



A Handbook for Those Discerning a Call to Ordination as a Priest in the Episcopal Church

*This handbook has been prepared by
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These forms are also available online at <https://diovermont.org/com/>

INTRODUCTION: THE MINISTRY OF A PRIEST

Ministry in the Episcopal Church is understood broadly as the work of the whole People of God. The Catechism asks, “Who are the ministers of the Church?” and responds: “The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.” And the ministry of lay persons is defined expansively: “The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.” (Book of Common Prayer, p. 855).

The Committee 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; on farms and in forests; in offices, retail stores and repair shops; in hospitals, nursing homes, law courts and prisons; on playgrounds and in restaurants. It is through our everyday activity that we all, as baptized Christians, follow the Risen Christ.

Ordination as a deacon, priest or bishop sets a person apart for specific ministries of leadership in the life of the Church. “The ministry of a priest,” states the Catechism, “is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as pastor to the people; to share with the bishop in the overseeing of the Church; to proclaim the Gospel; to administer the sacraments; and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God.” (BCP p. 856)

A more extended explanation of a priest’s ministry appears during the ordination service for a priest, when the bishop says to the ordinand:

The Church is the family of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the

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Holy Spirit. All baptized people are called to make Christ known as Savior and Lord, and to share in the renewing of his world. Now you are called to work as pastor, priest, and teacher, together with your bishop and fellow presbyters, and to take your share in the councils of the Church.

As a priest, it will be your task to proclaim by word and deed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to fashion your life in accordance with its precepts. You are to love and serve the people among whom you work, caring alike for young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor. You are to preach, to declare God's forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God's blessing, to share in the administration of Holy Baptism and in the celebration of the mysteries of Christ's Body and Blood, and to perform the other ministrations entrusted to you.

In all that you do, you are to nourish Christ's people from the riches of his grace, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come. (BCP, p. 531)

On the basis of these understandings of priesthood, the Committee on Ministry undertakes the task of discernment with persons exploring a call to be a priest. For those discerning a call to priesthood, this handbook sets forth in detail the elements of the ordination process.

ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

The Canons of the Episcopal Church specify that each diocese shall have a Commission on Ministry. Overall, its work is to “assist persons engaged in a process of ministry discernment to determine appropriate avenues for the expression and support of their ministries, either lay or ordained.” ([Title III.3.4](#))

In the Diocese of Vermont, the work designated by the churchwide canons to a Commission on Ministry is carried out by the Committee on Ministry. This

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committee is a constituent group of the Commission on Missional Vitality, which also includes the Committee on Congregational Development and Formation.

The Committee on Ministry consists of twelve persons appointed by the bishop, who may serve up to two three-year terms. Ordinarily, six members are lay persons and six are clergy (priests and, if possible, deacons). The committee has a chair, a vice chair and a clerk. The committee meets both in person and electronically. Interviews with persons in discernment are generally conducted in person.

Questions about the Handbook or about the discernment process may be directed to the bishop's office, or to the chair of the Committee on Ministry.

The Committee on Ministry requests that persons pursuing discernment for ordination read Title III, on the subject of "Ministry", in the [Canons of the Episcopal Church](#).

In this Handbook the pronoun "they" and its corollaries ("their" and "them") are used instead of "he or she" and its corollaries.

QUALITIES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR ORDAINED MINISTRY

We are all Christian ministers by virtue of our baptism in Jesus Christ. Many are called 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 they have a call to ordained ministry, prayerful deliberation must extend to the member of the clergy who is their pastor and the faith community in which the person is an active member.

As the Committee on Ministry, we believe clarity about the qualities and attributes we seek is necessary, and we continually pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance. In general, we believe that a person called to ordained ministry as a priest must:

- be a confirmed communicant of the Episcopal Church.
- be settled and active in the life of a congregation in the Diocese of Vermont.
- have a clear sense of call affirmed by a local faith community.
- accept worship, prayer and Scripture as an integral part of their life.
- be intellectually competent and able to grow in their understanding of theological, ethical and social issues.
- have a demonstrated ability both to lead and to collaborate with others.
- be enthusiastic about communicating to others God's love for them in Christ.
- be psychologically sound and have demonstrated insight into their own personality and emotional issues.
- if partnered in a long-term relationship, be in a stable and fulfilling relationship in which the partner supports the person's call.
- strive to pattern their ethical life after the example of Jesus.

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- be a faithful steward of God's creation, including their own body and health.

There are two important requirements related to priesthood in the Episcopal Church. A person called to ordained ministry as a priest must:

- firmly believe the vows they 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 also 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 imperfectly reflect the glory of God.

In addition, the bishop and Committee on Ministry require that a person seeking ordination as a priest in the Diocese of Vermont be committed, if ordained, to minister within the diocese for three to five years following ordination to the transitional diaconate. Exceptions may be made at the bishop's discretion.

The bishop and Committee on Ministry endorse and practice the non-discrimination provision of the church-wide canons:

No person shall be denied access to the discernment process or to any process for the employment, licensing, calling, or deployment for any ministry, lay or ordained, in this Church because of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, sex, marital or family status (including pregnancy and child care plans), sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disabilities or age, except as otherwise provided by the Canons. No right to licensing, ordination, or election is hereby established. ([Title III.1.1-2](#))

From time to time, the bishop and the Committee on Ministry may offer daylong informational gatherings for persons who wish to explore a possible call to ordained ministry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FISCAL LIFE AS A CLERGY PERSON

The Episcopal Church does *not* require clergy to take a “Vow of Poverty” as might be the case in other Christian denominations. However, life as a clergyperson can have dramatic financial implications on a person and their family’s life. As you discern a call to ministry, please be aware of and consider:

- the costs of seminary/training programs and ways to be supported or find funding for them
- implications on your tax reporting
- retirement and pension
- your own and family’s cost of living

Applicants are encouraged to browse the [Church Pension Group’s website](#) for financial planning tools and worksheets specific to seminarians as well as ordained clergy. Please also talk with your pastor about this aspect of ordained ministry.

