



GUIDE TO THE CONGREGATIONAL DISCERNMENT PROCESS IN THE DIOCESE OF DELAWARE

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For clergy, diaconal aspirants, and congregations with a desire to commit to a
diaconal ministry together

*“Those who abide in me and I in them,” said Jesus, “bear much fruit, because
apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5)*

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INTRODUCTION

NOTE: (The following text is modified and expanded from the Diocese of Vermont Parish Discernment Handbook)

All called to servant ministry in a congregation

Serving the Church and levels of approval

Context of servant ministry

Diaconal Congregation

- Diaconal ministry in the world
- Deacons provide leadership
- Congregation joins doing ministry in the world
- Diocese presentation on “What is a Deacon”

The Commission on Ministry (COM) recognizes that the ministry and leadership of the deacon takes place in the normal setting of each congregation. Furthermore, the diocese recognizes that a deacon should not carry out his or her ministry alone without the participation and support of the congregation or other community of faith. Each member of a Christian community is called to servant ministry in that we are called, by Christ, to serve the needs of the world. We are each called to feed the poor, clothe the naked, heal the lame, and free the prisoner. The Commission on Ministry also recognizes that those needs in the world can be overwhelming and that congregations need the example and leadership of a deacon in order for them to realize the full potential of their own ministries. A call to the ordained ministry of the Church is a corporate event and involves the entire congregation in Christian community.

Since a Deacon is ordained to also serve the greater Church, discernment to a call and accompanying approval for ordination takes place on four levels:

- **The Congregation/Vestry/Rector**
- **The Commission on Ministry**
- **The Standing Committee**
- **The Bishop**

Although a congregation begins the call process, all four levels must give consent before ordination occurs.

Most servant ministries do not occur within the context of the church as it gathers for worship, fellowship, or education. Thus our 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. We must remember that ministry takes place in the world, in ways that may not even be obvious to others as a religious moment, and that only a relatively small part of Christian ministry takes place in churches or religious settings, or is even identifiable as religious in nature. However, no entity alone can bring to life the amazing realization that each of us, joined to Christ in baptism, is already given the gifts for ministry and ordained to minister in his name. Therefore, the congregation, diaconal Aspirant, and the clergy will join together to form a diaconal congregation in the Diocese of Delaware. A diaconal congregation is one where the congregation has sought out and raised up a deacon (or deacons) who will identify opportunities for service in the community and lead the members of the congregation to serve others. A presentation on “What is a Deacon” should be scheduled for a parish meeting before beginning the task of discernment.

While the Bishop, the Commission on Ministry, and the Standing Committee play an important role on the pathway towards the approval of an individual to be ordained a deacon, it is at the congregational level that a large portion of

OF DISCERNMENT

The Discernment Committee

The Purpose and Members of the CDC

- 6 – 8 Members
- Two from Congregation
- One vestry member
- Others from area Episcopal churches
- Not related
- 6 – 12 month commitment

- Begin and end in prayer
- See and understand God's will
- Action of the Holy Spirit

- Gifts of frankness and courage
- Welfare of larger Church

the discernment process will take place. In the final analysis, once a deacon is ordained, that deacon will generally return to his or her sponsoring congregation to work together with them as a diaconal leader taking them out into the world to carry out each person's call to ministry. Therefore, discernment is for validation of the deacon's call, and also for the congregation's call and willingness to join into this mutual ministry.

It is impossible for an entire congregation to be part of a discernment process. Therefore a discernment committee of lay people will be selected to work together with the deacon Aspirant to assess call and readiness. This committee, the Congregational Discernment Committee (CDC) plays a key role in the process leading to ordination. It assists the clergy, the Aspirant, and the vestry in discerning the will of God. After selection of the committee the clergy should schedule a presentation on the discernment process with the Diaconate Formation Director before beginning the work of the committee.

The CDC is selected jointly by the Clergy and the Aspirant and both need to agree on the composition of the committee. It consists of a minimum of six to a maximum of eight persons, and no more than two, one of whom must be a member of the vestry, should be members of the congregation. All others should be selected from area Episcopal, Lutheran, or Moravian churches. It is preferable that the members are not close friends of the Aspirant. Further, no member of the discernment committee should be related by blood, marriage, or partnership arrangement to the Aspirant, clergy, or other members. These persons must be communicants in good standing who have mature faith in, and an understanding of, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. These persons should be selected for their objectivity. Members of the CDC should be able to articulate their own vocation and ministry in the context of the work of the Church. Members must be willing to be engaged in this process for at least six months and perhaps as long as twelve months.

