

**A Handbook for Those Discerning a Call to Ordination  
as a Deacon in The Episcopal Church**



**The Episcopal Diocese of Vermont**

2023

# **A Handbook for Those Discerning a Call to Ordination as a Deacon in The Episcopal Diocese of Vermont**

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## **THE LAYOUT OF THIS HANDBOOK**

This handbook addresses the discernment process for the Ordination of deacons. It has four parts. There is a separate handbook for those discerning a call to priesthood.

Introduction & Reflection on the Diaconate by The Ven. Stannard Baker, *Missional Service*  
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Appendix B Summary of steps in the discernment process

Appendix C Glossary of terms pertaining to the Diaconate

Any questions about this *Handbook*, or about the discernment process may be directed to the Bishop's office, the Archdeacon for Diaconal Formation, or to the Chair of the Committee on Ministry (COM).

(Revised, April 2022)

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **BAPTISMAL MINISTRY**

The Episcopal Church recognizes that all baptized persons are called to minister in Christ's name. 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. 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 congregations, especially those who preach and teach, to bring this awareness of ministry to life.

To further this mission, the Canons of the Episcopal Church (Title III, Canon 1) mandate that each diocese makes provision for the affirmation and development of the ministry of all baptized person, including:

- (a) Assistance in understanding that all baptized persons are called to minister in Christ's name, to identify their gifts with the help of the Church, and to serve Christ's mission at all times and in all places.
- (b) Assistance in understanding that all baptized persons are called to sustain their ministries through commitment to life-long Christian formation.

**MISSIONAL SERVICE: A THEOLOGY OF THE DIACONATE  
A REFLECTION BY THE  
VENERABLE J. STANNARD BAKER, ARCHDEACON FOR DIACONAL  
FORMATION**

This handbook is meant for those thinking about, discerning, or in process toward ordination into the Holy Order of Deacons. It is for what some call Vocational Deacons, Permanent Deacons, or Real Deacons. This handbook does *not* outline the process toward ordination as a Transitional Deacon (those on the way to becoming priests). The diaconate is a *separate and distinct order*. Some used to say a “separate and equal order,” when comparing the diaconate to priesthood. I feel that the concept of “equal” gets in the way in this conversation, because it leads to quibbling about which order is more important. In fact, in God's church all four orders of ministry have distinct importance: bishop, priest, deacon and lay. All are essential and all are connected, but each has a distinct focus.

The diaconate is an ancient order, and also one that is ever-changing as we deepen our knowledge of what it means to be a deacon in God's church. Susanne Watson Epting wrote in her book, *Unexpected Consequences: The Diaconate Renewed*, that we are in the “seventh wave” of the diaconate. Many deacons now say we are entering the eighth wave. Each wave brings a new understanding. We now understand that the diaconate is an active, prophetic order that leads the church to action in our hurting community and world. The diaconate is less clearly defined than the priestly order, but this opens the possibility for a dynamic and sometimes liminal developmental process as the diaconate emerges into new ways of being and action. Even so, each of a deacon's liturgical functions points toward the dismissal when we walk with the people into the world to do the work God has given us to do.

Deacons are told by the bishop at our ordination: *As a deacon in the Church, you are to study the Holy Scriptures, to seek nourishment from them, and to model your life upon them. You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live, and work, and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world. You are to assist the bishop and priests in public worship and in the ministration of God's Word and Sacraments, and you are to carry out other duties assigned to you from time to time. At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself.* (BCP, p. 543). “Word” and “service” both describe the deacon's role. The two cannot be separated in the life of a deacon.

We, as deacons, are icons for servant-leadership, and for action to heal the world. We are more

than humble servants, for we carry out a commissioned task and act as messengers of God's word. We are the hands, words, heart, and body of Jesus in the world. As such, one of the most important liturgical roles of a deacon is proclaiming the Gospel. We read it out loud to the congregation each Sunday to help the faith community understand the basis of their action in the world as Christians. We then bid the Prayers of the People, helping the community to let go of the mistakes or wrong actions and thoughts of their lives, lift up before God the needs of the community and the world, and prepare for service. At the altar, we set the table, an act of great caring as we prepare the way for Jesus to become incarnate in the consecration. This is a discrete act that makes it possible for the priest to consecrate the elements and sanctify the people. We pour water into the wine in the chalice, bringing the water of baptism into the sacred ritual, reminding the people of their baptismal promises. This also reflects the water mixed with blood that poured from the side of Our Savior. Many deacons lift the chalice while the priest lifts the patten or bread at the words of the doxology in the Eucharistic Prayer, signifying our role as sacred messengers, united with the people by the blood of Christ. We may assist in the distribution of communion. Then we clean up the table, readying the people for the dismissal to come.

In proclaiming the gospel, bidding intercessions, setting the table, adding water to the wine, raising the chalice at the doxology, assisting in communion and cleaning up the table, we prepare the way to dismiss the people, arguably the most important role we carry out. These are all acts that take place within the church – acts of hospitality and welcome that lead us, hand in hand with the people, to do God's work in the world, the work we are called to do as church. This work in the world may be social action to secure dignity, justice and equity for all. It may be pastoral care to those in need in our community. It may be the formation of children, youth or adults, or of deacons. It may be in leadership in church bodies to focus priorities on action and healing. Whatever a deacon does, it will be something that requires action and that models the life of Jesus in the world. A prayer from the ordination of Deacon's is a good way to close this essay:

*Make them, O Lord, modest and humble, strong and constant, to observe the discipline of Christ. Let their life and teaching so reflect your commandments, that through them many may come to know you and love you. As your Son came not to be served but to serve, may this deacon share in Christ's service, and come to the unending glory of him who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever.*

“Go in peace to do the work God has given you to do!” Amen.

## COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY (COM)

Within the ministry of all baptized persons, there will be some persons who experience an emerging sense of possible call to serve in ordained ministry. The Bishop has appointed a Committee on Ministry (COM) to assist congregations to engage in a process of discernment with those baptized persons who may be called to ordained ministry. The Committee on Ministry is one of two committees that comprise the Commission on Missional Vitality.

### STANDARDS FOR THE ORDAINED MINISTRY

*No person shall be denied access to the discernment process for any ministry, lay or ordained, in this Church because of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disabilities, or age, except as otherwise provided by these Canons. No right to licensing, Ordination or election is hereby established.*

We are all Christian ministers by virtue of our baptism in Jesus Christ. The Bible offers many examples of God's people being called (Isaiah, Priscilla and Paul) to special ministries. Some may be called to special lay ministries, others to life in a monastic community, others to Holy Orders as deacons and priests.

Discerning the ministry to which one is called is a matter for prayerful deliberation. When a person believes he or she has a call to the ordained ministry, prayerful deliberation must extend to local clergy leadership and to the congregation (as represented by the vestry or designated by the Committee on Ministry and the Bishop).

The Canons of the Episcopal Church set forth certain requirements for Ordination. There are, however, special qualities and attributes the Committee on Ministry (COM) looks for in its discernment. We believe clarity about the qualities and attributes we seek is necessary; however, we are also always praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance. In general, we believe that a person called to ordained ministry must:

- firmly believe the vows he or she will take at Ordination regarding the Holy Scriptures and conformity to the doctrine, discipline and worship of the Episcopal Church, and accept the authority of the Bishop, while having an open mind and loving heart for those within and outside our Church who faithfully struggle with their beliefs.
- be able to act in accordance with the Canons of the Episcopal Church while keeping in mind that earthly institutions only imperfectly reflect the glory of God.
- be a faithful steward of God's creation, including his or her own body and health.
- be intellectually competent and able to grow in his or her understanding of theological, ethical and social issues.
- be psychologically sound and have demonstrated insight into his or her own emotional issues.
- strive to pattern his or her ethical life after the example of Jesus.

- have a clear sense of call affirmed by a local faith community.
- be settled and active in the life of a congregation in the Diocese of Vermont.
- accept worship, prayer, and Scripture as an integral part of his or her life.

## **THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS FOR THE ORDINATION OF DEACONS**

This handbook addresses the discernment process for the Ordination of deacons.  
(There is separate handbook for those discerning a call to priesthood.)

Provisions for the Ordination and Life and Work of Deacons can be found in Title III, Canons 6 & 7 of *The Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church*

[http://www.episcopalarchives.org/pdf/CnC/CandC\\_2012pp67-125.pdf](http://www.episcopalarchives.org/pdf/CnC/CandC_2012pp67-125.pdf)

## **Chapter One: PARISH DISCERNMENT**

### **DISCERNMENT IN THE LOCAL CONGREGATION/FAITH GROUP**

In this first stage, the person must articulate his or her sense of call. The member of the Clergy helps the person explore this sense of call, ascertains whether the call is genuine, and determines whether the person's call is to the Diaconate or to another expression of ministry.

At the parish level, the process of discerning a call to ordained ministry has two parts: first is the affirmation of the person's inward sense of call by the member of the Clergy; second is the affirmation of the call by members of the parish, including the Vestry.

When a confirmed adult communicant in good standing desires to explore a sense of call to be a deacon, they may initiate the discernment process. Nevertheless, members of the congregation, or the member of the Clergy, may also initiate the discernment process through recognition of persons who exhibit "diaconal lives" and engage in "diaconal ministries".

### **MEMBER OF THE CLERGY'S RESPONSIBILITY IN THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS**

Because the member of the Clergy has important firsthand knowledge of an applicant's gifts and skills, they have a crucial responsibility at this stage of the process. If a decision not to move a person forward in the process is to be made at all, it is best made at this point. It is preferable to deny the applicant permission to continue in the process rather than to allow them to proceed with no genuine prospect of Ordination. No one is served well—the person, the parish, or the Church—if the member of the Clergy does not accept the serious responsibility of evaluation and decision.

*The Member of the Clergy must meet with the person for a period of no less than six months and*

*for a minimum of five meetings before the congregation's formal discernment process begins."*

Accordingly, the member of the Clergy must examine the issues that might give rise to questions about the person's suitability for ordained ministry. These issues include the person's personal history and psychology, goals for ministry, personal faith, and theological understanding. If the applicant has previously been refused admission as a Candidate in any other Diocese, or once admitted, has afterwards ceased to be a Candidate, the circumstances of refusal or cessation should be explored. The member of the Clergy and applicant should be aware that according to Canon III.6.3.c, a letter from the Bishop of the Diocese where refusal or cessation occurred will be required before Postulancy. This letter must declare the cause of refusal or cessation.

If the member of the Clergy has any questions regarding the process or the person's particular circumstances, he or she should confer with the Chair of the Committee on Ministry. The Committee on Ministry (COM) can provide concrete and practical assistance to the member of the Clergy in the discernment process.