STAGE 1: THE PARISH PROCESS OF DISCERNMENT

Discernment of a call to ordination as a priest has several elements. They include the individual's sense of call, the congregation's sense of call, and the determination of the bishop and the Committee on Ministry. The goal of the discernment process is to determine if all elements are present. Only when the individual's sense of call and the larger church's sense of that call are in alignment can the ordination process move forward.

The process begins in the congregational community of which a person is a member. At this 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, ordinarily the priest who is the person's pastor, and hereafter termed the pastor. Second is the affirmation of the call by members of the parish, including the vestry.

The term "member of the clergy," interchangeable with the term "pastor" throughout this document, may be the rector, vicar, priest-in-charge, interim rector of a parish, chaplain or any other leader who exercises oversight in a faith community, or, subject to the permission of the bishop, a specially designated priest of the diocese. In case of uncertainty about who may act as the pastor, the bishop must be consulted. The term "parish" throughout this document may also refer to any congregation or faith community.

ROLE OF THE PASTOR

The pastor has a crucial responsibility at the parish stage of the discernment process. The pastor 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.

Conversations with the person in discernment should cover the topics in

“Qualities and Requirements for Ordained Ministry.” The pastor should discuss any issues that might prompt questions about the person’s suitability for ordained ministry. If the pastor has questions regarding the process or the person’s particular circumstances, they should confer with the chair of the Committee on Ministry.

If the pastor decides that they support the person’s call to be a priest, they will inform the person of this decision, clearly express the reasons for it, and initiate the process of establishing a Parish Discernment Committee.

If a decision against the ordained ministry is to be made, it is best made at this point. It is preferable to deny the applicant permission to continue in the process than to allow them to proceed with no genuine prospect of ordination. No one is served well — the person, the congregation or the diocese — if the pastor does not accept the serious responsibility of evaluation and decision.

At any point during the period of meetings, the pastor may decide that they cannot support the person’s pursuit of ordination. If so, they may make one of two determinations:

- 1) They cannot affirm the person’s perceived sense of call at this time but are willing to continue to work with the person, and to reevaluate at some future time. If so, they must communicate their reasons to the person, propose a timetable for reevaluation, and clearly indicate to the person the conditions under which support would be considered.
- 2) They cannot affirm the person’s perceived sense of call and do not foresee a change of their opinion. If so, they must communicate their reasons to the person. It is also important to provide continuing pastoral care to the person.

If the pastor cannot support the person because of their own views relating to

gender, sexual orientation or theological or political matters, the pastor must consult with the bishop. The bishop will arrange for another member of the clergy in another congregation to help shepherd the person through the discernment process.

ROLE OF THE PARISH DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

When the pastor decides to support the applicant's call to ordination, they will appoint a Parish Discernment Committee. At least one member of the Parish Discernment Committee should be a member of the vestry, who will serve as a link to the vestry. If the faith community is not a congregation, a body equivalent to a vestry will suffice.

The first meeting of the Parish Discernment Committee will include an advisor from the Committee on Ministry, who will set forth the parameters of the process and provide information and resources. The Parish Discernment Committee must meet with the applicant for a period of no fewer than six months and five meetings. The conversations should cover the topics outlined above in "Qualities and Requirements for Ordained Ministry." The Committee will request from the applicant a spiritual autobiography and a statement setting forth their experience and understanding of ministry.

The Parish Discernment Committee's decision about whether the person is suitable for ordination is a crucial part of the discernment process. The committee must make its decision about the person independently of the pastor's decision. The committee's decision may be one of three:

- 1) The committee affirms the person's call and recommends that the vestry nominate the person for postulancy. If so, the committee informs the applicant and cites the reasons for its decision.
- 2) The committee cannot affirm the person's pursuit of ordination at this time but is willing to continue to work with the person, and to reevaluate

at some future time. If so, it must propose a timetable for reevaluation and indicate to the person the conditions under which support would be considered.

- 3) The committee cannot affirm the person's call to ordination and does not foresee a change of its opinion. If so, it must inform the applicant of the reasons for its decision. It should consult with the pastor about continuing pastoral care for the applicant.

When the Parish Discernment Committee affirms the person's call to priesthood, it submits a written report to the pastor and the vestry.

ROLE OF THE VESTRY

Following receipt of the Parish Discernment Committee's report, the vestry and the pastor meet to discuss whether to nominate the person to the bishop for postulancy. The vestry may wish to meet with the applicant and with members of the Parish Discernment Committee.

If the vestry and pastor decide to nominate the person for postulancy, they must compose a letter of support to the bishop stating the reasons for the nomination. This must also include a statement committing the congregation to involve itself in the nominee's preparation for ordination to the priesthood, including financial support. The letter of support must be signed by a two-thirds majority of the vestry and by the pastor. The letter of support is then submitted to the bishop, and can be included as part of Form 2 in the appendix of this Handbook.

ONGOING DISCERNMENT AT THE PARISH LEVEL

The parish's involvement in the ordination process does not end with the submission of the letter of support. If the bishop admits the person as a

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Postulant for Holy Orders in the Diocese of Vermont, a second letter of support will be required before admission to candidacy can occur. Therefore, ongoing discernment is important on the part of the postulant, the faith community that sponsored the nominee, the bishop, and Parish Discernment Committee.

STAGE 2: POSTULANCY

Postulancy is the initial stage of formal recognition by the diocese that a person is in the ordination process. Postulancy is a period of both continued discernment and personal formation for ministry.