The CDC is called to this ministry to explore and discern not only another's call to the diaconate, but to discern the call of the congregation to a servant ministry together with a deacon. Discernment means to see and understand God's will. It is the action of the Holy Spirit through prayer and meditation and the voices of other people. Therefore, it is essential that the CDC begin and end each gathering with a period of prayer and silent reflection (See "Contemplation" online which is in eight parts). It is this prayerful tone that will invite true discernment of God's will and minimize any anxiety on the part of all.

The CDC should reflect the diversity of the congregations represented and its ministries and the varying degrees of relationship with the person seeking spiritual discernment. The members of the committee must be willing to walk with the applicant and be open to God's movement in their own lives. These members must be persons of prayer, humility, confidentiality, and openness to the working of the Holy Spirit within the church. Persons serving on the CDC need not have any expertise or prior experience with spiritual discernment.

Members of the CDC do need to have gifts of frankness and courage. They need to have the welfare of the larger church always in mind. They need to

- Sacred responsibility

- Help congregation understand diaconal calling
- Support for aspirant if requested throughout process

- Aspirant selects activities and an ongoing diaconal project
- writes diaconal project plan for Bishop
- Begins the diaconal project
- Meets with clergy
- Meets with Spiritual Director

remember that avoiding tough calls only makes things more difficult for the Aspirant and the congregation. The CDC is encouraged to work diligently and deliberately at this sacred task. The CDC is being given a sacred responsibility to be present for God's holy people and in so doing must exercise care and confidentiality as they explore sensitive issues.

While discernment is primarily an action of the Holy Spirit, it is also an action of the intellect, perceiving the will of God through the gifts of the individual and the gifts of the congregation. Discernment is also in perceiving each person's role in the Christian community. The CDC is being asked to help one of their own understand God's will as it is uniquely played out in the spiritual journey of his or her sense of call to ordained ministry. The CDC is also being asked to help the congregation find their sense of call to a servant ministry as a faith community together in Christ's name. The CDC will serve as a support unit for the Aspirant throughout his or her process to ordination if requested by the aspirant. The CDC will also serve as a resource for individuals in the congregation as they seek to identify his or her unique spiritual gifts that will lead them into servant ministry (see Appendix for spiritual gifts inventory resources).

The Aspirant who will write out a plan of activities and an ongoing diaconal project (project plan to be submitted to the Bishop) during the discernment period that may include, but is not limited to:

- Writing Prayers of the People with lay readers
- Serving as a
 - Communion Assistant
 - Acolyte
 - Altar Guild member
- Organizing and leading an intercessory prayer group
- Participating in:
 - Stephen Ministry Training (or some equivalent human awareness formation)
 - Ignatius Exercises (Eight month model)
 - Education for Ministry (EFM)

The aspirant is required to:

- Meet at least monthly with a spiritual guide or companion
- Engage in a diaconal ministry activity where Aspirant and congregation would work together in:
 - Identifying a need in the local community
 - Identifying opportunities for others to volunteer
 - Bringing community need and volunteer opportunity to the attention of the congregation
 - Recruiting volunteers to participate
 - Arranging for, and/or training congregational participants
 - Participating in the project
 - Meeting monthly with volunteers for supervision/feedback
 - Bridging the diaconal ministry activity and congregation through regular communication/progress reports such as
 - ✓ Announcements
 - ✓ Bulletins and Newsletters

Clergy Participation and work with Aspirant

- Clergy provides diaconal project and liturgical oversight
- Meets regularly with aspirant
- Writes report on diaconal project progress when ready to support aspirant for postulancy

Diocesan Representative to meet with CDC

TASKS OF THE CDC

Task One – Definition, responsibility and confidentiality

Task Two – Introduce the Aspirant to the CDC

- ✓ Personal Contact
- ✓ Preaching at least twice (with clergy permission)

The clergy person will meet regularly with the Aspirant to oversee progress in the discernment process and the diaconal project and to offer pastoral support. At the end of the congregational discernment process and when the diaconal project is self-sustaining and on-going, the supervising clergy will submit a report on the diaconal project in terms of its breadth, depth, success, congregational participation, and overall assessment of the effectiveness of the aspirant as a diaconal servant leader. This report should accompany Form 2 and the congregational discernment committee's letter of recommendation.

