

WHAT KIND OF PRIESTS DO WE SEEK FOR WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS?

Preamble: Ministers for the 21st Century

The late Verna Dozier challenged the Church to remember the dream of God, a dream that invites *all* Christians to follow Jesus more closely and more passionately. The *Book of Common Prayer* is consistent with that dream when it states that the ministers of the Church are all of God's people: "lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons." (BCP 855)

It is within this context that priests are called to a *particular* ministry; not a more prestigious ministry. That ministry is to serve as pastors to God's people, to share in oversight of the Church with their bishop, to proclaim the Gospel, to administer the Sacraments, and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God. (BCP 856) The role of a priest is to "model sacramentally...the life of the whole priestly community."

(See: <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/towardtheologymin.pdf>)

We are called to do this work in this particular time and place. We are profoundly aware of the ways that the landscape has shifted over the past fifty years. With the conversion of Emperor Constantine in the early part of the fourth century, what some have called "Christendom" was born—a version of imperial Christianity that seems to be coming to an end. We therefore find ourselves in a cultural milieu that may well have more in common with the earliest centuries of the Church's life than with the Church of even a generation ago. While people of good faith draw diverse implications from this new context, it seems that we are increasingly in agreement that the Church needs ministers—both ordained and lay—who will focus on the Mission of God in new and invigorating ways. Our diocesan mission to focus on building healthy and mission focused congregations requires healthy mission-focused leaders willing to risk transformation and the new life Christ offers to the whole world.

We seek candidates for the priesthood who are committed to the spiritual growth of individuals and communities of faith through common prayer and sacramental leadership. Priests in this new context will be asked to offer or provide numerous resources for spiritual growth and to serve in varied capacities to equip the saints including spiritual director, biblical teacher, confessor, counselor, intercessor, and friend.

Psychological and Personal Wellness

Personal maturity, emotional stability, and resiliency must be evident in persons who will be considered for Holy Orders. We seek candidates who:

- Demonstrate personal integrity,
- Are equipped to meet the pressures and demands of the priestly life,
- Demonstrate a capacity for maintaining and developing healthy interpersonal relationships,
- Are individuated and maintain appropriate interpersonal boundaries,
- Do not allow personal problems to impede their work,
- Have a facility for dealing with personal, interpersonal, and group dynamics and conflicts,
- Are committed to ongoing human formation and who have a capacity for self-reflection, identifying and working on personal weaknesses and struggles and seeking the support to do so when circumstances require,
- Have a capacity to hold and appropriately exercise personal and ecclesial authority. One must know how to respect, relate to, and act under the authority of the Church as represented by the Bishop.

Leadership

This shifting landscape requires dynamic, creative, and energetic priests. We seek:

- *Pastoral* leaders who are capable of demonstrating care and compassion toward others,
- *Inspiring* leaders who are capable of mobilizing a community around a shared vision,
- *Grounded* leaders who are not afraid of conflict and change,
- *Inquisitive* leaders who are open to new models of living out the mission of the church in local congregations,
- *Collaborative* leaders who know their limits and are willing to delegate and share responsibilities,
- *Curious* leaders who are capable of reading the cues of the local, national and global culture in order to keep the faith relevant to the issues Christians face in their daily lives,
- *Humble* leaders who are willing to learn from their mistakes and failures and who can appreciate people and ideas different from their own,
- *Joyful* leaders who are willing to celebrate personal and corporate successes.

Spiritual Growth and Development

We seek prayerful candidates who demonstrate an integrated spirituality and a commitment to the personal and corporate life of the Church. Healthy, vital, and inspiring priests are committed to a lifelong process of spiritual growth and development. We seek candidates who are committed to an ongoing and ever-deepening relationship with Jesus Christ as evidenced by the following:

- A capacity to utilize and seek resources for their spiritual growth and nurture, including a spiritual director and/or spiritual support group, spiritual reading and retreats and quiet days,
- A commitment to individual and corporate spirituality,
- A capacity to give testimony to the living God through the study of the scriptures, personal moments of devotion and piety, experiences of worship both corporately and alone, and experiences of growth through Christian service,
- A diligence in reading and studying the Holy Scriptures and persevering in private prayer. (BCP, 532),
- Outward and visible expressions of joy and grace that give testimony to a well-integrated interior life,
- Growing wholeness and moral integrity,
- A willingness to act with personal initiative and openness in the relationship with the Commission, Bishop and Shepherd through the discernment process.

A Commitment to On-Going Theological Formation

We seek candidates for the priesthood who are capable of integrating a depth and breath of theological knowledge as outlined in the canons of the Church, including competence in the areas of Holy Scripture, Church History, Christian Ethics, contemporary society, and liturgics (Title III, 7.5). Candidates must possess excellence in communication through the written and verbal word. They must also be able to translate theological ideas to meet the needs and culture of a given ministerial context. We seek candidates who are personally committed to lifelong learning through various continuing education opportunities. As important as it is for individuals to continually learn, we seek candidates who will also inspire and support lifelong learning in others, especially lay leaders and the members of a parish or local community.