Parish Discernment Committee Handbook

*Guidelines for Assisting Others in*

*Discernment for Ordination*

The Anglican Diocese in

New England

The Anglican Diocese in New England is a family of churches united in Word, Spirit, Sacrament and Mission, and committed to the Reawakening of New England. We are seeking missional leaders who have the character, gifting, gospel passion, and deep commitment to Jesus Christ and His Church necessary to exercise fruitful gospel ministry in post-Christendom New England.

The canons of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) outline the requirements for those who are to be ordained into Holy Orders. God's call on an individual is discerned through His body, the Church, through which Jesus Christ strengthens, confirms, and grows the various gifts among us, including those of leadership. The diocesan bishop makes the final determination whether an individual should be ordained into Holy Orders in our diocese, but the process begins at the local congregation and involves multiple levels of discernment before a recommendation is made to the bishop.

An individual who senses a call to ordained ministry first meets with his/her parish priest. If the priest senses the individual has a call to ordained ministry, a Parish Discernment Committee (PDC) is then constituted to continue the discernment of the individual’s call. That PDC is you! If you discern that the individual has a call to ordained ministry, you will recommend him/her to the vestry. They must then decide whether to recommend him/her to the diocese. If they do, the applicant moves to the diocesan assessment level. First, s/he is interviewed by two diocesan assessors, who discern whether to send him/her to the full Diocesan Discernment Committee (DDC) for a final determination whether to recommend to the bishop that s/he be ordained in Holy Orders. This process is long and involved, but the sacred nature of the ordained ministry demands that we act with all due diligence in discerning the call.

**The Parish Discernment Process**

So, what is your job? You assist the Rector and Vestry in discerning whether an individual applicant is called to ordained ministry. You are the people who have seen that person the most and know him/her the best. Therefore, your input is vital.

How do you do your work? The word “discern” means “to perceive or detect,” so your job is to help perceive or detect whether an individual has a call to ordained ministry. You will need to explore four areas:

1. Call

2. Character

3. Maturity

4. Ministry Experience

What are we looking for in our ordained leaders? The ACNA canons require that they be “baptized and confirmed, sufficiently instructed in Holy Scripture and in the doctrine, discipline and worship of the ACNA, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and a wholesome example and pattern to the entire flock of Christ.” ACNA Cn. III.2.1. They also must meet the requirements found in Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus. They should have a passion for the gospel, a lifelong pursuit of spiritual transformation through apprenticeship to Jesus, as the core of their life, a history of fruitful ministry, and a commitment to the core values of the ADNE and to the Reawakening of New England.

The parish discernment process is a series of conversations (it can be as many as 2-4 meetings) between you and the person seeking ordination to assess his/her readiness in the four areas listed above. If the individual is married, his/her spouse is required to attend at least one of the sessions.

When you have finished meeting with the individual, you will prepare a report for the vestry. Usually, a member of the PDC meets with the vestry to give an explanation of its findings.

A possible format for conversations with the applicant is as follows:

• Session 1: Questions about the applicant’s background, personal faith, life and calling, health of the marriage

• Session 2: Questions about his or her ministry and gifts

• Session 3: Follow up on particular questions or issues raised in first two conversations

• Session 4: Summary conversation, once again focused on things raised in earlier conversations.

It is important for these conversations not to be rushed, allowing both the individual and committee members enough time to ask and answer questions prayerfully and thoughtfully. If you can cover this ground in fewer than 4 sessions, that is fine. At the same time, you may add more sessions if you or the applicant feels it would be helpful.

**The Importance of Prayer**

Spiritual discernment comes through prayer, Scripture, and taking counsel together. Pray for yourself, the other committee members, and the applicant.

Ways to pray:

− For the applicant and committee members to be able to hear God’s call

− Pray for God to reveal his will

− Pray for unity

− Pray to see and hear clearly

− For discernment on the part of applicant and committee members

− For the ability to listen to other committee members, again listening to God’s voice in the midst of these conversations

− For the Holy Spirit’s presence during the conversations

− For wisdom

**Sample Discernment Questions**

In advance of your first meeting with the applicant, you will be given the diocesan application materials s/he has prepared. Those include an essay setting forth his/her life history, faith journey, gifting and ministry experience, and sense of call. You will also receive the applicant’s response to a number of questions regarding his/her theological understanding, personal spiritual life, and more. You can use those documents as a springboard for questions of the applicant. We have also included below some examples of questions you may choose to use. They are not, however, required. As long as you discuss the general categories brought up below, you can choose to do so in your own manner. Some questions create dialogue that may answer other questions. In this situation questions do not have to be asked again.