The Bishop and the COM have identified some specific tasks or goals for the CDC. A member of the COM or a diocesan representative must meet with the CDC to discuss these tasks and goals prior to beginning the tasks. Call the Diaconate Formation Director to schedule the first meeting with the representative .

It is not intended for the following tasks to be completed in one meeting or session. They are purposely not put into a specific timeline by the COM. Each discernment process will vary according to the circumstances of each Aspirant and each congregation and how the process unfolds. As the CDC reviews these tasks they will, along with the clergy and Aspirant, determine a time line. Accordingly, all members involved should remain open and flexible to the need to adjust the schedule as the process moves forward. The Appendix contains additional resources for education and reflection, as well as guidelines for conducting meetings.

Define the tasks of the CDC, stressing responsibility, care, and confidentiality.

1. Members of the committee introduce themselves to each other, sharing the particular gifts they bring to the committee. The member of the clergy may express the reasons for the selection of each person on the CDC.
2. The members discuss the process of discerning and select a convenor.
3. The group is introduced to an understanding of the continuum of ministry from lay to the three orders of ordained ministry, using the catechism of the Book of Common Prayer.
 - a) What seems unique about each form of ministry?
 - b) What is similar?
 - c) How does this understanding relate to your own life and ministry?
 - d) How will this relate to the deacon Aspirant and her or his gifts and calling (in general)?
 - e) How will this relate to the congregation and the call to be a diaconal congregation?

Introduce the deacon Aspirant to the CDC and begin to form a community of sharing and trust

Task Three – Aspirant’s Understanding of Ordained Ministry

Task Four – Aspirant’s Willingness and Ability to Grow

1. The member of the clergy introduces the deacon Aspirant to the CDC members and distributes a brief biographical sketch provided by the Aspirant. The clergy then excuses him or herself from the meeting and will not meet with the committee again until task eight.
2. The CDC studies and discusses the biographical information in preparation for the next meeting.
3. The CDC may request further information or clarity from the member of the clergy at any time during the process.
4. The chair of the CDC summarizes the first session with the Aspirant present.
5. CDC members introduce themselves to the Aspirant, each sharing some of his or her story and the person’s investment in the process.
6. The Aspirant introduces him or herself in a similar manner, focusing on what brings the applicant to this point in his or her spiritual journey.
7. The committee members ask clarifying questions of the applicant regarding the introduction.
8. The CDC schedules the next meeting to go over the Aspirant’s autobiography and address the issues that surface for the Aspirant and the committee members.

Focus on the Aspirant’s understanding of Christian ministry and call to ordained ministry

1. Committee and the Aspirant discuss issues that arise from a study of the Aspirant’s autobiography and personal story.
 - a) How has the Aspirant’s vocation been shaped by teachers, parents, clergy, books, experiences, etc.?
 - b) Does the Aspirant articulate a sense of call with clarity, passion?
 - c) What has moved the Aspirant to seek ordination?
2. CDC discusses the four-fold ministry of the Church and the Aspirant’s clarity about the Christian ministry (See Appendix – The Discernment Shepherds – Diocese of Chicago)
3. CDC discusses how the Aspirant’s gifts and vision best fit the call to diaconal ministry. Can the Aspirant begin to articulate his or her understanding of the ordained ministry and what the Church will require of him or her? Can the Aspirant identify ways in which ordination to the diaconate may change her or his ministry?

Focus on the Aspirant’s ability and willingness to grow. CDC discusses the following questions with the Aspirant:

1. Does the Aspirant seem to be growing in the Christian faith?
 - a) How has personal/spiritual growth been apparent in the past?
 - b) Are there issues that seem to inhibit growth? How might these be addressed?
 - c) What is the potential for growth in the discernment?
 - d) How has the applicant grown in the discernment process? How has the person progressed over the meetings in articulating his or her sense of call?