APPLICATION FOR POSTULANCY

The nominee is responsible for ensuring that the following documents have been submitted to the bishop:

Submitted to Bishop by Nominee:

- FORM I: Application for Postulancy
- Spiritual autobiography of approximately 1000 words and an accompanying statement of the nominee's experience and understanding of ministry
- Evidence of baptism
- Evidence of confirmation or reception in the Episcopal Church
- Resume/curriculum vitae (CV) of no more than three pages
- Transcripts from all post-secondary educational institutions
- Evidence of sexual misconduct prevention training within five years
- Evidence of anti-racism training within five years

Submitted to Bishop by Pastor:

- FORM II: Letter of Support from Pastor and Vestry
- FORM III: Certification of the Nominee's Parish Discernment Process

Forms Sent to Nominee from Bishop's Office, Completed By Nominee, And Then Returned To Bishop's Office:

- Physical Examination Form

- Life History Questionnaire
- Behavior Screening Questionnaire
- Information Release Form

Submitted to Bishop by Committee on Ministry:

- FORM VI: Recommendation from Committee on Ministry recommending nominee for postulancy, submitted by chair to bishop. *(This occurs after the nominee is interviewed by the Committee on Ministry)*

MEETING WITH THE BISHOP

Once these documents have been received, the bishop's office will contact the nominee to schedule a meeting with the bishop. This meeting gives the nominee the opportunity to meet face-to-face with the bishop, discuss their sense of call to ordained ministry, discuss the topics outlined above in "Qualities and Requirements for Ordained Ministry," consult about financial resources, and clarify any other matters about the diocesan discernment process.

Following this meeting, the bishop will decide whether the nominee should proceed with the diocesan discernment process, and will notify both the nominee and the chair of the Committee on Ministry of their decision. The bishop may make one of three decisions:

- 1) The bishop supports the nominee's pursuit of ordination, pending satisfactory completion of other evaluations (below). If so, the bishop initiates the further steps in the diocesan discernment process.
- 2) The bishop cannot affirm the nominee's call to ordination at this time, but is willing to reevaluate at some future time. The bishop will indicate to the nominee the conditions under which they will allow the nominee

to proceed with the diocesan discernment process and a timetable for later reevaluation.

- 3) The bishop cannot affirm the nominee's call to ordination and does not foresee a change in their opinion. The bishop will indicate to the nominee the reasons for this decision and will be in touch with the nominee's pastor about continuing pastoral care.

EVALUATIONS

When the bishop decides to support the nominee in moving forward, the bishop's office will initiate the Oxford Document Background and Public Records check. Forms for the Oxford process will be mailed directly to the nominee from Oxford Document Management. The cost for this process will be borne by the diocese.

The nominee will also undergo specific physical and mental professional examinations as part of the evaluation process. The bishop has approved a list of professional evaluators and will designate those whom the nominee may see. The bishop's office will send the needed forms to the nominee, who is responsible for providing them to the evaluators. In general, the parish and the diocese share in the expenses associated with these professional evaluations, as determined by the diocese. The possibility of insurance covering certain costs should be explored.

Physical Examination: The nominee will schedule a physical examination with their 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.

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.

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 to the psychiatrist the Life History Questionnaire, which will be seen only by the psychiatrist and will remain in the psychiatrist's files. The psychiatrist will complete the Psychiatric Examination Form and send it directly to the bishop along with a detailed, written psychiatric report.

The completed forms and the reports from evaluative interviews will be sent directly to the bishop by the evaluators. Only the bishop will have access to the Oxford Background Check and to the physical, psychological and psychiatric evaluations.

When all the above information has been received and reviewed by the bishop, the bishop will decide whether the nominee may continue with the diocesan discernment process.

MEETING WITH THE COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

When the bishop decides that the nominee may continue in the process, the bishop will request the Committee on Ministry to enter into discernment with the nominee. The bishop's office will send the committee various documents such as the application for postulancy, the support letter from the parish, the nominee's spiritual autobiography, and educational transcripts.

Note concerning neurodivergence:

The Diocese of Vermont values diversity of all kinds, and supports people of diverse identities, including those who disclose as neurodiverse. The committee invites neurodiverse persons to engage in the discernment process. The committee assumes that all who disclose neurodiversity

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(or any other identity) have done or are doing the work necessary to thrive as clergypersons in the Diocese of Vermont.

The committee is a safe place to announce and own diverse identities. The nominee may choose to disclose to the Committee on Ministry, either in person or in writing, any pertinent information regarding neurodivergence or related matters. The committee assures people in the process of discernment that any such information will receive a considerate response.

Cleveland Clinic Definition of Neurodiversity:

“Neurodiversity” is a word used to explain the unique ways people’s brains work. While everyone’s brain develops similarly, no two brains function just alike. Being neurodivergent means having a brain that works differently from the average or “neurotypical” person. This may be differences in social preferences, ways of learning, ways of communicating and/or ways of perceiving the environment. Because of this, a neurodivergent person has different struggles and unique strengths.

The chair of the Committee on Ministry will contact the nominee and invite them to meet with the committee. In that meeting, the Committee on Ministry will explore the nominee’s sense of call that has been affirmed by the pastor, the Parish Discernment Committee, and the vestry in its letter of support. Topics of conversation will include those listed above, under “Qualities and Requirements for Ordained Ministry.”

After meeting with the nominee, the Committee on Ministry will make a recommendation to the bishop, which may take one of three forms:

- 1) The committee recommends to the bishop that the nominee be admitted as a postulant for ordination to the priesthood.

- 2) The committee cannot affirm the nominee's call to ordination at this time but is willing to reevaluate at some future time. In this case, the committee will indicate to the bishop the conditions under which affirmation might be reconsidered.
- 3) The Committee on Ministry does not affirm the nominee's call to ordination and does not foresee a change of its opinion.

