



***PROCESS FOR  
LOCAL MINISTRY SUPPORT TEAM  
FORMATION***

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## INTRODUCTION

The Commission on Ministry recognizes that all baptized persons are called to minister in Christ's name. This ministry takes place in the normal setting of each person's daily life, as each of us lives out the Baptismal promise to seek and serve Christ in all people. Thus ministry takes place in our homes and schools; in offices, and retail stores and auto repair shops; in hospitals, nursing homes, law courts and prisons; in playgrounds and fast food restaurants. It is through our everyday activity — through the ordinary and mundane as well as through the extraordinary -- that we all, as baptized Christians, follow the Risen Christ.

It is the responsibility of leaders within our diocese and congregations, especially those who preach and teach, to bring this awareness of ministry to life. We must remember that ministry takes place in the world, in ways that may not even be obvious to others as a religious moment, and that only a relatively small part of Christian ministry takes place in churches or religious settings or is even identifiable as religious in nature.

The Commission on Ministry will assist congregations in nurturing the ministry of the baptized. However, no single entity alone can bring to life the amazing realization that each of us, joined to Christ in baptism, is already given the gifts for ministry, and ordained to minister in his name.

This process was created in partnership by the Commission on Ministry/ Ministry Developers Workgroup, received and affirmed by the COM May 2009, and revised 2012.

## INITIAL EXPLORATION

The Diocese offers a range of programs and resources that encourage congregations to deepen their understanding and practice of baptismal ministry in the shifting and transforming church and world in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

- *Rooted in God* is a ten week study series that helps congregations explore what it means to be the church and to discern what God is particularly calling their church to become and do. It also includes a Rule of Life workshop. It is available without charge from the Diocese of Vermont.
- *Wade in the Water* explores ways that the ministry of the baptized can create healthy small churches. This resource can empower lay members to find a more active role within the church, including positions of leadership. It is designed to be used with small groups in a short series, or as a one-day workshop. Available from the Diocese of Vermont.
- *LifeCycles* is based upon the understanding that all Christians are called to, and commissioned by, baptism for participation in Christ's ministry in the world and in the church. Working through small groups, *LifeCycles* aims to empower all members to realize their God-given gifts and so become ever more active, articulate apostles at work in God's world, and to transform congregations to become vital, ministering communities. Available at [www.LeaderResources.com](http://www.LeaderResources.com) for a membership fee.

- *I Have Called You Friends* by Kevin Thew Forrester gives a theological basis for mutual ministry and describes the experience of the Diocese of Northern Michigan. The book is available from [www.hopkinsbookshop.com](http://www.hopkinsbookshop.com). A study guide for the book is available from the Diocese of Vermont.
- *Outward Signs: The Congregation as Sacramental Community* helps a congregation look at its unique mission and ministry. Eight sessions look at Sacramental Community, Worship, Christian Friendship, Stewardship, Education, Outreach, Evangelism and ends with a session on visioning for the future. It is available from [www.LeaderResources.com](http://www.LeaderResources.com)
- *New Growth in God's Garden: Transforming Congregations through Mutual Ministry* by Margaret Babcock describes a simple and grounded process for transformation in a congregation with focus on relationships and creative use of community organizing and other techniques. Available from [www.LeaderResources.com](http://www.LeaderResources.com)
- *Born of Water, Born of Spirit: Supporting the Ministry of the Baptized in Small Congregations*, Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook and Fredrica Harris Thompsett, explores a variety of ways people in small congregations, fifty members or fewer, are living out their baptism and looking at ministry and the church in a more expansive way ([www.hopkinsbookshop.com](http://www.hopkinsbookshop.com))
- *The Great Emergence* by Phyllis Tickle ([www.hopkinsbookshop.com](http://www.hopkinsbookshop.com)) combines history, a look at the causes of social upheaval, and current events, to show the massive transition occurring now in church and culture, how it came to be, and where it is going.
- *Changing the Conversation* by Anthony B. Robinson (available from [www.hopkinsbookshop.com](http://www.hopkinsbookshop.com)) invites church leaders to engage in courageous work that can transform, deepen, and sustain the life of a congregation and help them respond with greater vitality, effectiveness, and faithfulness to our Post-Christian 21st century world.