### **DECISION OF THE MEMBER OF THE CLERGY**

If the member of the Clergy supports the person's entering the process of discernment within the parish, she/he will inform the person of this decision. The member of the Clergy must notify the Bishop and the Chair of the diocesan Committee On Ministry (COM) of the intention to form a Parish Discernment Committee (PDCOM). The Chair of the COM will appoint a member of the COM as an Advisor to the PDCOM. The Advisor should be invited to attend the first meeting of the PDCOM to assist in clarifying the steps of the discernment process. The role of the Advisor is to support the PDCOM throughout its process.

At any point the member of the Clergy may decide that they cannot in good conscience support the person's pursuit of Ordination. The member of the Clergy may make one of two determinations:

1. cannot affirm the persons' perceived sense of call and does not foresee a change of their opinion.
2. cannot affirm the person's perceived sense of call *at this time* but is willing to continue to work with the person and to re-evaluate at some future time.

### **PARISH DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE ON ORDAINED MINISTRY FORMED**

If the member of the clergy supports the person's perceived sense of call, the member of the Clergy shall appoint a Parish Discernment Committee (PDCOM)). At least one member of a Parish Discernment Committee should be a member of the Vestry, and will serve as a link to the Vestry. It is strongly suggested that one member of the committee be from another congregation. It is expected that the first meeting will include the appointed Advisor from the COM. The COM shall provide the Parish Discernment Committee with information and resources to help with its work. The Parish Discernment Committee must make its decision

about the person independently of the member of the Clergy. A separate publication, *The Parish Discernment Handbook for the Diocese of Vermont* provides information needed by this Committee.

*“The Committee’s decision about whether the person is suitable for ordination is a crucial part of the discernment process. After a period of no fewer than six (6) months, and a minimum of five meetings, the parish discernment committee will make a decision about whether to recommend the person to the Member of the Clergy and Vestry as a potential Nominee.”*

## **THE PARISH DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE’S (PDCOM) RECOMMENDATION**

**Positive recommendation:** If the Parish Discernment Committee affirms the person’s call, then they will inform the person of this decision and clearly express the reasons for it. The Parish Discernment Committee then prepares a written report for the member of the Clergy and Vestry. The report will be given to the Bishop. If the Bishop approves, the report will then be conveyed to the COM. Requirements for this report are outlined in the *Parish Discernment Handbook*.

**Negative recommendation:** The PDCOM may find that it cannot affirm the person’s call to Ordination. The committee may make one of two determinations:

1. The Committee cannot affirm the person’s call to Ordination and does not foresee a change of its opinion.
2. The Committee cannot affirm the persons’ pursuit of Ordination *at this time* but is willing to continue to work with the person and to re-evaluate at some future time.

If the decision is negative or to postpone, The Parish Discernment Committee must clearly express to the person, in writing, the reasons for its decision. If the Parish Discernment Committee makes the decision to postpone, it must propose a timetable for re-evaluation. The Committee must indicate to the person the conditions under which support would be re-considered and the ways in which further measurement and evaluation will occur. Requirements for this report are outlined in the *Parish Discernment Handbook (Task V, a.- n.)*. The report will be given to the Bishop and, who will convey it, at the proper time, to the COM.

## **NOMINATION AND SUPPORT**

Following the discernment process outlined above, the PDCOM recommends Nomination to the vestry which considers the recommendation of the PDCOM and votes to nominate the person whom they believe is called to the Diaconate (see Forms 2 and 3). The letter of support (Form 2) from the applicant’s faith community must also include a statement committing the faith community to continue to involve itself in the Nominee’s preparation for Ordination to the Diaconate and a pledge to contribute to the financial support of the person’s preparation, per Canon 6.2(a). If it is a congregation, the letter shall be signed by a two-thirds majority of the Vestry and the member of the Clergy.

## ONGOING DISCERNMENT

The involvement of the faith community does not end at this point. If the Bishop admits the person as a Postulant for Ordination to the Diaconate in the Diocese of Vermont, further letters of support will be required both at the time of application for Candidacy and at the time of application for Ordination to the Diaconate. Therefore, ongoing discernment on the part of the Nominee's faith community continues to be important to the individual's Ordination process.

## ACCEPTANCE OF NOMINATION AND APPLICATION FOR POSTULANCY

**The Nominee is responsible for submitting the following documents to the Bishop:**

1. Form 1 Acceptance of Nomination and Application for Postulancy  
(Applicant must accept Nomination in writing *via* the signature at the bottom of this form)
2. Form 2, Vestry Letter of Support for the Nominee
3. Form 3, Report from the PDCOM of local discernment process and its written assessment.
4. Certificates of baptism and confirmation.
5. A spiritual autobiography of no more than three pages

*Note: If the Nominee has previously been refused admission as a Candidate in any other Diocese, or once admitted, has afterwards ceased to be a Candidate, a letter from the Bishop of the Diocese where refusal or cessation occurred will be required before Postulancy. It is the responsibility of the Nominee to request that this letter be sent to the Bishop of Vermont. In accordance with the Canons, this letter must declare the cause of refusal or cessation.*

The Bishop has an initial interview with the Nominee. If the Bishop decides to continue the process, he/she will initiate a complete evaluation. The Bishop's office will provide the following forms:

1. Oxford Document Background Check
2. Physical Examination Form
3. Instructions and forms for the Psychological Examination Process
4. Life History Questionnaire
5. Behavior Screening Questionnaire
6. Information Release Form

Three evaluative interviews must now be completed. The forms above and the evaluations listed below will be sent directly to the Bishop.

After reviewing this information, the Bishop will decide whether the Nominee may proceed with the discernment process. The *Information Release Form* gives members of the Committee on Ministry/Committee on Discernment and the Standing Committee access to the Nominee's file, including all reports and examination results, at the Bishop's discretion.