The committee does not communicate its recommendation to the nominee, but only to the bishop. In all three options, the committee communicates its decision to the bishop in writing and explains the reasons for its recommendation. The committee's work is only to recommend action to the bishop. The bishop alone has the authority to designate a nominee as a postulant. The bishop's action may differ from the committee's recommendation, whether positively, negatively or regarding delay.

BISHOP'S DECISION ON POSTULANCY

If the bishop's decision is positive, the nominee will become a postulant for Holy Orders in the Diocese of Vermont, and their name will be recorded in the Book of Official Acts of the Diocese of Vermont. If the bishop's decision is negative, the bishop, in consultation with the chair of the Committee on Ministry, will either suggest termination of the ordination process or specific conditions for its continuation.

After meeting with the new postulant, the bishop will inform the pastor, the Committee on Ministry, the Standing Committee, and the head of any educational institution which the postulant may be attending of the fact and date of the admission to postulancy. ([Title III.8.3.d](#))

Any postulant may be removed as a postulant at the sole discretion of the bishop. The bishop will give written notice of the removal to the postulant and the pastor, the Committee on Ministry, the Standing Committee, and the head

of any education institution the postulant may be attending. ([Title III.8.3.f](#))

“No Bishop shall consider accepting as a Postulant any person who has been refused admission as a Candidate for ordination to the Priesthood in any other Diocese, or who, having been admitted, has afterwards ceased to be a Candidate, until receipt of a letter from the Bishop of the Diocese refusing admission, or in which the person has been a Candidate, declaring the cause of refusal or of cessation.” ([Title III.8.3.c](#))

FORMATION AND EDUCATION

The churchwide canons ([Title III.8.5](#)) helpfully set forth the basic parameters for formation and education in preparation for ordination:

Preparation for Ordination:

- a. The Bishop and the [Committee] on Ministry shall work with the Postulant or Candidate to develop and monitor a program of preparation for ordination to the Priesthood and to ensure that pastoral guidance is provided throughout the period of preparation.
- b. If the Postulant or Candidate has not previously obtained a baccalaureate degree, the [Committee on Ministry], Bishop, and Postulant or Candidate shall design a program of such additional academic work as may be necessary to prepare the Postulant or Candidate to undertake a program of theological education.
- c. Formation shall take into account the local culture and each Postulant or Candidate’s background, age, occupation, and ministry.
- d. Prior education and learning from life experience may be considered as part of the formation required for the Priesthood.
- e. Whenever possible, formation for the Priesthood shall take place in community, including other persons in preparation for the Priesthood, or others preparing for ministry.
- f. Formation shall include theological training, practical experience, emotional development, and spiritual formation.

- g.** Subject areas for study during this program of preparation shall include:
 - i. The Holy Scriptures.
 - ii. History of the Christian Church.
 - iii. Christian Theology.
 - iv. Christian Ethics and Moral Theology.
 - v. Christian Worship according to the use of the Book of Common Prayer, the Hymnal, and authorized supplemental texts.
 - vi. The Practice of Ministry in contemporary society, including leadership, evangelism, stewardship, ecumenism, interfaith relations, mission theology, and the historical and contemporary experience of racial and minority groups.
- h.** Preparation for ordination shall include training regarding:
 - i. prevention of sexual misconduct against both children and adults.
 - ii. civil requirements for reporting and pastoral opportunities for responding to evidence of abuse.
 - iii. the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church, particularly Title IV thereof, utilizing, but not limited to use of, the Title IV training website of The Episcopal Church.
 - iv. the Church's teaching on racism. [The Diocese of Vermont understands this to include anti-racism training.]
 - v. Each Postulant or Candidate for ordination to the Priesthood shall communicate with the Bishop in person or by letter, four times a year, in the Ember Weeks*, reflecting on the Candidate's academic experience and personal and spiritual development.
- i.** The seminary or other formation program shall provide for, monitor, and report on the academic performance and personal qualifications of the Postulant or Candidate for ordination. These reports will be made upon request of the Bishop and [Committee] on Ministry, but at least once per year.

* According to the Book of Common Prayer, Ember Days are set aside for prayers for those called to Holy Orders, and occur on the following Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays:

- After St. Lucy's Day (December 13)
- After the First Sunday in Lent
- After the Day of Pentecost
- After Holy Cross Day (September 14)

This means that there are four sets of Ember Days, one for each season of the year—winter, spring, summer, and autumn.

Theological Education

In most cases, the postulant is expected to complete the Master of Divinity. This usually requires a college degree and three years of full-time seminary education. The bishop will discuss with the postulant their preferences for theological education. The institution, or the range of acceptable institutions, and the parameters of the academic program are ultimately the bishop's decision to make. If the applicant has not attended seminary but has a graduate degree in a field closely related to theological study, the bishop may determine that less seminary work is required. In most cases, however, the postulant will take a minimum of two semesters of residential study at a seminary. Online seminary education is a possibility that may be explored.

It is the responsibility of the postulant to complete the steps necessary for admission to a seminary. Financial arrangements are to be made by the postulant in consultation with the bishop and the financial aid officer of the seminary concerned. Any evaluations from the seminary discussing the Postulant's academic progress will be sent to the bishop's office and made available to the Committee on Ministry and the Standing Committee. Possessing a graduate degree in theology or having pursued a formation program is not a prerequisite to the discernment process. Nor does having a theological degree make the critical discernment of the congregation and the diocese unnecessary.

Theological Field Education

Parish-based field education is required for postulants and candidates

attending seminary. Normally this is done during the first or second academic year of study and is carried out through the seminary's field education program. The student is expected to consult with the bishop regarding an appropriate site for this formation.

Clinical Pastoral Education

CPE focuses on the development of pastoral skills. Participants develop their pastoral skills and reflect on their ways of relating interpersonally in a structured environment. CPE strengthens the student's identity and self-awareness in ministry. CPE typically occurs in a medical or psychiatric facility, but parish-based CPE is also possible. At least one unit (400 hours) of CPE at an accredited center (hospital or parish) must be completed. Either a full-time or part-time program is acceptable.