Task Five - Aspirant's gifts, talents, and resources

2. How does the Aspirant take care of, order, balance him or herself?
 - a) Does the person have a spiritual director?
 - b) Does the person have a rule of life, a prayer life, and a spirituality that is life-giving?
 - c) Does the Aspirant strike you as a person of prayer?
 - d) How does the Aspirant feel about him or herself?
 - e) What would the Aspirant identify as strengths and weaknesses, and how might they affect the person's current and future ministry?

Focus on the Aspirant's gifts, talents, and resources in relationship to our mutual understanding of the church's servant ministry and the involvement of the congregation

1. CDC discusses how the Aspirant's gifts, skills, current ministries, lifestyle, commitment and vision best fit the call to ministry.
 - a) What diaconal ministries has the person shown in the parish?
 - b) In what ways could you envision the Aspirant as a deacon?
 - c) Is the Aspirant someone you would actively recruit, support, and follow in his or her diaconal ministry?
 - d) What are the Aspirant's strengths and weaknesses, the areas needing growth?
2. The Aspirant describes the resources God has uniquely given him or her that can be developed into the ministry of the diaconate. The CDC discerns whether it concurs with the Aspirant's assessment. Such things to be considered are:
 - a) *A maturing Christian faith* that reflects an understanding of Christ's presence, conveying a sense of being called to service, of sharing the Gospel, living in the Spirit, showing love and exhibiting openness to the whole body of Christ's people in ecumenical engagement. A disciplined pattern of private and common prayer; and the ability and willingness to speak in a personal way of his or her experience of God and Jesus Christ are also important indicators of a maturing faith.
 - b) *Humility*: understanding and acceptance of her or his humanity and ultimate dependence on God.
 - c) *Awareness of the power of service, sacrament, word and liturgy and willingness to become a symbol bearer*.
 - d) *Sense of vocation for the diaconal ministry*: ability to articulate a call, a beaconing, recognized as from God and ability to articulate what the Aspirant believes he or she has to offer to the Church; ability to articulate past and present personal history of ministry.
 - e) *Loving heart*: capacity and inclination to be close to and care for others, including family, friends, colleagues, and strangers.
 - f) *Leadership potential*: initiative, vision, willingness to risk, potential to motivate and lead others. The ability to sense and deal with the impact of systems and institutions, as well as interpersonal conflicts.
 - g) *A sense of self*: strong sense of self-worth, psychological

Task Five (Cont.)

- health, level of emotional maturity.
- h) *Personal integrity*: authenticity, trustworthiness, dependability.
 - i) *Intellectual competence*: ability to learn, to process information, and apply results, intellectual curiosity as an ongoing process in the Aspirant's life, evidence of the ability to grow in a coherent sense of God's work through history and in contemporary events, and the potential for appropriately communicating that knowledge.
 - j) *Effective communication*: presence and poise in functioning with people, both one-on-one and with groups; ability to express oneself simply, clearly, and directly, with the capacity to organize thoughts and actions and establish goals and directions.
 - k) *Sense of fitness of things*: judgment, boundaries.
 - l) *Loyalty to the institution of the Church*: a healthy respect for the traditions and authority of the Church from a position of challenge as well as from a position of support.
 - m) Commitment to continuing personal, professional and most of all, spiritual growth.

Task Six – Reflection on leadership role

To reflect on the leadership roles that the Aspirant presently lives out.

1. The CDC considers what leadership roles the Aspirant is presently engaged in.
 - a) What does the Aspirant identify as strengths and weaknesses in these leadership roles?
 - b) How does the Aspirant function in groups and relate to a wide variety of people?
 - c) What alternatives might the Aspirant have in mind if leadership as an ordained person is not accomplished?

Task Seven – What has been learned from the process

To meet with the Aspirant to share what has been learned from the process and how the Aspirant envisions meeting the needs of the Church today as a deacon.

1. The CDC considers the Aspirants responses to the following questions:
 - a) What have you learned about yourself as you have explored the possibility of ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church with your member of the clergy and CDC?
 - b) How does your profession fit in with a call to the diaconate?
 - c) What are the needs of the Church as you see them, and how do you envision yourself responding to them through ordained diaconal ministry?
 - d) Is it your wish to continue in the process?