#### EXPLORING AND REIMAGINING

When a congregation wants to explore and re-imagine its community life as church, deepening its understanding and practice of baptismal ministry, they enter into a new relationship with the diocese in which the congregation and diocese become partners in the exploration. When such an exploration results in a desire to restructure- creating a Regional Ministry, a local Ministry Support Team, conventional clergy-led models, or a combination of these-- the exploration process generally proceeds as follows:

- An initial letter about exploring / reimagining is sent to the Bishop from the congregational leadership
- The Ministry Developer and the Bishop discuss the letter
- The Ministry Developer responds to the letter and sets up a meeting to talk with the congregation about what will happen next and contacts the chairpersons of the Commission on Ministry (COM)
- The Ministry Developer meets with the congregation
  - To listen to their story (using the *Initial Assessment Tools* )
  - What motivated them to enter this exploration
  - What is their history – how did they arrive at this place
  - What work has been done and what do they sense they need to do
  - What are they looking for from the diocese and wider church

--To present “How Did We Get Here?” and the “Roadmap” (typical process, parameters and rationale) and to invite the congregation to work in identifying where they are and what needs to happen next.

--To develop a plan with the congregation which the Ministry Developer will communicate to the COM and Bishop. It is understood that a congregation may have already done some of these steps and does not have to do each one over if they can offer the Bishop and COM evidence that the work in a given area has already been done.

This plan will include *at least* the following items (plus others as identified) and an initial timeline. The following work is done in partnership with or with the assistance of the Ministry Developer and/or a Companion:

- The congregation, as a whole, deepens their knowledge and understanding about baptismal ministry: theology, Scriptural basis, common practices, impact on the congregation and individuals, etc., including both ministries in the gathered congregation and ministries when the congregation is dispersed. This learning process includes a commitment to a discipline of prayer and seeking God’s leading.
- The congregation deepens their understanding about the various models for structuring its ministry including Regional Ministry, Local Ministry Support Team, etc.
- The congregation chooses one model to explore in depth using a process developed by the congregation and Ministry Developer.
- The Ministry Developer and/or Companion again shares the detailed “Roadmap” and plans the next steps, timeline, etc.

#### PROCESS FOR EXPLORING THE LOCAL MINISTRY SUPPORT TEAM MODEL

##### *Study*

The Ministry Developer and/or Companion works with the congregation to ensure that *most* of its members understand the Local Ministry Support Team model and its implications for the congregation. This is likely to include some or all of the following:

- Members of the congregation interact with others who have this model in place through visits, case studies, phone calls, etc.
- The congregation learns about the various ministry roles that a congregation *might* have, including those within the church and in the world
- The congregation learns about and practices discernment as a way of making decisions.

The COM liaisons meet with the congregation at the local site to listen and learn about the congregation’s story leading to this desire for re-structuring how they are church. The COM will recommend discernment resources for use and distribute the resource *Skills and Knowledge for Ministry*.

*Discernment*

The congregation discerns 1) what Local Ministry Support Team roles are needed to support its congregational life and the members of the congregation in their ministries and 2) discerns what ministries are needed to carry out its mission and ministry in the church and in the community/world.

The congregation identifies what competencies (skills, knowledge, experiences) are needed for each role and what competencies are needed for those who will be on the Local Ministry Support Team, using *Skills and Knowledge for Ministry*.

The congregation discerns what process it will use to call people into ministry and/or help them discern their ministry. Title III canons establish that every congregation will have in place an ongoing discernment process with the goal of helping any member of the congregation discern his/her ministry, find a place/way to exercise that ministry, be equipped for it and supported in it. There may be two different processes established: one for ongoing discernment of all ministries and a second process for those called to be on the Local Ministry Support Team. It is highly desirable that the discernment for the Local Ministry Support Team members be a congregation-wide process rather than one conducted by a smaller group.

The congregation discerns who is called to form the Covenant Group and the roles it feels each person is called to fulfill.

The individuals who are called are invited to prayerfully consider and respond to the call (usually within a specified time of two weeks to a month). The congregation, Ministry Developer and/or Companion, and COM will join in prayer with those identified and be available to listen, talk, explore, etc. during this individual decision time.

## FORMING THE COVENANT GROUP

Those who choose to explore their call in greater depth form a Covenant Group.