Constellation Ministry Preparation

The Diocese of Vermont is forming constellations of several congregations served by a single ordained pastor or a pastoral team. This increases opportunities for full-time ordained ministry and reduces dependence on part-time clergy. In addition to the areas of study cited above, all postulants and candidates are expected to enroll in training for constellation ministry.

Internship

The diocese may require persons in formation to undertake a full-time internship in a congregation or other ministry within the diocese over a period of about ten weeks. The purpose of the internship is to provide experience of full-time ministry and nurture awareness of particular challenges and opportunities of ministry in Vermont.

Spiritual Direction

Spiritual growth is aided by 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 postulants and candidates to give serious attention to this dimension of discernment and

formation.

Ember Day Letters (referenced above)

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 (Sept. 14).

Liaison

Each postulant will be assigned a liaison from the Committee on Ministry to assist the postulant and to provide support throughout the process. The responsibility for maintaining contact between the liaison and the postulant is mutual.

STAGE 3: CANDIDACY

Candidacy is the next stage of discernment and formation for ordination to the priesthood. After the personal and spiritual growth experienced as a postulant, the candidate typically has matured in theological understanding and pastoral identity and is ready to engage in discerning specific possibilities for future ministry.

APPLICATION FOR CANDIDACY

After a period of no fewer than six months after admission to postulancy, and having completed at least half of the recommended course of theological study, a postulant may apply for admission to candidacy. The postulant is responsible for submitting the following documents, all of which go directly to the bishop:

Submitted to Bishop by Postulant:

- FORM IV: Application for Candidacy (two copies)
- Reflection paper (two copies) of no more than 500 words in which Postulant reflects on their readiness to apply for candidacy
- Transcripts: Records of all academic courses and grades received from the seminary or other program approved by the bishop and the Committee on Ministry.
- Final written CPE evaluations by postulant and CPE supervisor
- Any other reports, records or evaluations requested by the bishop or the Committee on Ministry

Submitted to Bishop by Pastor:

- FORM V: Letter of Support (two copies) from sponsoring parish

Submitted To Bishop by Committee on Ministry:

- FORM VI: Statement from the Committee on Ministry attesting to continuing formation of Postulant and recommending candidacy, submitted by the chair to the bishop

After reviewing the submitted documents, the bishop may choose to meet with the postulant. Such a meeting may also occur later in the process, at the bishop's discretion.

MEETING WITH THE COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

After considering the postulant's Application for Candidacy, the bishop may request the Committee on Ministry to meet with the postulant. The bishop's office will send relevant documents to the committee.

The committee chair will invite the postulant to meet with the committee to reflect with the postulant on their ordination preparation thus far and to determine the postulant's readiness for candidacy. The committee will discuss with the postulant such matters as spiritual growth, ministerial growth, theological understanding, the experience of seminary or other educational program, and evaluations of field education and Clinical Pastoral Education. Documents the postulant submitted to the bishop will assist discussion.

After meeting with the postulant, the Committee on Ministry will decide on a recommendation to the bishop, which may take one of three forms:

- 1) The Committee recommends to the bishop that the postulant be admitted as a candidate for ordination to the priesthood.
- 2) The Committee on Discernment does not affirm the postulant's call to ordination at this time, but is willing to reevaluate at some future time. In this case, the committee will indicate to the bishop the conditions under

which affirmation might be reconsidered.

- 3) The Committee on Discernment does not affirm the postulant's call to ordination and does not foresee a change of its opinion.

The Committee does not communicate its recommendation to the postulant but only to the bishop. In all three options, the Committee communicates its decision to the bishop in writing and explains the reasons for its recommendation. The committee's work is only to recommend action to the bishop. The bishop alone has the authority to designate a Postulant as a Candidate. The bishop's action may differ from the committee's recommendation, whether positively, negatively or regarding delay.

MEETING WITH THE STANDING COMMITTEE

The Standing Committee is the canonical elected body of the diocese that has a number of formal administrative responsibilities in collaboration with the bishop. It is at the stage of candidacy that the Standing Committee first participates in the ordination process.

Ordinarily, the Standing Committee appoints one of its members to be a liaison with the Committee on Ministry. The liaison often attends interviews conducted by the Committee on Ministry and informs the Standing Committee of persons coming through the ordination process. Thus, the Standing Committee ordinarily has ongoing background awareness before its first formal participation in the ordination process of any particular person.

If the bishop concurs with the positive recommendation of the Committee on Ministry, the bishop will request the Standing Committee to interview the postulant and make a recommendation concerning candidacy. The bishop will forward relevant documents to the Standing Committee to assist its consideration. The president of the Standing Committee will invite the postulant to meet with the committee.

The role of the Standing Committee is not to repeat the discernment process carried out by the Committee on Ministry. It is, instead, to become acquainted with the postulant, review the documentation and confirm that canonical requirements have been met.

After meeting with the postulant, the Standing Committee communicates its recommendation in writing to the bishop.

BISHOP'S DECISION ON CANDIDACY

With positive recommendations in hand from the Committee on Ministry and the Standing Committee, the bishop decides whether to admit the postulant to candidacy. If the bishop's decision is positive, the postulant will become a Candidate for Holy Orders in the Diocese of Vermont, and their name will be recorded in the Book of Official Acts of the Diocese of Vermont. If the bishop's decision is negative, the bishop, in consultation with the chair of the Committee on Ministry, will either suggest termination of the ordination process, or specific conditions for its continuation.

The bishop will inform the pastor, the Committee on Ministry, the Standing Committee, and the head of any educational institution which the postulant may be attending of the fact and date of the admission to candidacy.