Task Eight – Meet with Clergy and make recommendation

CDC meets as a group with the clergy without the Aspirant present to share discernment conclusion. Then CDC formulates a written recommendation to share with the Aspirant and eventually with the Bishop and the COM. This recommendation must consider each of the issues raised under paragraphs 2 (a) through (m) of Task Five.

Task Eight (Cont.)

- CDC and Clergy meet and make a decision
- Decision is shared with aspirant
- A written letter of the CDC decision is produced
- Form 1 and Form 2 in Diocesan Process Guide completed if aspirant approved for nomination for postulancy and submitted to the Bishop
- Report of overseeing clergy accompanies Form 2 (See Page 3 – Clergy Participation)

CONCLUSION

1. The CDC considers how the Aspirant can be envisioned as a deacon of the Episcopal Church.
2. The member of the clergy and the CDC together share their recommendations with the Aspirant after the meeting.
3. If the CDC acknowledges a call and supports this Aspirant for ordination, then the member of the clergy provides the application form for the Aspirant (Form 1 in the Diocesan Discernment Handbook) to complete for the Bishop.
4. If the CDC cannot acknowledge a call, the committee and the clergy should meet with the aspirant to discuss that conclusion. The CDC should then write a letter to the Aspirant, the clergy, and the Bishop to reflect that decision.
5. Should the CDC and the member of the clergy decide to proceed, the Aspirant is now presented to the vestry asking them to support a recommendation to the Bishop and the COM for postulancy.
6. Two letters of support must be written (one clergy, one CDC) summarizing the conclusions of the CDC and the Clergy in relation to all aspects of their work with the aspirant and submitted to the vestry with Form Two.
7. Upon acceptance of the letter of support from the CDC, Form 2 (Diocesan Discernment Handbook) must be completed and signed by two-thirds of the Vestry and the clergy providing oversight. Signing this form commits the sponsoring congregation or faith community to ongoing involvement in the diaconal Aspirant's formation. It also commits the congregation to ongoing physical, emotional, spiritual, and financial support of the Aspirant. Form 1, form 2, and accompanying letters are then submitted to the Bishop.
8. **NOTE: The above letter of support and submission of Form One and Form Two do not constitute final approval for ordination. A deacon is ordained for the larger Church and recommendations and/or approval must also be obtained from the Commission on Ministry, The Standing Committee, and the Bishop. Failure to obtain approval at any of these levels effectively removes the aspirant/postulant from the process.**
9. It is very important that the entire congregation continue to support the Aspirant as she or he proceeds through the process toward ordained ministry.

It is likely that each member of the CDC will be changed in some way by involvement in the ministry of a CDC.

The questions and issues raised can be a springboard for deepening awareness of God's call to ministry to each member of the CDC. Through this awareness, the CDC will be able to encourage all members of the congregation to find their ministry and spiritual gifts. In this way, a congregation will begin to ready itself to join in a mutual ministry as a diaconal congregation when the deacon they raised up is ordained, returns to

APPENDIX

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING MEETINGS

Before considering parameters for conducting a Discernment Committee meeting, it is important to understand the complexities of the Committee's role. The Discernment Committee's focus should be to elicit and share information, not to solve problems or reach decisions (at least not until Task #8). Its objective should be to gain and grow in its own and the Aspirant's understanding of the Aspirant's and the congregation's calls to the diaconate, not to debate to a conclusion about the validity of that call. The conclusion will evolve.

Accordingly, the tone of the Committee's meetings should be conversational. The Chair should be more a Convener or Facilitator than a leader and controller. His or her role should be to draw out thoughtful comments and questions from the Aspirant and committee members. And individual committee members should feel free to express opinions and ask probing questions in complete confidentiality.

Clearly, then, the first rule for meetings of the committee must be the observance of respect for every individual's opinions and feelings, and the observance of complete confidentiality. If the Aspirant is to disclose sensitive information about his or her spiritual journey, he or she must be confident that "what is said within the room will stay within the room" and he must be comfortable that he or she will not be subjected to judgment or ridicule. And it is to be expected that, as understanding develops, committee members may also reveal similar sensitive information about themselves. While all involved must delve deeply into themselves and each other, this must be done with respect for the dignity of everyone; judgments are out of place in Discernment Committee meetings.