*Evaluations:* The Bishop has approved a list of professional evaluators and will designate those whom the Nominee may see. It is the Nominee's responsibility to provide the evaluators with the appropriate forms.

1. *Physical Examination:* The Nominee will schedule a physical examination with his or her personal physician and will take the *Physical Examination Form* to this examination. The physician will complete the form and send it directly to the Bishop's office.
2. *Psychological Examination:* The Nominee will schedule a psychological examination with a psychologist designated by the Bishop. The psychologist will complete the *Psychological Testing Form* and send it directly to the Bishop's office along with a written psychological report.
3. *Psychiatric Examination:* The Bishop may also require the Nominee to schedule a psychiatric examination with a psychiatrist designated by the Bishop. Prior to this examination, the Nominee will submit the *Life History Questionnaire*. The psychiatrist will complete the *Psychiatric Examination Form* and send it directly to the Bishop, along with the *Life History Questionnaire*. The psychiatrist will also send a detailed, written psychiatric report to the Bishop.

## **THE BISHOP DECIDES**

When all the above information has been received and reviewed by the Bishop, the Bishop determines whether the Nominee may continue with the discernment process. If the Bishop chooses not to continue the discernment process, the Bishop will inform the Nominee of that decision. If the Archdeacon for Diaconal Formation is not already aware of this person's discerning the Vocational Diaconate, the Bishop's office will inform the Archdeacon.

If the Bishop chooses to continue the discernment process, the Chair of the COM will contact the Nominee to schedule an interview for Postulancy

## **Chapter two: POSTULANCY**

### **BECOMING A POSTULANT**

The Bishop requests the chair of the COM to invite the Nominee to meet with representatives from the COM. The COM explores the sense of call which has been affirmed by the Nominee's community of faith. The COM recommends action to the Bishop. The Bishop alone has the authority to designate a Nominee as a Postulant.

### **DURING POSTULANCY**

*For sake or convenience, persons in the process of discernment with the Bishop and COM, whether Nominees, Postulants or Candidates, also may be referred to as Persons In Process (PIPs).*

Postulants shall pursue diaconal training and education through the Province I School for Deacons, a two-year program of online learning, with four in-person weekend gathering each year. (See link for complete information about the Province I School for Deacons.)<sup>1</sup>

**Ember Day Letters:** Each Postulant for Ordination to the Diaconate shall communicate with the Bishop by letter, four times a year, in the Ember Weeks, reflecting on the Postulant's academic, diaconal, human, spiritual and practical development. The Ember Days occur on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays four times annually, following the Third Sunday of Advent, the First Sunday in Lent, the Day of Pentecost, and the Feast of the Holy Cross.

**COM Liaison:** When a PIP become a postulant, she/he is assigned a liaison from the COM who will assist her/him and provide support throughout the discernment process.

The liaison is the PIPs direct connection to the COM. The liaison will maintain regular contact with the PIP who should feel free to contact him/her whenever necessary.

**The Archdeacon for Diaconal Formation:** the Bishop of Vermont created this position in 2021 as a needed support, advocate, education, liaison, and mentor for the diaconal formation process, and for parishes who are raising up deacons. The Archdeacon will coordinate with the Bishop on all matters, and also collaborate regularly with the PIPs COM Liaison (or the Chair of the COM). The Archdeacon for Diaconal Formation will also coordinate with the Standing Committee Chair; at the times the PIP is preparing to meet with the Committee.

**Deacon's Council:** If a formation program is needed beyond the Province I School for Deacons, the Postulant will work with the Archdeacon for Diaconal Formation, the Deacons' Council, and the COM Chair, to establish a formation program in order to meet the requirements as set forth in *Resources for the Formation of Deacons in the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont*.

**Deacon Mentor:** The Deacons' Council shall appoint a Deacon Mentor who will assist the PIP in outlining the specifics of their plan for discernment and academic, spiritual, and emotional formation. The Deacon Mentor shall meet periodically with the PIP regarding resources and strategies for fulfilling their formation plan and periodically report that progress to the Deacons' Council and to the COM liaison.

### **Chapter three: CANDIDACY**

After a period of no fewer than six months after admission to Postulancy, and having completed one half of the Province I School for Deacons program, and in consultation with their Deacon Mentor and the liaison from the COM, a Postulant may apply to the Bishop to become a Candidate for Ordination. The Postulant is responsible for submitting the following documents to the Bishop:

1. Form 4 Application for Candidacy

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<sup>1</sup> Link to information about the Province I School for Deacons:  
<https://www.province1.org/deacons-formation>

Form 4 required documents:

- a reflection paper of no more than 500 words describing why you feel ready to apply for Candidacy.
- transcripts and evaluation(s) of any academic courses and grades received since you applied for Postulancy
- a summary of your formation plan
- Form 5: Letter of support from vestry (Second Letter of Support) for Postulant seeking Candidacy

2. Form 5 Vestry Letter of Support
3. Academic records and evaluations from the Province I School of Deacons
5. Written assessments from any ministerial placement or program undertaken as a Postulant
6. Once the forms are received by the Bishop's office, they will be forwarded to the COM, at which time the Chair of the COM will be schedule an interview with the PIP.

