

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

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

Diaconate

The following document outlines the process for those exploring a call to the diaconate 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 diaconate. 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,” completes a **Notice of Interest Form** stating a) their desire to further explore ordained ministry; or b) that they do not intend to explore ordained ministry at this time. If the “seeker” does desire to enter the formal discernment process the following must be 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 ordination as deacon (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. 11530, the following:

- 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. DCOM 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 continue 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 at an overnight retreat. 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.

Ember Day Letters

All postulants (diaconate and priesthood) 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 and reflection.

Diaconal Formation Plan Overview

The postulant's formation will be directed by the School for Ministry of the Mercer School of Theology. This formation will include three years of theological study prior to ordination and an appropriate field education assignment with a congregation or community other than the sponsoring church. The School for Ministry faculty will assess theological readiness for

ordination.

I. During the period from acceptance as a postulant until the beginning of the first formation year in September, the postulant will participate in a course of study offered through the School for Ministry designed to prepare the postulant to begin formal theological study at Mercer in September. The new postulant may also be asked, during this period prior to the academic year, to undertake reading as determined by the Mercer Faculty.

II. In September, formal academic learning and formation activities will begin for year one. The School for Ministry meets one Saturday monthly for instruction, prayer, and community. Between those meetings, students complete assigned reading and writing, as well as continue to serve and learn in their field placement and meet monthly with their spiritual director. The three-year Core Academic Program is described under the School for Ministry → Courses of Study tab on the Mercer website (www.mercershool.org)

III. Application for Candidacy (January of Formation Year Two)

During the month of January of their second year of formation, postulants for the diaconate will complete and submit their **Application for Candidacy (Form C-23)** and **Vestry Endorsement of Candidate for Holy Orders (Form C-24)** forms. These must be received by the bishop's office no later than January 20th of the individual's second year of formation in the School of Ministry. When the Application for Candidacy has been received by the bishop's office the following will occur.

- a. A meeting to take place during the month of May will be scheduled by the bishop's office for the postulant to meet with the Bishop regarding Candidacy.
- b. If Candidacy is encouraged by the bishop, a meeting with the Standing Committee shall then be scheduled to take place during the following month of June.

IV. Application for Ordination to the Diaconate

During the month of August, prior to the third year of formation, candidates ought to complete the **Application for Ordination to the Diaconate (Form O-21)** and **Vestry Endorsement for Ordination to the Diaconate (Form O-22)** with the sponsoring parish. The completed form is to be submitted to the Bishop's Office no later than August 20th. Applicants for ordination as Deacon will then meet with the Standing Committee in November of the second year of formation.

VIII. Assessment of Theological Readiness/Examinations/Certifications

Arrangements will be made by the Mercer School Faculty for Candidates for ordination to be examined regarding their readiness for ordination and ministry as Deacon, in a form approved by the Bishop. Such assessment will be ongoing throughout the candidates' formation at the School of Ministry. A separate assessment of theological learning will take place at the conclusion of the post-ordination third year of formation.

Academic assessments by School for Ministry instructors, and any certificates of study, will be kept at the Mercer School office for the personal record file of each person preparing for ordination to the diaconate.

IX. Ordination to Diaconate

The date for ordination to the Diaconate will be set by the Bishop's Office. It may be expected generally that the ordination will occur on a Saturday in January during the third year of formation.

X. Ministry of Deacons and Mentoring

The placement of newly ordained deacons to ministry in the diocese of Long Island will be made by the Bishop's Office. Mentoring of newly ordained deacons throughout the first three years of ministry will be provided as needed through the Mercer School of Theology.