

**MINISTRY DISCERNMENT PROCESS IN THE
DIOCESE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS**

A TIMELINE FOR THOSE DISCERNING A CALL TO PRIESTHOOD

PRE-APPLICATION

<i>Form</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Deadline</i>
	If a person senses a call from God to discern a vocation to ordained ministry, he/she MUST be a confirmed adult communicant in good standing and a member of a parish or faith community in the Diocese of Western Massachusetts before being nominated for Postulancy by the Vestry and Rector of a congregation. As of January 1 st , 2016, anyone interested in discerning a call must complete the Loving the Questions (LTQ) program and participation in a small Community of Discernment (LTQ). (late summer registration deadline – consult Commission on Ministry page on Diocesan website for registration deadline and application form.) Rector’s recommendation is required for all persons applying to attend LTQ/Community of Discernment. If accepted, the person in discernment (PID) begins LTQ/Community of Discernment in September-October. [Note: LTQ and the discernment work of the Community of Discernment can be done in sequential years, but no application for ordination can be made until <i>both</i> are complete.] LTQ/Community of Discernment runs from fall through spring.	Late summer
	A person seeking such nomination SHOULD be in regular spiritual direction with a director who is not the person’s rector, be tithing or moving toward tithing, and be engaged in lively Baptismal ministry.	
	The person will meet with the parish priest over a period of time (usually a year or more) to discuss and continue discerning the perceived call. A small group of parishioners may be involved in this discernment at the rector’s discretion.	
	Inquirers’ meetings for the PID, their Rector, and senior warden (and other clergy and vestry members who wish to learn about the diocesan process leading to ordination), will be held in MAY or JUNE as warranted. Anyone who wishes to enter the ordination process, and his/her priest, must attend one of these sessions. The PID must also have completed the LTQ/Community of Discernment processes before attending Inquirers’ meetings. If s/he is seeking ordination, s/he signs a waiver available from the LTQ leader that permits leaders of the small Community of Discernment to give their observations to the Bishop and the chair of the Commission on Ministry (COM). S/he must also seek support from her/his vestry and Rector (or priest-in-charge). [Note: written observations from the Community of Discernment and formal written support of the rector and vestry are required.]	May or June
	When the parish priest feels confident that the discernment process should continue the priest asks the vestry of the congregation to nominate the person to enter the process for Holy Orders. If the vestry nominates the person, the priest helps the Nominee begin the application process with the Diocese.	

APPLICATION / PRE-POSTULANCY

<i>Form</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Deadline</i>
P-1 P-2 P-3 P-4	The Nominee prepares the application packet, to be submitted to the Bishop’s office. See Title III Canon 8.2 and Forms P-1 through P-4. Payment for the psychological evaluation and background checks must accompany the application and will be returned if the nominee withdraws before they are conducted. (The evaluation cost is split by thirds among the applicant, parish, and diocesan office.) With the vestry’s endorsement noted above, the PID applies for Postulancy. Background checks, medical examination, and the psychological evaluation are done. If the PID is not already in spiritual direction, s/he begins it now. Deadline for applications (including psychological evaluation) is September 30th.	Sept 30 th
	The Commission on Ministry (COM) meets with applicants for Pre-postulancy screening in November. Immediately following that meeting, the COM makes its recommendation to the bishop regarding Postulancy. See Title III Canon 8.3 (d). After a decision has been made, the Bishop will notify the Nominees by letter. The Bishop’s office will arrange for applicants to meet with the Bishop to discuss his/her decision. Those accepted for Postulancy will discuss formation plans with the Bishop and the chair of the Board of Examining Chaplains, including seminary application. If the Bishop does not make the Nominee a Postulant the Nominee’s Rector will meet with the	Nov.