The Covenant Group develops the commitment (the covenant) they will make. The Team presents this covenant to the congregation for affirmation and, through the Ministry Developer, to the diocese. This generally includes an initial Rule of Life for each individual and the Group, a commitment to study, working norms, accountability, etc. The presentation of the covenant and commissioning take place during the Sunday worship service with the Ministry Developer representing the ministry of the Bishop.

The Covenant Group identifies the competencies and developmental needs of each Group member and the Group as a whole, using *Skills and Knowledge for Ministry*.

The Group works with the Ministry Developer and/or Companion to identify what resources are best suited for their on-going formation to help them meet their developmental needs. This will include programs, events, etc. for the entire group as well as for individuals who may need resources tailored to their role or specific needs.

## FORMATION AND INSTALLATION OF THE LOCAL MINISTRY SUPPORT TEAM

The Covenant Group works with the Ministry Developer and/or Companion and the Vestry to determine when the Group is ready to present to the Bishop for acceptance as an installed leadership team. This presentation includes the following steps.

- The Vestry and Ministry Developer's letters of endorsement of this Group's readiness.
- A portfolio of materials illustrating competencies in the following areas:  
     Group Dynamics      Decision-making Styles      Conflict Resolution  
     Leadership Development      Baptismal Ministry Development
- A Ministry Contract: a description of how the Group has been helping others in the congregation identify their ministries, equip them for their ministries, and prepare them for commissioning/licensing along with the Group at the time of installation. This Contract covers a particular period of time (ex., 1 year) and includes goals, expectations of learning, and oversight by the Bishop's appointed clergy person.

The role of the Local Ministry Support Team is to support the ministries of others. The norm is that the Group has prepared others to be commissioned at the same time as the Team is installed (see "A Form of Commitment Christian Service," BCP, p. 420), so it is clear that this is a *congregational commitment to ministry* and not a matter of replacing a single clergy person with a team which will still do the ministry on behalf of the people.

- A description of the Group's assessment of where the congregation is in their journey.
- A description of the Group's plan for its ongoing formation, including their individual and Group's Rule of Life and the seven canonical areas (see below).

The Bishop and Ministry Developer will consult about the portfolio and materials presented; the Bishop may ask for a conversation with the Group. The Bishop will then determine the Group's readiness for installation as a Local Ministry Support Team or if other actions, time, etc. are needed.

When approved, the Group works with the Bishop, Ministry Developer or Companion, and the Vestry and congregation to plan a service that will appropriately celebrate the new ministry. This will include the installation of Local Ministry Support Team members, for some members a commissioning to their individual ministries, and a reaffirmation by the congregation of their baptismal ministry. Individuals in the congregation may also celebrate a new or renewed Commitment to Christian Service. It is appropriate that members of surrounding congregations and the diocese be invited to celebrate with the congregation.

For congregations with no itinerant priest, the Bishop, in consultation with the Vestry, will appoint a Companion to the congregation for pastoral oversight, expressing the partnership between the local leadership and the Bishop. The Companion is appointed yearly and has direct relationship to the Bishop and a primary relationship to Senior Warden, in order to accompany, support and guide the local leadership.

## POSTULANCY

The Covenant Group works with the Ministry Developer and/or Companion, COM, and the Vestry to determine when members of the Local Ministry Support Team called forth for ordained ministries are ready to present to the Bishop for acceptance as postulants. This presentation includes the following steps.

- The Vestry and a priest's endorsement of these members' readiness :  
**III:2(c)** Whenever the letter of support of a Vestry is required, the letter must be signed and dated by at least two-thirds of all of the members of the Vestry, at a meeting duly convened, and by the Rector or Priest-in-Charge of the Parish, and attested by the Clerk of the Vestry. Should there be no Rector or Priest-in-Charge, the letter shall be signed by a Priest of the Diocese acquainted with the nominee and the Parish, the reason for the substitution being stated in the attesting clause.

The form for this Letter of Support is available in the Appendix.

The Application for Postulancy (Appendix) then needs to be completed. The Application consists of the following items:

- Evidence of baptism and confirmation
- An individual's spiritual autobiography of no more than 3 pages
- The Vestry's Letter of Support (see Appendix)
- Evidence of Safe Church training/re-certification within Province 1
- Evidence of diocesan anti-racism training
- Evidence of educational background  
 (high school diploma, GED, technical school certification,  
 college transcripts, etc.)