Any candidate may be removed as a candidate at the sole discretion of the bishop. The bishop will give written notice of the removal to the candidate and the pastor, the Committee on Ministry, the Standing Committee, and the head of any education institution the postulant may be attending. ([Title III.8.4.d](#))

DURING CANDIDACY

Candidacy is a time of formation in preparation for ordination. The formational practices recommended during postulancy should be continued through

candidacy. During candidacy, the candidate grows in their awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in ministry and actively considers specific directions their call to ministry may take. The candidate stays in touch with their sponsoring congregation and communicates regularly with the bishop through Ember Day Letters.

Ordinarily, a candidate takes the General Ordination Examination (GOE), which is administered churchwide annually in January by the Episcopal Church's General Board of Examining Chaplains. Typically, the candidate takes the examination during the final year of seminary or other educational preparation. The diocese covers the cost of the GOE and receives the results from the General Board of Examining Chaplains.

The GOE covers the six canonical areas of study that are set forth above in the section on "Formation and Education" in Stage 1: Postulancy. The exam is designed to evaluate competence in each of those areas. The Diocese of Vermont considers the GOE to be a useful diagnostic tool, not an on-off switch for ordination. If a candidate does not demonstrate proficiency in a particular area, further study and tutorial work is recommended prior to ordination.

STAGE 4: TRANSITIONAL DIACONATE

By ancient tradition, persons to be ordained to the priesthood are first ordained to the diaconate. The diaconate is itself one of the three ordained orders in the church, and the permanent or vocational diaconate is being recovered in the Diocese of Vermont and in the Episcopal Church generally. Persons preparing for the transitional diaconate on the way to priesthood are advised to consider prayerfully this ministry as an important formational period and to incorporate into their priestly identity the character of diaconal ministry.

“The ministry of a deacon,” says the Catechism, “is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a servant of those in need; and to assist bishops and priests in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.”

During the [ordination of a deacon](#), the bishop addresses the ordinand as follows:

God now calls you to a special ministry of servanthood directly under your bishop. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely.

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.

Although a person ordained as a priest is a deacon for a limited period, it should not be regarded as simply a way station. Instead, the servanthood highlighted by the diaconate should be a signal feature of one’s priesthood.

APPLICATION FOR ORDINATION TO THE TRANSITIONAL DIACONATE

After a period of no fewer than six months since admission to candidacy, a candidate may apply for ordination to the transitional diaconate. The candidate is responsible for seeing that the following documents are sent directly to the

bishop:

Submitted to Bishop by Candidate:

- FORM VII: Application for ordination to Transitional Diaconate.
- FORM IX: Certificate from the seminary or other program of preparation showing the candidate's scholastic record and providing an evaluation with a recommendation (though the evaluation need not conform to the format of this form).
- A statement of no more than 500 words in which the candidate reflects on their growth in ministry and how they believe they are prepared to be ordained to the transitional diaconate.

Submitted to Bishop by Pastor:

- FORM VIII: Letter of Support from candidate's congregation.

Submitted to Bishop by Committee on Ministry:

- FORM X: Recommendation from Committee on Ministry with recommendation regarding ordination to the transitional diaconate, submitted by the chair to the bishop.

Submitted by Bishop to Standing Committee:

- Certificates giving the dates of admission to postulancy and candidacy
- FORM X: Recommendation from Committee on Ministry regarding ordination to transitional diaconate.

Submitted by the Standing Committee to the Bishop:

- Testimonial in form specified (Canon 8, Section 6f)

After reviewing the submitted documents, the bishop may choose to meet with the candidate. Such a meeting may also occur later in the process, at the bishop's discretion.

MEETING WITH THE COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

After considering the candidate's Application for Ordination to the transitional diaconate, the bishop may request the Committee on Ministry to meet with the postulant. The bishop's office will send relevant documents to the committee.

The committee chair will invite the candidate to meet with the committee in order to reflect with the candidate on ordination preparation thus far and to determine the candidate's readiness for ordination to the transitional diaconate. Documents the candidate submitted to the bishop will assist discussion.

After meeting with the candidate, the Committee on Ministry will decide on a recommendation to the bishop, which may take one of three forms:

- 1) The committee recommends to the bishop that the candidate be ordained to the transitional diaconate.
- 2) The committee does not affirm the candidate's call to ordination at this time but is willing to re-evaluate at some future time. In this case, the committee will indicate to the bishop the conditions under which affirmation might be reconsidered.
- 3) The committee does not affirm the candidate's call to ordination and does not foresee a change of its opinion.

The Committee does not communicate its recommendation to the candidate, but only to the bishop. In all three options, the committee communicates its decision to the bishop in writing and explains the reasons for its recommendation. The committee's work is only to recommend action to the bishop. The bishop alone has the authority to proceed with ordination. The bishop's action may differ from the committee's recommendation, whether positively, negatively or regarding delay.

ROLE OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

If the bishop concurs with the positive recommendation from the Committee on Ministry, the bishop will request consideration by the Standing Committee. The bishop will forward the application materials and the recommendation of the Committee on Ministry to the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee may or may not meet with the candidate.

The Standing Committee's role at this stage is to certify that the canonical requirements for ordination have been met; certify that there is no sufficient objection on medical, psychological, moral or spiritual grounds; and to recommend concerning ordination. A formal certification is signed by a majority of the Standing Committee members ([Title III.8.6d](#)).

BISHOP'S DECISION ON ORDINATION TO THE TRANSITIONAL DIACONATE

Upon receiving a positive recommendation from the Standing Committee, the bishop may ordain the candidate to the transitional diaconate.

TRANSITIONAL DIACONAL MINISTRY

In the Diocese of Vermont, ordinations to the diaconate occur at St. Paul's Cathedral in Burlington.

All deacons serve at the direction of the bishop, who must approve the specific ministry assignment of a deacon.