<i>Form</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Deadline</i>
	Nominee to further develop baptized ministry.	
	Postulants apply to seminaries by January. At this time, they may also be assigned by the Bishop to a congregation other than the one which sponsors them in order to broaden their understanding and experience of the Episcopal Church.	Jan.
	POSTULANCY	
	Postulants (and Candidates) will write Ember Day letters to the Bishop. See Title III Canon 8.3(e).	
	At some time during Postulancy the Postulant is required to be interviewed by the Standing Committee.	
P-7	When the Bishop and the chair of the COM believe the Postulant ready to become a Candidate for ordination and that s/he has met the canonical requirements (including having met with the Standing Committee), s/he submits an application for Candidacy to the Bishop's office. See Form P-7. background check is conducted. The cost for this is split in thirds among the PID, her/his congregation, and the diocese.	
P-8	At the same time the Postulant requests that the Rector and Vestry submit the letters of support required by Title III, Canon 8.4(a), Form P-8.	
	Before applying for ordination, the Candidate will submit documentation that s/he has training in Title IV, in Safe Church (prevention of sexual misconduct), and diversity awareness.	
	With the Standing Committee's recommendation, the Bishop makes the decision for CANDIDACY. See Title III Canon 8.4 (b).	
	CANDIDACY	
P-11 P-12	No later than SEPTEMBER of the Candidate's senior year in seminary (or similar point in nontraditional formation process), the Candidate shall supply an application requesting ordination and a letter of support from the Clergy and Vestry. See Title III. Canon 8.6 (c) (a and 2) and Forms P-11 and P-12. The Candidate also submits up-dated medical and psychological reports if the initial reports were made more than 36 months prior to the anticipated ordination date. New background checks are requested if required.	Sept.
P-14	The Standing Committee submits the Certificate for Ordination to the (transitional) Diaconate to the Bishop. See Form P-14.	
	ORDINATION	
	In DECEMBER-JANUARY – with the Bishop's consent, ordination as (transitional) Deacon takes place ordinarily at Christ Church Cathedral, Springfield.	
	In JANUARY of the Deacons/Candidates' senior year in seminary, Deacons/Candidates take the General Ordination Examination. A copy of the seminarian's responses is to be sent to the Bishop. The Board of Examining Chaplains will read the General Ordination Exams before MARCH 1 . When the General Ordination Exam readers' results arrive, the Examining Chaplains meet and discuss with the Deacon/Candidate and recommend any remediation if required.	
P-15	After a minimum of six months from the date of ordination to the (transitional) Diaconate and no less than eighteen months after accepting the nomination of the congregation, the Deacon may be ordained to Priesthood. The Deacon makes application for ordination using Form P-15.	

<i>Form</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Deadline</i>
	Working with the Canon for Transition Ministries, each (transitional) Deacon secures a cure/canonically recognized ministry. [Note: a Candidate may not be ordained until s/he has secured a position in ministry acceptable to the bishop.]	
P-16	The (transitional) Deacon's congregation submits another Letter of Support, using Form P-16. Commission on Ministry must determine if the Candidate has successfully completed the required study and training, and makes a report/evaluation/recommendation to the Standing Committee and Bishop as to the Candidate's personal qualifications and readiness for Holy Orders. That determination will be made in a timely manner for referral to the Standing Committee.	
P-18	The Standing Committee submits a Certificate for Ordination to the Priesthood to the Bishop. See Form P-18.	

ROLE OF RECTOR IN THE MINISTRY DISCERNMENT PROCESS

Be alert for those who may have gifts and a call to ordained ministry.

Be aware of the challenges of the ordination process and of finding employment at the end of the process. Help the inquirer understand the significant financial cost of preparation.

- Be certain that the inquirer knows the importance of staying open to whatever the outcome of the discernment process may be. Help him/her embrace the fact that God and the church may say “no” to ordained ministry and “yes” to lay ministry and that both are crucial ministries in the church.

Meet with the inquirer until it can be determined whether or not there are grounds to carry the discernment process forward. The book Listening Hearts, available through Morehouse Publishing, is recommended as a resource.

Encourage the inquirer to attend Loving the Questions and participate in the Community of Discernment as required by the diocesan ordination process effective January 1, 2016.

Assist the inquirer in obtaining the nomination of the vestry.

- Write a letter to the Bishop, at the appropriate time, using the Rector's Response form as a guide and recommending the inquirer.

After writing the letter to the Bishop, the Rector turns over the role of discernment to the Vestry, and Commission on Ministry.

- The Rector does not play the role of advocate for the Nominee but rather is available as pastor and spiritual guide. The Rector's support will be important in helping the Nominee find God in the ups and downs of the process.

Instruct the Vestry in its role throughout the process.

If the Nominee is not affirmed in a call to ordained ministry by the Diocesan Discernment Committee and the Commission on Ministry, the Rector will be crucial in helping the Nominee discover new opportunities for lay ministry.