These Team members work with the COM and Ministry Developer and/or Companion to plan a way to assess their academic preparation using the portfolio model. This plan is shared with the Bishop. The COM works with the Team members to ensure that the plan will prepare them to be certified in the seven canonical areas as specified in Title III:8(5):

1. The Holy Scriptures
2. Church History, including the Ecumenical Movement
3. Christian Theology, including Missionary Theology and Missiology
4. Christian Ethics and Moral Theology
5. Studies in contemporary society, including racial and minority groups
6. Liturgics and Church Music  
 Christian Worship and Music according to the contents and use of the Book of Common Prayer and the Hymnal, and authorized supplemental texts
7. Theory and Practice of Ministry.

All members of the Team are expected to have basic understanding of these areas and to have particular knowledge of how these areas are foundational to their specific ministries, regardless of ordination or commissioning.

- The Bishop will meet with the members and together decide whether to go forward.
- These members undertake the medical exam and both an individual and a group psychological exam.
- The Bishop makes the decision on whether to refer these members to the COM for the postulancy interview or if other actions, time, etc. are needed at this point.
- Applicants for postulancy will meet with the COM: Committee on Discernment. The COM makes its recommendation to the Bishop.
- The Bishop decides on postulancy: yes, no, maybe.
- If yes, these members implement their continuing formation plan which is developed and reviewed in an ongoing conversation with the COM.
- During the postulancy period, these members of the Local Ministry Support Team will participate in the annual retreat with the COM: CoD, other persons in the Holy Orders process, and Standing Committee to develop relationships and build community.

#### CANDIDACY

After no less than six months the Postulant members of the Team apply to the Bishop for Candidacy. This application includes the following:

- An endorsement by the Vestry and a priest, Canon III: 8 (4.2). The form for this Letter is available in the Appendix.
- An updated plan for next steps, continuing formation, work with the congregation, and progress on the plan for their—and the whole Team’s--work in the seven canonical areas.

After the Bishop receives the above, the following takes place:

- An interview with the COM: CoD to assess the members’ readiness for Candidacy.
- The COM makes its recommendation to the Bishop.
- The Standing Committee interviews the Postulants and makes its decision.
- When the Standing Committee decides in favor of a candidate, the Bishop then decides whether to accept the members as Candidates for Ordination or if other actions, time, etc. are needed at this point. If the Standing Committee decides not to put forward the candidate, the person meets with the Bishop for further conversation.

#### AFFIRMATION AND CELEBRATION OF MINISTRY

After no less than six months, the members apply to the Bishop for ordination. This application includes a report and a plan addressing the following:

- How the Team is currently helping others in the congregation identify their ministries, equip them for their ministries, and prepare them for commissioning along with the Team members who are to be ordained.
- How the Team is deepening its own understanding and practice of baptismal ministry (its ongoing formation).
- How the Team is leading the congregation in deepening its understanding and practice of baptismal ministry.



- How the Team and congregation are bringing new members into their community.
- The Team's assessment of where the congregation is in their journey.

This plan will become the basis for the mutual ministry review in future and will continue to be reviewed and updated annually.

Other steps now happen:

- The Team members to be ordained work with the COM to assess their academic preparation under the canons using the portfolios.
- The COM certifies the members' readiness to the Bishop and Standing Committee.
- The Bishop presents the members to the Standing Committee for its approval.

If there are members of the Team who are called to the priesthood, ordination to the transitional diaconate needs to take place. So, upon approval from the Standing Committee, the Team and the Bishop hold a liturgical re-affirmation of the commitment to the ministries to which the Team has been called by the congregation. In this context, transitional deacons are ordained.

In the next six months, the Team plans and works on its members' transition to their new ministry roles and also how they will develop and support the ministries of the congregation.

When approved, or following the six month transition period, the Team works with the Ministry Developer, Companion, the COM, Bishop, and congregation to plan the ordination service that will appropriately celebrate the new ministry. This will include a reaffirmation of the Local Ministry Support Team members and a reaffirmation by the congregation of their baptismal ministry. Individuals in the congregation may also celebrate a new or renewed Commitment to Christian Service. It is appropriate that members of surrounding congregations and the diocese be invited to celebrate with the congregation.

#### ONGOING DEVELOPMENT OF MINISTRY

After the service, the Local Ministry Support Team continues its formation plan which is developed and reviewed in an ongoing conversation with the Ministry Developer (generally every six months or so).

