Guidelines for the Parish Discernment Team

*These Guidelines should be reviewed together by the whole Team at their first meeting.*

The task of the Parish Discernment Team (PDT) is to assist the Rector and Vestry in discernment of God’s will for Aspirants who feel called to ordained ministry. This discernment, accomplished in the context of the Aspirant’s home church with lay peers, is of critical importance. Either you will affirm the Aspirant’s call to ordained ministry or you will not. You will also assist in discerning to which order of ministry the individual is called; please do not assume one over the other without careful consideration. (See the earlier section on Deacons and Priests.) You may be able to affirm a call to ordained ministry yet sense that it is not the right time. If you are not able to affirm a call to ordination, it is our hope that the PDT will continue to work with the former Aspirant until you, and the Rector, have helped him/her find the unique place in the Body of Christ that the Lord has prepared in advance for this person to do.

The task of discernment is truly an awesome responsibility, especially as it has direct implications for future decisions of another’s life. This work should be undertaken with a humble awareness of the privilege it is to participate in what God is doing in someone else’s life, and in the life of the Church. The PDT is not an advocacy group, nor a support group. Instead, its goal is to hear from the Lord about the future direction of the Aspirant’s life and speak truth in love through the leading of the Holy Spirit, whether that is a “yes,” a “no,” or a “not now.” Please ask yourself if you are willing and able to give the Aspirant, your fellow churchgoer, whichever of these three determinations you arrive at.

Your recommendation will be given consideration by the Vestry of your parish, who along with the Rector, will decide whether or not a person should continue in the process toward ordination.

The composition of the PDT, including designating a Chair, is the prerogative of the Rector. A majority of the PDT will be of the Rector’s choosing. Each person on the PDT will sign the Theological Statement that our Aspirant is asked to sign (see Appendix B). If the Aspirant is a woman, the Bishop asks that the PDT members be open to the ordination of women as this is not the arena for her to have to address or defend that issue.

The Aspirant, and his/her spouse or fiancée, should be invited to attend some of the sessions with the PDT. During the first two times with the Aspirant (or however long it takes you to get there), the PDT should be seeking to form an understanding of the Aspirant’s ***relationship with God***, his/her devotional life and discipline, and the degree to which he/she has a good understanding of worship and witness. The last half of your work should focus on the Aspirant’s ***relationships with others*** and ordained ministry potential. You may choose to begin with the end in mind and use the Evaluation Form questions to guide your time together.

The PDT should be aware that this work is intensely personal for the Aspirant and will be most effectively conducted in an atmosphere of trust and respect. PDT members will assure the Aspirant of the confidential nature of this work, help the Aspirant grow in his/her self-understanding, where he/she is gifted and where grace needs to be sought. The PDT may request the Aspirant develop and complete a ministry project in the parish, especially if he/she has not been deeply involved in the life of the parish. With concurrence of the Rector, the PDT may also request to receive copies of the written work the Aspirant is doing for the Diocese.

There is no set number of meetings required for the PDT, though we see this taking four to six months in most settings. After the second meeting, and after every meeting thereafter, the PDT Chair will communicate with the Rector. The Rector and PDT Chair will determine when the work of the PDT is finished. The PDT Chair will complete the evaluation. This document and the signed theological statements will be sent to the Diocesan Office along with the Vestry Recommendation.

Parish Discernment Team Report Form

The following is to be completed by the Chair of the Parish Discernment Team (PDT), though every member of the PDT should have a copy with which to work.

Aspirant’s Name:

Parish, Location:

Names of PDT Members, include name of Chair and email address:

Date of first PDT meeting:

Did each PDT Member sign the Theological Statement (see Appendix B, p. 20)? yes

Please attach copies of each to this Evaluation.

1. How long have you known the Aspirant and in what context?
2. How does this person’s life reflect the love of God?
3. What have you learned about this person’s devotional life and discipline?
4. Is this person regular in attending worship and participating in the liturgy?
5. How does this person give evidence of an awareness of God’s involvement in ordinary and everyday events as well as in times of crisis?
6. Describe the Aspirant’s attitude to learning. Is he/she a life-long learner? Is he/she teachable and able to learn from other perspectives? Do you believe the aspirant to be academically capable of meeting the challenges of theological education and of the ministry?
7. What have you learned about the Aspirant’s family life?
8. What have you been able to learn from the Aspirant’s employment history?
9. How does the Aspirant use his/her leisure time? How does the Aspirant spend Sabbath time?
10. How does the Aspirant demonstrate a servant’s heart, being able to serve without the need for recognition, and to be responsive to praise without being dependent on it?
11. Describe the Aspirant’s ability to develop and maintain relationships in the parish.
12. How do people outside and within the parish regard the Aspirant?
13. How does the Aspirant encourage and enable other people’s ministries, both lay and ordained?
14. How has the Aspirant demonstrated leadership and service in the parish and the community? Can he/she accept the authority of others?
15. What are the Aspirant’s greatest strengths for ministry?
16. In what areas does the Aspirant especially need to seek grace?
17. To the best of your ability, and understanding that not all are gifted in all areas, comment about the Aspirant’s ministry skills in these areas (as many as you have observed):
    1. Preaching
    2. Teaching
    3. Evangelism
    4. Group leadership
    5. Worship leadership
    6. Pastoral visitation
    7. Counseling
    8. Interpersonal relationships
    9. Administration
    10. Conflict management
    11. Initiation of new ministry
18. How would you describe the Aspirant’s potential for ordained ministry based on your own observation and knowledge of the aspirant at this time?
19. What do you feel is motivating the Aspirant’s pursuit of ordination?
20. To which order do you believe this person is being called?

Vocational Deacon

Priest

Please summarize in a few sentences the reasons for this discernment as to which order.

1. How well do the following characteristics describe the aspirant (use appropriate order for Aspirant)?

VOCATIONAL DEACON

*Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued,3 not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 11 Their wives (or women) likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. 13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:8-13)*

PRIEST (PRESBYTER)

*An overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife,2 sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,* ***3*** *not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.* ***4*** *He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive,* ***5*** *for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?* ***6*** *He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.* ***7*** *Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3)*

*This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—* ***6*** *if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers5 and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.* ***7*** *For an overseer,as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,* ***8*** *but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.* ***9*** *He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. (Titus 1:5-9)*

1. Knowing that no clergy person has all the spiritual gifts, would you recruit this person to serve your parish as an ordained leader if the appropriate position were available? Can you describe how you envision the Aspirant fulfilling the Bishop’s charge from the Ordinal (above)?
2. Intuitively, do you have any reservations about recommending this person to the Vestry, the Bishop and the Ordination Preparation Team for continuing in the Ordination Process?
3. Is there anything further you think we should know?

Signature of PCT Chair

Date:

Please submit completed work by mail or email:

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