

APPENDIX A: Congregation Discernment Team Instructions

Forming a Congregational Discernment Team (CDT)

The COM Consultant will contact the Priest-in-Charge and provide that individual with an overview of the CDT selection process.

- The Priest-in-Charge meets with the aspirant to select individuals from the congregation who will make up the CDT.
- Working together, the Priest-in-Charge and the aspirant form a CDT that includes people who know the aspirant at some level and those who do not know the aspirant. The CDT is comprised of lay people.
- The appointment of five members is a wise practice, as circumstances sometimes require a group member to withdraw before the process is completed.
- Ideally one member of the discernment group is also a member of the Vestry/Bishop's Committee/Chapter.
- The COM does not recommend that the Priest-in-Charge be a member of the CDT, although it is helpful if the Priest-in-Charge attends the first meeting of the CDT along with the COM Consultant.
- One of the CDT members will be designated as the convener or chairperson. Another member of the DT should be appointed scribe so as to keep highlights (not copious notes) and be prepared to construct the first draft of the letter of response to the Priest-in-Charge.

Meetings

The CDT needs to meet a minimum of four times with the aspirant. Additional meetings could be called if needed, but only in consultation with the Priest-in-Charge and the COM Consultant. The meetings should be held about two weeks apart and should last no longer than 90 minutes.

Preparation

The COM finds the book *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community* by Suzanne Farnham et al, to be a valuable resource to understanding effective dynamics in a CDT. Additionally, the COM finds that the use of the book *Let Your Life Speak* by Parker Palmer as a succinct articulation of the experience of discernment. Both of these books are available on loan from the Diocesan Library.

NOTE: Discernment is an act of the community, which in this case is experienced in a slice of that community through a discernment team. Together this team listens to the Holy Spirit speak into the soul of one in their midst not only for the sake of one person but for the entire church. While the members of the CDT often find themselves focused on the vocational call of one individual, the results of such work enhances the personal discernment of each participant within the team.

Tasks

The primary tasks of the Discernment Team are

- to help discern God's call,
 - to refine the aspirant's ability to articulate the reason(s) s/he believes s/he is called to the priesthood or diaconate,
- and
- to be a support for the aspirant whether or not the ordination process continues.

NOTE: It is important to remember that this CDT does not function as a gatekeeper to pass final judgment on the aspirant's sense of call, nor is it an advocacy group whose mission is to push the aspirant toward ordination.

Meeting Content

First Meeting: CDT, COM Consultant, Aspirant

This is an organizational meeting only. The COM Consultant will meet with the CDT to provide instruction and guidance for the structure of the meetings. The convener and scribe should be appointed. The COM Consultant will outline the meeting organization and construction, provide information regarding discernment and answer any question from the CDT or the aspirant.

NOTE: As the baseline, foundation, and touchtone for discernment, all parties should refer to the Examination (The Book of Common Prayer, p. 531 priesthood, p 543 diaconate) and answer the question, **how does this charge resonate with the aspirant's sense of call?**

Second Meeting: CDT, Aspirant

Prior to this meeting, each member of the CDT will give thought to and be prepared to share with their fellow CDT members a 5 – 10 minute response to the following:

- Tell us about your religious upbringing.
- How do you nurture your relationship with God? What practices (formal / informal prayer, worship, journaling, study, retreat) assist you?
- What person(s) have had a significant influence on your spiritual life? Who you are today is in part due to their influence on you.
- What defining moment (a decision you made, an event you participated in, an experience you had) has shaped your spiritual life.

NOTE: The aspirant will be present as an observer and listener for this meeting in preparation for his/her own presentation at the third meeting..

Third Meeting: CDT, Aspirant

This meeting is dedicated to the aspirant telling her/his spiritual autobiography to the DT. The spiritual autobiography should be written but not read. After the telling of the story, then copies are distributed. These can be used as reference for later questioning and reflection. The aspirant, if he/she moves forward, will have to submit several essay questions (Form 5), and the spiritual autobiography will be helpful in preparing written responses for presentation to the COM.

Fourth Meeting: CDT, Aspirant

The CDT members will ask open-ended questions allowing the aspirant to experience self-discovery regarding their call. The discussion might focus on the following as initial points of exploration and discussion:

- Tell us about your experience in the Episcopal Church.
- What is your understanding of ministry, the different functions of the laity, deacons, priests, and bishops?
- Why do you seek priesthood(diaconate) rather than another vocation?
- Who is God to you?
- Describe for us this sense of calling that you have toward priesthood (diaconate). What is it about the priesthood (diaconate) that draws you to this vocation and not another?
- Describe for us your prayer life. Who has been particularly significant in helping you grow in your relationship with God?
- Describe for us ways in which you have demonstrated leadership?
- Describe for us an incident in which you experienced and dealt with conflict.
- What is your sense of the world beyond this community? What are the needs of the Church as you understand them?
- Tell us of a time when your passion to serve others has moved you to action.
- What do you do to relax? How do you balance work, leisure, family, and care for self?