As required by canon, the Team reports annually to the Bishop on their continuing education. They also submit a progress report and baptismal ministry action plan. An annual mutual ministry review is conducted with a Ministry Developer or Companion, and a covenant of mutual expectations for ministry is renewed with the congregation and presented to the Bishop.

The Team schedules additional opportunities for members of the congregation to make a Commitment to Christian Service at an appropriately celebratory service (e.g. the Bishop's visit or celebration of All Saints).

To support its developing mission, the congregation may need to create new Covenant Groups in future years.

## ***APPENDIX***

Letter of Support for Postulancy for Members of a Covenant Group	page 11
Application for Postulancy for a Local Ministry Support Team Member	pages 12-13
Letter of Support for Candidacy for Members of a Local Ministry Support Team	page 14



## Letter of Support for Postulancy for Members of a Covenant Group

Date:

Sponsoring congregation/faith community:

The Right Reverend Thomas C. Ely  
Bishop of Vermont  
5 Rock Point Road  
Burlington, VT 05401-2735

Dear Bishop Ely:

We, the undersigned communicants of \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of congregation*),  
in the community of \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of town*), pledge our support  
to the following persons in a Local Ministry Support Team who are hereby nominated for  
Postulancy:

*List here the names of persons and their identified ministries*

We pledge our commitment to continue our discernment with these Nominees. We will endeavor to involve our entire faith community in our responsibility to help these persons who are preparing for ordination.

Faithfully,

*Signatures of the Vestry*

*Signature of the member of the Clergy who has oversight*



## Application for Postulancy for a Local Ministry Support Team Member

Full Name of Nominee \_\_\_\_\_  
[Include any other names you have used or have been known by]

Length of time in the Diocese of Vermont \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsoring congregation/faith community \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Baptism \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Confirmation \_\_\_\_\_  
*attach certificates of baptism and confirmation to this form*

### PREVIOUS APPLICATION

Have you ever applied for Postulancy, in this diocese or another diocese?

Yes  No

*If yes, explain circumstances and outcome, using the reverse side.*

### PREVIOUS NOMINATION

Have you ever been nominated for Postulancy in another diocese?

Yes  No

*If yes, explain circumstances and outcome, using the reverse side.*

### EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

*Please check the type of educational experiences and degrees/ certifications you have.  
Attach copies of the diplomas, certificates, transcripts, etc. to this form.*

- high school diploma or GED  
*name the institution or program and date of completion*
- technical school certification  
*name the institution or program and date of completion*
- college degree  
*name the institution or program and date of completion*
- graduate school or other professional degrees  
*name the institution or program and date of completion*

*APPLICATION FOR POSTULANCY, PAGE 2*

ADDITIONAL FORMS

*Please attach to this form the following documentation for the individual applicant:*

- A spiritual autobiography of no more than three pages
- Transcripts from all post-secondary educational institutions
- Evidence of Safe Church training/re-certification within Province One
- Evidence of diocesan anti-racism training
- Evidence of educational background  
(high school diploma, GED, technical school certification, college transcripts, etc.)

*The following documentation is to be submitted collectively as a Group:*

- The Vestry's narrative description of the discernment process
- The Ministry Contract
- A description of the Team's assessment of where the congregation is in their journey.
- A description of the Team's plan for its ongoing formation, including their individual and common Rule of Life.

SIGNATURE

Please consider this request for admission to Postulancy as a member of a Local Ministry Support Team.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

**Please send all applications and supporting documentation both for the Team and the individuals as one package.**



## Letter of Support for Candidacy for Members of a Local Ministry Support Team

Date:

Sponsoring congregation/faith community:

The Right Reverend Thomas C. Ely  
Bishop of Vermont  
5 Rock Point Road  
Burlington, VT 05401-2735

Dear Bishop Ely:

We, the undersigned communicants of \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of congregation*),  
in the community of \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of town*), pledge our support  
to the following persons in a Local Ministry Support Team who are Postulants.

*List here the names of persons and their identified ministries*

Furthermore, we pledge our commitment to continue our discernment, and we will endeavor to involve our entire faith community in our responsibility to help these persons prepare for ordination.

Faithfully,

*Signatures of the Vestry*

*Signature of the member of the Clergy who has oversight*