**After interviewing the Postulant, the Committee on Ministry makes its recommendation:**

- 1) affirms the Postulant's call to Ordination and recommends Candidacy.
- 2) does not affirm the Postulant's call to Ordination and does not foresee a change of its opinion.
- 3) does not affirm the Postulant's call to Ordination *at this time* but is willing to re-evaluate at some future time. In this case, the Chair of the Committee on Ministry will indicate to the Bishop, in writing, the conditions under which affirmation might be reconsidered.

### **THE STANDING COMMITTEE**

When a Postulant applies for Candidacy, the Standing Committee becomes involved in the process. After the Person in Process (PIP) is interviewed, the liaison between the Standing Committee and the COM, will consult on the information that will be conveyed to the Standing Committee. If the COM and the Bishop are in agreement regarding the recommendation that the Postulant become a Candidate, the Postulant will be informed. A positive vote from the Standing Committee is necessary for a Postulant to become a Candidate for Ordination to the Diaconate. The Bishop will inform the Postulant as to the decision of the Standing Committee.

### **CANDIDACY AND FORMATION**

The period of Candidacy will include continuing formation and discernment and, when possible, will occur in community with others who are preparing for the Diaconate or for other ministry.

**Some elements of ongoing formation for Candidates include, but are not limited to:**

**Ember Day Letters:** Candidates continue to communicate with the Bishop four times a year on the Ember Days.

**Liaison:** Each Candidate will continue in relationship with a Deacon Mentor and a Liaison from the COM who will assist the Candidate and provide support throughout the ongoing process.

**Spiritual Direction:** Spiritual growth is aided by intellectual and emotional exploration of and conscious reflection on one's relationship with God. Meeting with a spiritual director, guide or intentional group allows one to strengthen the capacity for such reflection. The Committee on Ministry expects candidates to give serious attention to this dimension of discernment and formation.

**Education:** The Candidate will complete the second year of study at the Province I School for Deacons. (Or, if already in process, another approved theological preparation program.)

**Training:** During the formation phase the Candidate will receive training and certification in the areas of anti-racism, sexual misconduct and other matters regarding Title IV of the Canons of the Episcopal Church.

#### **Chapter four: PRACTICUM IN PASTORAL MINISTRY Or CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION**

**Practicum in Pastoral Ministry, or Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE):** focuses on the student as pastor. It gives the student the opportunity to reflect on ways of relating interpersonally and to develop pastoral skills in a structured environment. In addition, CPE strengthens the student's identity and self-awareness as a pastor.

For those aspirants who, due to full-time employment and/or family responsibilities, are unable to take Clinical Pastoral Education, the diocese now offers Practicum, a newly modified internship program, directed by the Canon Missioner for Pastoral Training. It is a program of discernment and pastoral development and builds upon and merges two existing training experiences, **Ministry Internship Placement** and a **Ministry Project**, into one intensive practicum experience in a parish setting or social service agency. Practicum incorporates a rigorous reflective process, including individual and group supervision and satisfies the CPE requirement. Practicum may be up to a year, but not less than nine months. If the Practicum in Pastoral Ministry takes place outside the parish, the aspirant will also be placed by the Bishop in a parish setting, supervised by a clergy person to learn diaconal skills related to parish ministry. Note: If the candidate elects to enroll in a traditional CPE program (for example, to explore the possibility of chaplaincy following ordination) they will be placed in a parish assignment during, or upon completion, of a unit of CPE.

**Ongoing Evaluation:** The COM and Deacon's Council shall evaluate each Candidate's progress. In addition, the COM may request written evaluations from those involved in the Candidate's formation.

***Termination:*** *At the Bishop's sole discretion, any Candidate may be removed from the list of Candidates; written notice of the removal will be given to the Candidate, the Standing Committee, the Committee on Ministry and the member of the Clergy in charge of the nominating congregation.*

## **Chapter five: ORDINATION**

### **Committee on Ministry Written Report of Successful Completion:**

Upon successful completion all requirements related to the Candidate's readiness for Ordination, and interview by the COM, the COM shall provide a written report to the Bishop. All evaluations, assessments and recommendations shall be made available to the Standing Committee by the Bishop. Upon certification in writing by the Standing Committee that all canonical requirements have been met and that there is no sufficient objection, the Bishop may ordain the Candidate a Deacon. Upon notification by the Bishop, the Candidate may apply for Ordination to the Diaconate (Form 7).

### **Time Frames**

The Bishop shall determine the length of time and extent of formation needed to prepare each Candidate for Ordination. Ordination may not occur until at least eighteen months after acceptance of Nomination by the Nominee and no sooner than six months since admission as a Candidate.

***Please note: If the medical, psychological, and background evaluations have taken place more than thirty-six (36) months prior to Ordination, they must be updated, unless the Bishop allows a variance to an individual PIP. Finally, before Ordination each Candidate must have reached age twenty-four and made application for Ordination.***

### **Parish Assignment**

All deacons report directly to the Bishop and are assigned by the Bishop to parish, constellation, or other settings in which they are to carry out their diaconate. The deacon's placement is entirely at the Bishop's discretion. The assignments are made in concert with the Archdeacon for Diaconal formation, other Canons to the Ordinary, and taking account the needs of the Diocese and parishes. If need is documented, the Bishop may choose to place the deacon in the parish from which they were raised up.

**APPENDIX A:  
FORMS FOR THE DIACONAL DISCERNMENT PROCESS**

***Form 1: Acceptance of Nomination and Application for Postulancy  
for Ordination to the Diaconate***

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Length of time in the Diocese of Vermont: \_\_\_\_\_  
Sponsoring congregation/faith community: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Baptism: \_\_\_\_\_ Denomination \_\_\_\_\_  
Place \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Confirmation: \_\_\_\_\_ Denomination \_\_\_\_\_  
Place \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever applied for postulancy, in this diocese or another diocese? Yes No

- If yes, explain circumstances and outcome, and attach to this form.