**Questions about personal faith and background**

• Tell us briefly about your personal faith.

− How did you come to know and follow Jesus Christ?

− How do you keep your faith lively? (personal disciplines? Prayer? Scripture?)

− What is the role of Scripture in your life? Be specific.

• Tell us about a time when following Christ was difficult for you.

• In what ways have you experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in your life?

• Tell us a little about your family– past and present. (parents/siblings/spouse/children).

What aspects of your family/personal life are nourishing and satisfying to you?

Tell us about your marriage.

**Questions about Call**

• Tell us about your sense of call to ordained ministry.

− How did you get to this point**?**

− What influences, or models have shaped your understanding of ordained ministry?

− What has led you to consider that ordained ministry is the best context for the exercising of your calling, gifts, passions, and skills?

• What experiences in your past seem to be consistent with this sense of call?

• How have others (who know you well) responded to your calling?

• What skills and experiences do you have that are in line with this sense of call? What gifts or skills would you most like to develop?

• What areas of ordained ministry would be challenging for you?

• Describe your understanding of ordained ministry

− What does the Bible say about ordination?

− All Christians are called to ministry…how is ordained ministry different? − What is the difference between the ministry of a priest? A deacon? A bishop?

• What does your spouse think and feel about this direction in your life?

• (To spouse): tell us about your thoughts and feelings about your spouse’s seeking ordination. How will this direction affect you and/or your family?

**Questions about Character & Maturity**

• Ordained ministry not only involves a deep relationship with God, it also demands fruitful relationships with others.

− Tell us about a person you have nurtured spiritually.

− Tell us about a situation in which you have had conflict with another person or group of persons. How did you handle it and what did you learn?

• What adjectives would people who know you use to describe you? How accurate are they?

• How do you relate to authority of others? In what ways have you exercised authority? − Tell us about a relationship with a boss or other superior that you learned from –either positive or negative.

• Where are you finding challenges or stress in your personal life?

• What things do you do for relaxation, refreshment, re-creation?

• Tell us about a tough season or situation and how you “rebounded” from it (or didn’t).

• What conversations have emerged with your family as a result of this direction? What else will need to be addressed?

• How do you think you will react to expectations the parish may put on your family, either fair or unfair?

• If Single, what do you see as the unique challenges in ministry for a single person?

• What supportive relationships and other supportive structures nourish you? How might they need to shift if you are ordained?

• What are your weaknesses?

**Questions about Ministry Involvement**

• Describe your relationship with your parish (or other community of faith.) Tell us something about your relationships with others, your involvement in activities, your involvement liturgically, etc.

• Tell us about a time when you shared your faith with someone else.

• In what contexts or situations are you most “yourself” or most “alive”?

**Instructions for Writing the Parish Discernment Committee Report**

The report should be finished within six (6) weeks of the final parish committee meeting.

We have provided below a report template to make it easier for PDC’s to write reports. A version can be downloaded from the diocesan website if you wish to type directly into it.

**Timeline**

The Diocesan Discernment Committee meets in late March/early April and October each year. Assuming your vestry agrees to recommend applicants to the diocesan level, it will take at least another 3-4 months before an applicant will be ready to meet with the DDC, as s/he will have to meet with the assessors and then undergo a psychological evaluation in the intervening time. The ability to schedule those events depends on the respective schedules of the applicant and the assessors, as well as the applicant and the psychologist.