A transitional deacon may serve in a particular ministry of outreach to the vulnerable of society, or as an assistant in a congregation, or as pastor in a constellation of congregations. In all settings, the bishop ensures that there is

pastoral supervision and ministry mentoring for the deacon.

Typically, the bishop arranges for the newly ordained deacon to be supported by a colleague group that may be mentored by an experienced pastor.

It is important that the deacon establish a rule of life that will be permanent throughout their ordained ministry. Daily prayer, regular spiritual direction and annual retreats are important elements in such a life pattern.

STAGE 5: PRIESTHOOD

Ordination to the priesthood is the end toward which the entire preceding process has been directed. The transitional deacon will have had the opportunity to prayerfully anticipate entering the priesthood, build on strengths, address weaknesses, and seek the Holy Spirit's guidance in particular paths of ministry. By churchwide canon, a person ordained a priest must be 24 years of age or older.

APPLICATION FOR ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

After a period of no fewer than six months since ordination, the transitional deacon may apply for ordination to the priesthood. The transitional deacon is responsible for seeing that the following documents are submitted directly to the bishop:

Submitted to Bishop by Transitional Deacon:

- FORM: XI: Application for Ordination to Priesthood
- Evidence of admission to postulancy, candidacy, and ordination as a deacon
- FORM XIII: Certificate of Scholastic Record from the seminary or other program of preparation
- A statement of no more than 500 words in which the deacon reflects on their growth in ministry and how they believe they are prepared to be ordained to the priesthood

Submitted to Bishop by Pastor:

- FORM XII: Letter of Support from the deacon's congregation or other faith community, signed by at least two-thirds of the members of the vestry and by the pastor. This is preferably the vestry of the

congregation in which the deacon is serving; alternatively it may be the vestry of the deacon's original sponsoring congregation

Submitted to the Bishop by the Committee on Ministry:

- FORM XIV: Statement from the Committee on Ministry attesting to successful completion of program of formation, and recommending the transitional deacon for ordination to the priesthood

Submitted by Standing Committee to Bishop:

- Testimonial in form specified (Canon 8, Section 7c)

Note that the medical, psychological and background checks previously submitted in the process must have occurred within the 36 months prior to ordination as a priest.

After reviewing the submitted documents, the bishop may choose to meet with the deacon. Such a meeting may also occur later in the process, at the bishop's discretion.

MEETING WITH THE COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

After considering the deacon's Application for Ordination to the priesthood, the bishop may request the Committee on Ministry to meet with the deacon and will send relevant documents to the committee.

The committee chair will invite the deacon to meet with the committee in order to reflect with the deacon on their diaconate and continuing ordination preparation and to determine the deacon's readiness for ordination to the priesthood. Documents the postulant submitted to the bishop will assist discussion.

After meeting with the deacon, the Committee on Ministry will decide on a recommendation to the bishop, which may take one of three forms:

- 1) The committee recommends to the bishop that the deacon be ordained to the priesthood.
- 2) The committee does not affirm the deacon's call to ordination to the priesthood at this time, but is willing to reevaluate at some future time. In this case, the committee will indicate to the bishop the conditions under which affirmation might be reconsidered.
- 3) The committee does not affirm the deacon's call to ordination to the priesthood and does not foresee a change of its opinion.

The committee does not communicate its recommendation to the deacon, but only to the bishop. In all three options, the committee communicates its decision to the bishop in writing and explains the reasons for its recommendation. The committee's work is only to recommend action to the bishop. The bishop alone has the authority to proceed with ordination to the priesthood. The bishop's action may differ from the committee's recommendation, whether positively, negatively or regarding delay.

ROLE OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

If the bishop concurs with the positive recommendation from the Committee on Ministry, the bishop will request consideration by the Standing Committee. The bishop will forward the application materials and the recommendation of the Committee on Ministry to the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee may or may not meet with the candidate.

The Standing Committee's role at this stage is to certify that the canonical requirements for ordination have been met; certify that there is no sufficient objection on medical, psychological, moral or spiritual grounds; and to recommend concerning ordination. A formal certification is signed by a majority of the Standing Committee members ([Title III.8.6d](#)).

BISHOP'S DECISION ON ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

Upon receiving a positive recommendation from the Standing Committee, the bishop may ordain the candidate to the priesthood.

PRIESTHOOD

Ordination to the priesthood occurs after appointment to a pastoral charge, as approved by the bishop.

In the Diocese of Vermont, ordinations to the priesthood ordinarily take place at St. Paul's Cathedral in Burlington.

As with transitional deacons, the bishop typically arranges for the newly ordained priests to be supported by a colleague group that may be mentored by an experienced pastor.

The diocese welcomes the newly ordained with the understanding that they will serve within the diocese for at least three to five years. Exceptions may be made at the bishop's discretion.

The newly ordained priest is advised to read Canon 9, "[Of the Life and Work of Priests](#)," in Title III of the Canons of the Episcopal Church.

SUMMARY OF THE STEPS TO ORDINATION

The following list of steps describes a full and successful process to ordination. Note that the process can be terminated by the parish in the first part of the process, or by the bishop in the second part of the process, if there is cause to do so.

PARISH DISCERNMENT PROCESS

- 1) Applicant meets with the pastor for at least 6 months.
- 2) Pastor affirms the applicant's sense of call and appoints a Parish Discernment Committee.
- 3) Ministry assignment developed.
- 4) Applicant meets with Parish Discernment Committee for at least 6 months.
- 5) Parish Discernment Committee recommends applicant to vestry.
- 6) Pastor and the vestry submit letter of support to the bishop.

DIOCESAN DISCERNMENT PROCESS

For Postulancy

- 1) Nominee submits required documents to bishop (see above for Schedule of Forms).
- 2) Bishop meets with nominee.
- 3) Bishop approves nominee to continue diocesan process.
- 4) Nominee has physical & psychological/psychiatric evaluations (as specified by the bishop)
- 5) Bishop approves nominee to continue the process.