Have you ever been nominated for ordination to the diaconate in another diocese? Yes No

- If yes, explain circumstances and outcome, and attach to this form.

Please check the levels of post-secondary education you have attained:

- Baccalaureate degree  
Name of the institution and date of completion:
- Master's degree  
Name of the institution and date of completion:
- Professional degree/certification:  
Name of the institution and date of completion:
- Doctoral degree  
Name of the institution and date of completion:
- Other certificate or degree programs:  
Name of the institution and date of completion:

Please attach to this form the following:

- certificates of baptism and confirmation
- a narrative description of the discernment process exercised by you and your sponsoring congregation or faith community.
- a spiritual autobiography of no more than three pages
- the signed Letter of Congregation/Faith Community support (Form 2)
- a copy of the written report from the PDCOM (Form 3)

I accept Nomination for Ordination to the Diaconate and hereby, respectfully, apply for Postulancy.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name of Nominee: \_\_\_\_\_

**Form 2: Vestry Letter of Support for Nomination to Postulancy:**  
(First letter of support)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Bishop MacVean-Brown:

We, the undersigned, communicants of \_\_\_\_\_  
in the town of \_\_\_\_\_  
pledge our support of the aforementioned person who is hereby nominated for Postulancy for Ordination to the Diaconate. Furthermore, we pledge our commitment to continue our discernment ministry, including financial support, during this Nominee's process of formation. We will endeavor to involve our entire faith community in our responsibility to help this person prepare for Ordination to the Diaconate in the Diocese of Vermont.

[The letter must be signed and dated by a two-thirds majority of the Vestry of the parish, and signed and dated by the Member of the Clergy exercising oversight. If the discernment community is not a parish, the letter must be signed by a two-thirds majority of an equivalent governing body and the community's leader or executive.]

Vestry members

Clergy member or executive \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Form 3: Report from Parish Discernment Committee***

Full Name of Nominee \_\_\_\_\_

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

*Please provide a description of the process of discernment by which the nominee has been identified for ordination to the diaconate. Refer to the Parish Discernment Committee on Ministry Handbook. (Use additional sheets as needed)*

PDCOM Members:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

PDCOM Member from another congregation \_\_\_\_\_

(signed) PDCOM Chair: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

***Form 4: Application for Candidacy for  
Ordination to the Diaconate***

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

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

Date Admitted to Postulancy \_\_\_\_\_

Required documents:

- a reflection paper of no more than 500 words describing why you feel ready to apply for Candidacy.
- transcripts and evaluations of any academic courses and grades received since you applied for Postulancy
- a summary of your formation plan
- Form 5: Letter of support from vestry (Second Letter of Support) for Postulant seeking Candidacy

*Send the originals to the Bishop's office from where copies will be sent to the Chair of the COM*

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Full name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Form 5: Vestry Letter of Support for Candidacy:  
(Second letter of support)***

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Bishop MacVean-Brown:

*We, the undersigned, communicants of \_\_\_\_\_  
in the town of \_\_\_\_\_  
pledge our support of the aforementioned person who is hereby recommended for Candidacy for  
Ordination to the Diaconate. Furthermore, we pledge our commitment to continue our  
discernment ministry, including financial support, during this Person in Process's formation.  
We will endeavor to involve our entire faith community in our responsibility to help this person  
prepare for Ordination to the Diaconate in the Diocese of Vermont.*

*[The letter must be signed and dated by a two-thirds majority of the Vestry of the parish, and  
signed and dated by the Member of the Clergy exercising oversight. If the discernment  
community is not a parish, the letter must be signed by a two-thirds majority of an equivalent  
governing body and the community's leader or executive.]*

Vestry members

Clergy member or executive \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Form 6: Recommendation from the Committee on Ministry:  
Certificate of Readiness***

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

*The Committee on Ministry affirms the readiness of this Postulant to be admitted as a Candidate for Ordination to the Diaconate in the Diocese of Vermont.*

Chair \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Form 7: Application for Ordination to the Diaconate***

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Admitted as a Postulant on \_\_\_\_\_

Admitted as a Candidate on \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever applied for ordination, in this diocese or another diocese? Yes No

- If yes, explain circumstances and outcome, and attach explanation to this form.

Please attach the following documents to this application:

- third letter of support from Vestry (Form 8 )
- a 500-word reflection paper from the Candidate describing why he/she feels ready to be ordained
- transcripts of all academic courses and grades received during the time of formation (if not previously submitted at time of application for Candidacy)
- letter from the Dean of the Province I School for Deacons (or other approved program of study)
- evaluation by Supervisor of Practicum in Pastoral Ministry, or CPE program
- documentation of sexual misconduct prevention training
- documentation of anti-racism training
- Certificate of Readiness for ordination from Deacons' Council
- any other reports, records, or evaluations that have been requested

I respectfully request consideration to be ordained a Deacon in the Diocese of Vermont.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name of Candidate: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Form 8: Vestry Letter of Support for Ordination to the Diaconate:  
(Third letter of support)***

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Bishop MacVean-Brown:

*We, the undersigned, communicants of \_\_\_\_\_  
in the town of \_\_\_\_\_  
affirm our support of the aforementioned person who is applying for Ordination to the  
Diaconate.*

*[The letter must be signed and dated by a two-thirds majority of the Vestry of the parish, and  
signed and dated by the Member of the Clergy exercising oversight. If the discernment  
community is not a parish, the letter must be signed by a two-thirds majority of an equivalent  
governing body and the community's leader or executive.]*

Vestry members

Clergy member or executive \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Form 9: Deacons' Council Letter of Support for Ordination to the  
Diaconate: Certificate of Readiness***

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

We, the members of the Deacons' Council, affirm the readiness of this Candidate for Ordination to the Diaconate in the Diocese of Vermont.