This said, it is not difficult to articulate some ground rules that will help to keep the meetings positive and productive – namely

1. Start meetings on time and limit duration to a maximum of 1-1/2 hours.
2. Be sure that everyone knows what the meeting is about; stay on task.
3. There should be no meeting minutes; if a subject needs to be carried over to a subsequent meeting, the Chair should simply make a note of it.
4. Encourage participation by everyone; ask those who are holding back from participation for their comments or questions.
5. Only one person should be speaking at a time; there should be no sidebar conversations.
6. Listen with full attention. Don't formulate the next question or comment while someone else is speaking; too often what is said is not heard because participants are more eager to ask their next questions or make their next observations.
7. Remember at all times that confidentiality is critical, and respect it accordingly.

APPENDIX

The Discernment Shepherds: On Hearing Call in Community (From the Diocese of Chicago)

The call to ordained ministry is heard in community; it is our official theology that there is no secret or individual call. Conversation about call to ordained ministry may be initiated by the community or it may be initiated by an individual. But it must be heard in community. The reasons for this are articulated in the book *Listening Hearts*.

The charge to the Parish Ministry Discernment Committee is to discern whether they believe the call to ordained ministry is from God. It will be important to let the PMDC members know that they will be engaged in ministering the applicant. Serving on the committee will require working with their assigned Shepherd, reading resource and background material, as well as attending an indefinite number of meetings with the applicant. A commitment to prayer, careful listening, and a willingness to hear the Holy Spirit enable the PMDC and applicant to address the things one wants to hear and things one does not want to hear.

It is our official theology that there is no secret or individual call.

It should be stressed that the work of the PMDC is, indeed, discernment. If all members of the committee hear a call for the applicant from God to ordained ministry, consensus will easily be reached. If all members of the committee hear a call from God for the applicant to continue in lay ministry, they must be clear about that—for the well-being of the applicant as well as for the good of the Church. If they cannot agree, they must continue to work, not being “held hostage” by anyone’s perceived time constraints.

Something happens to us when we consult one another in Christian Community. In sharing our thoughts with others, surprising insights often emerge—opening our eyes to what we have not seen and our ears to what we have not heard. This can transform and liberate us beyond our own narrow expectations. Both the one experiencing a call and those helping that person may express God’s wisdom and grace in the process. “I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.” (Jeremiah. 3:15)

Although God calls each of us personally, our individual perception, reasoning, and understanding are always limited. Even a person who feels absolutely certain that a specific revelation comes from God may be mistaken as to how it is to be applied. Because God often reveals part of the picture to one person and another part to another person, it is prudent to consult one another to discern God’s counsel, guidance, and direction, even if there is no apparent reason to do so. While circumstance sometimes require us to act without consulting others, the danger of arrogance and error in proceeding on our own can be great.

-Farnham, Suzanne et al. *Listening Hearts* (revised ed.) Harrisburg: Morehouse, 1996

The Discernment Shepherds: on Prayerful Group Deliberations (Diocese of Chicago)

Imagine a church on a breezy spring day, its doors and windows opened wide to let the wind flow through. So it is when we come together as God's people with the doors of our hearts and minds open—our eyes as windows raised to see what God will show us, our ears open to hear what God may say. It is then that the wind of the Spirit can sweep into our midst to make Pentecost a reality in our life together.

God knows our deepest potential, sees the hidden complexities of our circumstances, comprehends our situation in relation to the larger picture, and grasps the broader implications of our plans. Discernment is our effort to tap into the flow of this divine wisdom.

In classical spirituality, discernment means distinguishing God's spirit from other spirits that are present in a given time and place—such as the spirit of a nation, the spirit of the times, the spirit of competition. To put it another way, discernment is distinguishing the voice of God from other voices that speak to us: the voice of our parents, echoing from years past, the voices of friends, voices of urgency or fear. These voices are neither bad nor good in and of themselves. God often speaks to us through them. But, if followed indiscriminately, such voices can dominate us and lead us along a wrong path.

Discernment is a prayerful, informed, and intentional attempt to sort through these voices to get in touch with God's spirit at work in a situation and to develop a sense of the direction in which the Spirit is leading. Discernment is more a journey than a destination. We may not find answers for all our concerns, but we can be receptive to God's presence as we ponder the questions.