- 6) Nominee meets with Committee on Ministry.
- 7) Committee on Ministry recommends nominee to bishop for postulancy.
- 8) Bishop admits nominee to postulancy.
- 9) Nominee writes Ember Day letters to bishop throughout postulancy

For Candidacy

- 1) After no fewer than six months in postulancy, postulant submits required documents to bishop.
- 2) Postulant meets with Committee on Ministry.
- 3) Committee on Ministry recommends postulant to bishop for candidacy.
- 4) Standing Committee meets with postulant and recommends postulant to bishop for candidacy.
- 5) Bishop admits postulant to candidacy.
- 6) Postulant writes Ember Day letters to the bishop throughout candidacy

For Ordination to Transitional Diaconate

- 1) After no fewer than six months in candidacy, candidate submits required documents to bishop.
- 2) Candidate meets with Committee on Ministry.
- 3) Committee on Ministry recommends candidate to bishop for ordination to transitional diaconate.
- 4) Standing Committee recommends candidate to bishop for ordination.
- 5) Bishop ordains candidate to transitional diaconate.
- 6) Transitional Deacon continues to write Ember Day Letters to bishop.

For Ordination to Priesthood

- 1) After no fewer than six months in transitional diaconate, deacon submits required documents to bishop.

Handbook of the Ordination Process

- 2) Committee on Ministry meets with transitional deacon.
- 3) Committee on Ministry recommends transitional deacon to bishop for ordination to priesthood.
- 4) The Standing Committee recommends transitional deacon to bishop for ordination to priesthood.
- 5) Bishop ordains transitional deacon to priesthood.

INDEX AND SCHEDULE OF FORMS

FOR POSTULANCY

Submitted to Bishop by Nominee:

- FORM I: Application for Postulancy
- Spiritual autobiography of approximately 1000 words and an accompanying statement of the nominee's experience and understanding of ministry
- Evidence of baptism
- Evidence of confirmation or reception in the Episcopal Church
- Resume/curriculum vitae (CV) of no more than three pages
- Transcripts from all post-secondary educational institutions
- Evidence of sexual misconduct prevention training within five years
- Evidence of anti-racism training within five years

Submitted to Bishop by Pastor:

- FORM II: Letter of Support from Pastor and Vestry
- FORM III: Certification of the Nominee's Parish Discernment Process

Forms Sent to Nominee from Bishop's Office, Completed By Nominee, And Then Returned To Bishop's Office:

- Physical Examination Form
- Life History Questionnaire
- Behavior Screening Questionnaire
- Information Release Form

Submitted to Bishop by Committee on Ministry:

- FORM VI: Recommendation from Committee on Ministry recommending nominee for postulancy, submitted by the chair to the

bishop. *(This occurs after the nominee is interviewed by the Committee on Ministry)*

FOR CANDIDACY

Submitted to Bishop by Postulant:

- FORM IV: Application for Candidacy (two copies)
- Reflection paper (two copies) of no more than 500 words in which postulant reflects on their readiness to apply for candidacy
- Transcripts: Records of all academic courses and grades received from the seminary or other program approved by the bishop and the Committee on Ministry.
- Final written CPE evaluations by postulant and CPE supervisor
- Any other reports, records or evaluations requested by the bishop or the Committee on Ministry

Submitted to Bishop by Pastor:

- FORM V: Letter of Support (two copies) from sponsoring parish

Submitted To Bishop by Committee on Ministry:

- FORM VI: Statement from the Committee on Ministry attesting to continuing formation of postulant and recommending candidacy, submitted by the chair to bishop

FOR ORDINATION TO THE TRANSITIONAL DIACONATE

Submitted to Bishop by Candidate:

- FORM VII: Application for ordination to transitional diaconate.
- FORM IX: Certificate from the seminary or other program of preparation showing the candidate's scholastic record and providing an evaluation

with a recommendation (though the evaluation need not conform to the format of this form).

- A statement of no more than 500 words in which the candidate reflects on their growth in ministry and how they believe they are prepared to be ordained to the transitional diaconate.

Submitted to Bishop by Pastor:

- FORM VIII: Letter of Support from candidate's congregation.

Submitted to Bishop by Committee on Ministry:

- FORM X: Recommendation from Committee on Ministry with recommendation regarding ordination to transitional diaconate, submitted by the chair to the bishop.

Submitted by Bishop to Standing Committee:

- Certificates giving the dates of admission to postulancy and candidacy
- FORM X: Recommendation from Committee on Ministry regarding ordination to transitional diaconate.

Submitted by the Standing Committee to the Bishop:

- Testimonial in form specified (Canon 8, Section 6f)

FOR ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

Submitted to Bishop by Transitional Deacon:

- FORM: XI: Application for Ordination to Priesthood
- Evidence of admission to postulancy, candidacy, and ordination as a deacon
- FORM XIII: Certificate of scholastic record from the seminary or other program of preparation
- A statement of no more than 500 words in which the deacon reflects on

their growth in ministry and how they believe they are prepared to be ordained to the priesthood

Submitted to Bishop by Pastor:

- FORM XII: Letter of Support from the deacon's congregation or other faith community, signed by at least two-thirds of the members of the vestry and by the pastor. This is preferably the vestry of the congregation in which the deacon is serving; alternatively it may be the vestry of the deacon's original sponsoring congregation

Submitted to the Bishop by the Committee on Ministry:

- FORM XIV: Statement from the Committee on Ministry attesting to successful completion of program of formation, and recommending transitional deacon for ordination to priesthood

Submitted by Standing Committee to Bishop:

- Testimonial in form specified (Canon 8, Section 7c)

**APPENDIX OF FORMS NECESSARY FOR THE
ORDINATION PROCESS**