Deacons:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Deacon Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Form 10: Recommendation from Committee on Discernment  
for Ordination to the Diaconate:  
Certificate of Readiness***

*NAME* \_\_\_\_\_ *DATE OF BIRTH* \_\_\_\_\_

*ADDRESS* \_\_\_\_\_

We attest to readiness of this Candidate and we recommend this person for ordination to the Diaconate.

Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Form 11: Learning Contract/Letter of Agreement  
The Practicum in Pastoral Ministry***

The Diocese of Vermont



**The Practicum in Pastoral Ministry**

**The Letter of Agreement or Learning Covenant**

**Name of Intern** \_\_\_\_\_

**Setting, Parish or Agency** \_\_\_\_\_

**Supervising Clergy person** \_\_\_\_\_

**Supervisory Meetings (frequency, usual date and time)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Group Supervision (frequency, usual date and time)** \_\_\_\_\_

**On-Site Hours Weekly**

**Sundays** \_\_\_\_\_

**Weekdays** \_\_\_\_\_

**Term of Internship**

**Starting** \_\_\_\_\_ **until** \_\_\_\_\_

## Learning Goals and Areas of Internship Ministry

### Pastoral Care (where, when, with whom?)

#### Goal 1 \_\_\_\_\_

How will I know this goal has been achieved?

What change should be seen?

How will I measure the change?

#### Goal 2 \_\_\_\_\_

How will I know this goal has been achieved?

What change should be seen?

How will I measure the change?

### Worship Participation (When, How, What?)

#### Goal 1 \_\_\_\_\_

How will I know this goal has been achieved?

What change should be seen?

How will I measure the change?

#### Goal 2 \_\_\_\_\_

How will I know this goal has been achieved?

What change should be seen?

How will I measure the change?

### Preaching (frequency)

#### Goal 1 \_\_\_\_\_

How will I know this goal has been achieved?

What change should be seen?

How will I measure the change?

#### Goal 2 \_\_\_\_\_

How will I know this goal has been achieved?

What change should be seen?

How will I measure the change?

Other areas and goals for learning \_\_\_\_\_

Intern signature \_\_\_\_\_

Supervising Clergy person signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Learning Agreement \_\_\_\_\_

Approval by Bishop MacVean-Brown \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX B**

### **SUMMARY OF STEPS IN THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS FOR ORDINATION TO THE DIACONATE**

## APPENDIX B

### SUMMARY OF STEPS IN THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS FOR ORDINATION TO THE DIACONATE

#### *THE STEPS AT THE PARISH OR COMMUNITY OF FAITH LEVEL*

1. Applicant meets with the Member of the Clergy in local parish/faith group
2. Member of the Clergy affirms the sense of call
3. Chair of the COM notified and assigns advisor to PDCOM
4. Parish Discernment Committee (PDCOM) is formed and meets with COM advisor
5. The PDCOM meets several times with applicant following steps of Parish Discernment Handbook (for a minimum of six months)
6. The PDCOM makes a decision
7. PDCOM recommends to Vestry and Clergy
8. The Vestry nominates person
9. Form 1 Nominee signs Acceptance, and Application for Postulancy sent to the Bishop
10. Form 2 Letter of Support from Vestry sent to the Bishop
11. Form 3 Detailed Description of Parish Discernment Process sent to the Bishop

#### *STEPS FROM NOMINEE TO POSTULANCY*

1. Bishop has initial meeting with Nominee. If the Bishop makes decision to proceed with process, the evaluations and documents below need to be completed. (Bishop meeting #1)  
Nominee receives the following forms from the Bishop's office:
  - *Oxford Document Background Check*
  - *Physical Examination Form*
  - *Instructions and forms for the Psychological Examination Process*
  - *Life History Questionnaire*
  - *Behavior Screening Questionnaire*
  - *Information Release Form*
2. It is the responsibility of the Nominee to schedule the appropriate appointments and return all completed forms to the Bishop's office:
3. Bishop meets with Nominee following examinations (Bishop meeting #2)
4. Bishop decides. If yes then:
5. Nominee recommended to meet with COM for Postulancy

6. Nominee interviews with the COM
7. The COM makes a decision with recommendations to the Bishop
8. The Bishop, if in agreement, makes the Nominee a Postulant
9. The COM appoints a liaison for the new Postulant
10. The Postulant continues with the discernment process within the parish, and proceeds with formation as guided by the Deacons' Council, which appoints a Deacon Mentor, in addition to the COM liaison.
11. The Postulant enrolls in the Province I School for Deacons.

