendar. The purpose of the Ember Day letter is to apprise the bishop of the state of your life, discernment, formation etc. The letter should demonstrate a measure of depth, reflection and include some of the postulant's personal story.

Financing Studies

Through a generous bequest from the George Mercer, Jr. Scholarship Fund, we are able to cover the costs of the tuition and in some instances room and healthcare for postulants studying at seminary. Further information and proper paperwork should be obtained from the Mercer School of Theology.

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)

Each Seminarian studying for priesthood must have one unit of CPE. This requirement is often completed during the summer between the first and second years of seminary, as the seminarian and their advisors recommend. We encourage seminarians studying for priesthood in this diocese to consider our program at St. John's Hospital. **An official copy of CPE Certification should be provided to the bishop's office at the completion of this training.**

Academic Transcripts/Certifications

Academic transcripts and any certificates of study should be provided to the bishop's office for the personal record file of each postulant studying for holy orders. It is the responsibility of the postulant to ensure that his or her transcripts are forwarded to the Bishop's Office for his or her permanent record file.

Following the First Year of Seminary

Throughout the academic year, the postulant receives the prayers and support of the church, his or her sponsoring congregation and their shepherd. A representative from the Commission on Ministry Core Team will be in touch with seminarians as they complete their first year for an opportunity to meet, share a meal and reflect. It is the canonical responsibility of the Commission to attest to the ongoing formation of each postulant.

The Middler Year Review

Each seminarian will receive a formal review by the seminary toward the end of their second full year of studies. This review, called the **Midler Year Review**, is to be completed by academic supervisors at the seminary and submitted to the bishop's office by early May, the latest. It is the seminarian's responsibility to coordinate these expectations with his or her academic advisor.

Spring- Early Summer

Application for Candidacy and Candidacy Retreat

At the conclusion of the Middler Year, postulants, representatives from the Commission and the Bishop gather for a partial-day retreat, during the month of May. The purpose of this retreat is to provide ongoing support for the seminarians, to hear about their formation experience and for the postulants to have their individual Candidacy interviews with the Bishop. During this time, the bishop will consider the postulant's readiness and fitness for the ordained life, review his expectations for clergy serving in this diocese, what it means to "share in the councils of the church," the authority of the bishop in relationship to the clergy, and the substance of the ordination texts contained in the ordination liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer (BCP p. 525).

The following should be completed and submitted to the Bishop's Office prior to the Candidacy Retreat.

- a. Application for Candidacy (**Form C-21**)
- b. Vestry Endorsement of Candidate for Holy Orders (**Form C-22**)

Meeting with Standing Committee for Candidacy – June

Postulants applying for Candidacy will meet with the Standing Committee during their June meeting pursuant to Canon III.8.4b.

Office For Transition Ministry Portfolio

Once Candidacy is granted, the candidate shall be given access by the Office for Transition Ministry (OTM) portfolio through the office of the Canon to the Ordinary/Transition Minister. It shall be the responsibility of the Candidate to make such contact with the Bishop's Office.

General Ordination Exam (GOE)

Arrangements will be made by the bishop's office for Candidates for Holy Orders to take their General Ordination Examinations in late fall of their third year of seminary. This scheduling process happens around the same time that candidacy interviews occur. The GOEs are paid for by the Mercer Scholarship Fund and are administered in early January. Questions about the GOE should be directed to the Mercer School.

Part III. Ordination, Exploring First Assignments, and Ongoing Formation

Application for Transitional Diaconate

Candidates for Holy Orders should submit their **Application for the Transitional Diaconate** and **Vestry Endorsement** no later than September 1st.

- a. Application for Ordination to the Transitional Diaconate (**Form O-23**)
- b. Vestry Endorsement for Transitional Diaconate (**Form O-24**)

Meeting with Standing Committee prior to Ordination to Transitional Diaconate

Candidates preparing for the Transitional Diaconate must meet in person with the Standing Committee during their November meeting, appointment to be made through the bishop's office.

Ordination to the Transitional Diaconate – Epiphanytide (Sat. before Ash Wednesday)

Generally speaking, ordination to the Transitional Diaconate will happen in the Cathedral of the Incarnation, late February just prior to Ash Wednesday -- "God willing and the people consenting." Invitations for the Ordination to the Transitional Diaconate will be printed and made available through the bishop's office. The Bishop will not ordain a Candidate to the Transitional Diaconate unless there is the promise of a first cure coming squarely into focus.

Application for Ordination to the Priesthood

The Application and Vestry Endorsement for Ordination to the Priesthood must be completed and submitted to the bishop's office no later than June 1st

- a. Application for Ordination to Priesthood (**Form O-25**)
- b. Vestry Endorsement for Ordination to the Priesthood (**Form O-26**)

The Standing Committee will not meet in person with Transitional Deacons applying for Priesthood. However, they will review the ordination file of each Candidate during their June meeting to ensure that canonical requirements have been met.

Ordination to the Priesthood – Early September - Saturday after Labor Day

Generally speaking, ordination to the priesthood will happen in early September, either in the Cathedral of the Incarnation or on some occasions in the church where the ordinand/s has been called to serve -- "God willing and the people consenting." (nb. By Canon, The ordination to priesthood may not happen earlier than 6 months following ordination to the diaconate). The Transitional Deacon will not directly meet with the Standing Committee. However, the Standing Committee will review the ordination file of each to ensure that canonical requirements have been met.