Subsequent questioning and self-discovery meetings will be held as needed.

Fifth Meeting: CDT and COM Consultant

At some point the CDT will want to meet without the aspirant to arrive at a decision about their findings to be included in their report. Several options are available to the DT:

- The DT believes the aspirant is called to priesthood (diaconate) and is ready to write their report to

the Priest-in-Charge. The report needs to be written, approved by all members and signed by all members of the CDT (Form 3).

- The CDT is unsure or divided about the aspirant's call to priesthood (diaconate). A report should be constructed to portray the full spectrum of the CDT's observations, concerns, unanswered questions and conclusions. A subsequent meeting of the CDT with the Rector, Vicar, or Priest-in-Charge, and in absence of the aspirant, needs to be held. How the results of the CDT's conclusions will be dispersed to the aspirant is at the Priest-in-Charge's discretion.
- The CDT does not believe the aspirant is prepared to move forward for a variety of reasons. A subsequent meeting of the CDT and the Priest-in-Charge needs to be held to discuss next steps and how this information will be given to the aspirant.

Subsequent meetings could be held with or without the aspirant depending upon the discretion of the Rector, Vicar, or Priest-in-Charge. The CDT could be called upon to continue to meet with the aspirant for support as the person moves through the process. That decision must be made in consultation with the Priest-in-Charge and may be directed by the COM, the COM Liaison and/or the Bishop. The final report may or may not be shared with the aspirant at the discretion of the Rector, Vicar, or Priest-in-Charge.

The CDT's report will be shared with the Priest-in-Charge by the facilitator of the CDT. Only the portions of the CDT report selected by the Priest-in-Charge to omit inappropriate information for dissemination, if any, will be shared with the Vestry, and after nomination by the Vestry, Form 3 will be signed and submitted to the Bishop and the COM by November 15. If the Vestry approves the aspirant, the discernment report will be sent forward with the Rector, Vicar, or Priest-in-Charge's letter of recommendation to the Bishop's Office.

Report Content

The content of the report should include:

Use of these prompts in preparing the Report of the Congregational Discernment Team is recommended. The CDT may find it helpful to selectively use only some of the prompts, disregarding those that do not seem to fit the aspirant they serve. The Report should be in memo form, addressed to the Rector, Vicar, or Priest-in-Charge and Vestry/Bishop's Committee. If the aspirant is nominated for Postulancy, the Report will also be read by the Bishop and the Diocesan Commission on Ministry (COM). Recommended length is 500 to 800 words. Generally the report is compiled by one committee member based on input from all committee members. In writing the report, it is helpful to bear in mind that the Bishop and the COM understand the characteristics of the call to diaconate or priesthood to be as described in the Examination from the liturgy for the Ordination of a Priest which begins on page 525 in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) and for a Deacon which begins on page 537.

1. A statement indicating how often the CDT met, a list of the team members, and a line or two of what each member does (inside/outside the church) and how long they've known (or not known) the potential nominee.
2. Describe the process of coming together as a CDT. Were there aspects of group-bonding with which

the group struggled? Was the material in the book *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community* helpful? Are there positive aspects of this group-bonding experience which the group wishes to share?

3. In the view of this group, how important are the Sacraments to this aspirant? How has the group observed the aspirant relating to the Sacraments?
4. Can the group give a specific example of a way in which this aspirant has drawn others closer into community or into closer relationship to Christ?
5. Does the group agree that this aspirant fashions her/his life in accordance with the Good News of Jesus Christ? If so, please give an example to illustrate.
6. Would each member of the group feel comfortable turning to this aspirant in a time of personal crisis?(NOTE: it is suggested that each group member share their own answer to this question The COM recognizes that some people may have discomfort for reasons not specific to the aspirant; e.g. if someone older than the aspirant has difficulty turning to a younger adult for support or counsel.)
7. Does the group experience the aspirant as someone 'reclaiming the Great Commission' (Matthew 28:16- 20)? If so, please give a specific example.
8. Does the group believe that this aspirant is open to formation as a Priest or Deacon in this Church?
9. The liturgy for The Ordination includes a vow of obedience to the Bishop (p. 526, BCP). Does your Committee believe that this aspirant can balance dynamic leadership with obedience? Why or why not?
10. Does the group affirm the aspirant's sense of call to the order (priest or deacon) to which the aspirant aspires?
11. Does the group recommend that this aspirant be nominated by the Vestry/Bishop's Committee, the first step in the ordination process?

Structure of the CDT's Report

- Content is compiled by one member of the committee (i.e. chairperson) – ALL members must sign the report. It should use a memorandum format addressed to the Priest-in-Charge and the Vestry/Bishop's Committee. Approximately 500 to 800 words in length.
- Please include a statement indicating how often the committee met, a list of the committee members, and a line or two describing what each member does (inside/outside the church) and how long they've known (or not known) the potential nominee.
- The Content (see above) is to be in narrative text and should reflect the CDT's conversations with the aspirant as well as their reflections in discussing the questions above.