#### *APPLICATION FOR CANDIDACY*

1. Completion of year one of the Province I School for Deacons
2. Readiness for Candidacy determined with Deacon Mentor and liaison from COM
3. Form 4 Application for Candidacy submitted to Bishop and Chair of COM
4. Form 5 Vestry Letter of Support (Second Letter)
5. Postulant meets with COM
6. Form 6 The COM makes a decision with recommendations to the Bishop and Standing Committee
7. The Standing Committee interviews the Postulant
8. The Standing Committee makes its recommendation to the Bishop
9. The Bishop admits Postulant to Candidacy

#### *APPLICATION FOR ORDINATION TO THE DIACONATE*

1. Form 7 Application for Ordination with specified documentation submitted to the Bishop
2. Form 8 Vestry Letter of Support (Third Letter) submitted to the Bishop
3. Province I School for Deacons evaluation
4. Candidate documents completion of Practicum in Pastoral Ministry and/or completion of a CPE unit, followed by, or concurrent with, a Parish Assignment.
5. Form 9 Certificate of Readiness from Deacons' Council
6. Candidate meets with the COM
7. Form 10 COM makes its recommendation to the Bishop
8. Following a positive decision by the Bishop, recommendations will be made to the Standing Committee of the Diocese which may or may not meet with the Candidate
9. The Standing Committee authorizes the Bishop to proceed with the ordination
10. The Bishop ordains the candidate to the diaconate

***If the medical, psychological, and background evaluations have taken place more than thirty-six (36) months prior to ordination, they must be updated, unless a variance is granted by the Bishop.***

## **APPENDIX C**

### **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

## APPENDIX C

### GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Advisor to Parish Discernment Committee:** When the chair of the COM/COD is notified by a local clergyperson that s/he is calling for the formation of a Parish Discernment Committee, a member of the COM/COD shall be appointed to meet with and advise the local discernment committee on processes and protocols.

**Candidacy:** The continued period of discernment following Postulancy, during which a Ministry Project is undertaken and also during which continued discernment and preparation for ordination to the diaconate continues, and continued academic studies culminating in demonstration of proficiency in the canonical areas by means of a canonical examination.

**Canons:** Church laws passed by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church. Canon III, of *The Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church* addresses "Ministry".

**Committee on Ministry (COM):** The group of six clergy and six laypersons tasked with overseeing the discernment process of persons for ordination and who make recommendations to the Bishop. The COM is one of two committees of the Commission on Missional Vitality.

**Deacons:** In all that they do, deacons center on fulfilling the role as an image of Christ by being called and sent to serve in the world, modeling service to mobilize the baptized for service.

**Deacon Mentor:** The Deacons' Council shall appoint a Deacon Mentor who will assist the PIP (Postulant and Candidate) in outlining the specifics of her/his plan for discernment and academic, spiritual and emotional formation.

**Diaconate:** The full and equal order of ordained ministry for service to God's world and its people as a life-long commitment.

**Diaconate, Transitional:** Diaconal ordination for persons who subsequently will be ordained to the priesthood, usually in six months to a year after being made deacons.

**Discernment for Ordination as a Deacon:** Some persons may sense that God is calling them to

exercise their gifts in service to God's world as a deacon. The Diocese of Vermont sets out a process of discernment which begins with the local priest and congregation.

**Discernment for Baptismal Ministry:** Each baptized Christian is encouraged through prayer, individual reflection, and conversation with others in community, to seek in what ways her/his particular spiritual gifts may be deployed for Christ's mission in the world either as a lay or ordained person.

**Parish Discernment Committee (PDCOM):** Three to five members of a congregation/faith community appointed by the clergyperson in charge to engage in a discernment process with a person identified by the clergyperson as someone who may have a vocation as an ordained person.

**Ministry Project:** A major learning and formation experience during Candidacy. The project may take place in a parish, or in a community service agency, for no fewer than six (6) months.

**Nomination:** A person whose sense of calling to ordination has been affirmed through a formal discernment process with the clergy and Parish Discernment Committee (PDCOM) of a local parish/faith community is nominated to proceed to further discernment with the Bishop, COM/COD and Standing Committee of the Diocese.

**Nominee:** A person so nominated.

**Postulant:** A Nominee who has who has applied to and met with the bishop and who has completed physical and psychological examinations and various informational forms. The Nominee next meets with the COM/COD and if recommended to the Bishop is made a Postulant by the Bishop.

**Postulancy:** The period of continued discernment between Nomination and Candidacy during which the Postulant meets with the Deacons' Council, is assigned a Deacon Mentor and a liaison from the COM, serves a pastoral internship in a ministry placement.

**Practicum in Pastoral Ministry:** For those aspirants who, due to full-time employment and/or family responsibilities, are unable to take Clinical Pastoral Education, the diocese now offers Practicum, a newly modified internship program, directed by the Canon Missioner for Pastoral Training. It is a program of discernment and pastoral development and builds upon and merges two existing training experiences, **Ministry Internship Placement** and a **Ministry Project**, into one intensive practicum experience in a parish setting or social service agency. Practicum incorporates a rigorous reflective process, including individual and group supervision and satisfies the CPE requirement. Practicum may be up to a year, but not less than nine months

**Province I School for Deacons:** This program offers a two-year academic formation program with a quarterly pattern of two month-long courses culminating in a Formation Weekend retreat. Each module includes reading assignments, written papers, online lectures and discussions. The curriculum is designed to prepare students to fulfill ordination requirements in accordance with Canon III, Title 6 of the Episcopal Church Constitution and Canons 2018, calling for basic competence in five areas:

- Academic studies including, The Holy Scriptures, theology, and the tradition of the Church.
- Diakonia and the diaconate.
- Human awareness and understanding.
- Spiritual development and discipline.
- Practical training and experience.

**Standing Committee:** A committee of advice and counsel to the Bishop consisting of four laypersons and four clergy, elected by the Diocesan Convention. On recommendation by the COM and Bishop, the Standing Committee interviews applicants for Candidacy and Ordination and makes recommendations to the Bishop.