**Parish Discernment Committee Report (Template)**

Applicant Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Meeting Date(s): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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| **Presenting Parish and Discernment Committee Member Names:**  |
| **Background/ Faith Information on Applicant:** Name, spouse’s name if applicable, age, time in parish. When did s/he come to faith? How does s/he describe his/her current relationship with the Lord?   |
| **Call to Ministry and Current Ministry Involvement:** How does s/he describe his/her call to ministry, and what is their understanding of that call? How is s/he currently serving? How do others respond to his/her call? |
| **Readiness for Ministry. Challenges and Growth Areas**:  |
| **Concerns and/or Areas for Follow up:** |
| **Summary and Recommendation:** .   |

Committee Chair Signature Date

SAMPLE Parish Discernment Committee Report

Applicant Name: \_\_\_\_*Mr. John Smith*\_\_\_\_\_\_ Meeting Date(s): \_\_*2/10/13, 3/2/13, 4/1/13*\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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| **Presenting Parish and Discernment Committee Member Names:** *Beloved in the Lord Anglican. Lane Anderson, Chair Bud Rogers, Jane Green, Susan Gorfield and Robert Kinn, members*  |
| **Background/ Faith Information on Applicant:** *Mr. Smith presents with an active and lively faith, though relatively young in the Lord. He reported that he came to Christ as a junior in college four years ago through the influence of his InterVarsity staff worker. He attended a Baptist church for a year but joined the Anglican church after graduation three years ago. He is active in his congregation and in a small group Bible study. He also notes that he and his wife set aside time each Friday morning for Bible Study and prayer as a couple.* *Mr. Smith and his wife Susan have been married 6 months. She was raised in the Pentecostal tradition and made a profession of faith at age 6. She is supportive of his desire to be ordained but has expressed some concerns about worshipping in the Anglican tradition. She started attending the Anglican church with him when they got married and has found the transition to liturgy "difficult." Both Mr. and Mrs. Smith say this is an area that they are praying about.*  |
| **Call to Ministry and Current Ministry Involvement:** *Mr. Smith said he first felt a call to ordained ministry while serving as a camp counselor for a Christian camp the summer after he became saved. He told his InterVarsity worker when he returned to college in the fall, and his staff person encouraged him to talk to his pastor. Mr. Smith noted that he has been a residential advisor and in "pastoring" type roles even before he became a Christian. Currently he has been teaching a High School Boys Bible study for his church and has maintained ties with his campus fellowship as a part-time volunteer staff member.* *Mr. Smith understands ordained ministry as a call to serve the people of God by encouraging them to deepen in relationship with God and equipping them to call other lost people to salvation. His wife noted that since becoming saved, Mr. Smith has witnessed to his entire extended family and currently meets to discuss Scripture with some of his cousins.* |
| **Readiness for Ministry. Challenges and Growth Areas**: *Mr. Smith is 25 years old. While he was very enthusiastic about the nature of ministry in a way that seemed potentially naive to the committee, it is our opinion that this may be due simply to his age. We believe that a good church placement could help mature him in this area. There were no flags of a more serious nature. Mr. Smith reports that he is close to his parents and his three older brothers. However, none of them are believers and his father has expressed disappointment that Mr. Smith is not pursuing the family business (a CPA firm). "He doesn't understand this choice, but that is because he does not believe in being led by God." Mr. Smith said he was sad about the current tension but that he and his father have been able to remain on relatively good terms by "agreeing to disagree."* *Mr. Smith clearly has strong intellectual and academic abilities. He graduated summa cum laude with a degree in economics from his undergraduate university. At the recommendation of his rector, he has been taking online courses at Trinity to develop his biblical knowledge.* |

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| **Concerns and/or Areas for Follow up:** *Our only concerns about Mr. Smith's "fitness for ministry" are that he is a relatively young Christian and that he and his wife are not yet on the same page about whether this is the right tradition in which for him to be ordained. He is able to present the gospel message clearly but is less clear about what sets Anglicanism apart from other denominations/ traditions. Other than that, we do believe he has the skills and abilities for ordained ministry.* *We believe he may need to grow in healthy self-assertion and being able to state a clear opinion on potentially difficult issues.* |
| **Summary and Recommendation:** *We believe that Mr. Smith has several strengths. He is very joyful and talking to him was a delight. He very aware of other people and listened respectfully and attentively when others were speaking. He also has a great sense of humor.* *We do believe that Mr. Smith possesses the gifts and skills for ordained ministry. We also believe he is called. Not only can he articulate a clear calling, but those who have interacted with him in the congregation over the past two years have frequently said, "you should be a pastor!" As a community, we sense he is called.*  |

Committee Chair Signature Date

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