Sound rational analysis based on the best available information is crucial to good discernment. Yet spiritual discernment goes beyond the analytical to engage our senses, feelings, imaginations, and intuition as we wrestle with issues. It often points toward a decision, but it is not problem solving. The goal of our discernment efforts is to find the mind of Christ. As such it is the central component of decision-making for those who would have their work grounded in God.

Discernment is more than saying prayers that ask God to guide us in rational consideration of matters. It is a mode of prayer that involves opening our entire selves to the working of the Holy Spirit. It bids us to let go of preconceived ideas so that we can be open to new possibilities with a readiness to view things from new perspectives. Discernment beckons us to be still and listen with the ear of our heart. It draws us into alignment with God.

Discernment is central to doing God's work. To serve God, we must constantly be alert to the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Without God, we can do nothing. "Those who abide in me and I in them," said Jesus, "bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (John. 15:5)

In group deliberations, discernment involves coming together with open hearts and open minds to seek God's wisdom around issues important to the community. The first order of business is to become attuned to God's presence within and among those assembled.

Spiritual discernment differs from other kinds of discernment because it is grounded in a conviction that the Holy Spirit is an active presence and, when in a group, the leading party in the proceedings. Christ is present at the center of each person and alive in the group—speaking, forming, and touching—waiting to be heard and recognized. Those assembled want to let go of barriers, both individually and collectively. They want the Spirit to guide them in shaping an issue so that it reflects what is important to God. The Spirit works as leaven that permeates the mixture, transforming the ingredients into the bread of life.-

Franham, Suzaane G. et.al. *Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1996), pp 5-8.

The Discernment Shepherds: On Baptism and Ministry (Diocese of Chicago)

The genesis and continuing motivation for Christian ministry is a person's identification with God and the ministry of Christ. That ministry is a ministry of reconciliation, a restoring of the relationship of love and unity between all people and God, made continually necessary by the rebellious nature of human beings.

The church has accepted this ministry. Members of the church accept this ministry through the sacrament of baptism. Baptism is the symbolic and spirit-filled initiation into identification with Christ and the church and with the mission and ministry of the church.

Through God's grace, baptism accepts, strengthens, equips, and commissions every person to be a minister of Christ's mission in the world, the mission of restoring a loving relationship between all people and God.

This reconciliation is first effected with the baptized person, who promises to maintain this restored relationship by continually accepting God's forgiving and strengthening love. The baptized person then promises to be a minister to others by being an active member of the community of faith in worship, proclamation and service to all.

Such an inclusive understanding of baptism questions ordination. If all the baptized are commissioned to continue Christ's ministry, what is ordination? Does the practice of ordination confuse the "ordination" received at baptism? In addition, how does such an understanding of baptism influence the practice of infant baptism? Can an infant accept such a commission?

Our theology of baptism as described above would be:

God's love for us is complete when we accept that love and the reconciliation that Jesus Christ has effected through his death and resurrection. We accept both God's love and Christ's salvation by being baptized into the community of faith and vowing to join Christ's continuing ministry of reconciliation. Keeping our baptismal promises and doing ministry continues our own reconciliation as we help others. Baptism is our ordination to do so through the power of the Holy Spirit. The ordination of clergy merely adds a leadership responsibility in this ministry.

The Discernment Shepherds: On Ministry and Orders (Diocese of Chicago)

Baptism forms the soul of a minister. In baptism we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit. In baptism we find that we are and have always been God's beloved. Christianity is not a religion about being good so Daddy will love us. Through baptism we catch ourselves in Christ and set about the business of participating more fully in the life of Christ, growing into the form given us at birth and signified in baptism. We live into the growing realization that we are called into community, invited into relationship and given everything we need to participate in the life of Christ. We learn that we are part of a ministering community (not, as is so often lived out, a community gathered around a minister).

This is why, in Holy Baptism, we participate in three great renunciations and three great actions. We renounce those forces which rebel against God, we renounce those forces which corrupt and destroy, and we renounce those desires which draw us from the love of God. In short, we renounce those things that lead us away from the ability to perceive and respond to the reality of being God's beloved. We renounce those things that inhibit our relationship, destroy community, and obliterate life's natural abundance. We then undertake three great actions which participate in and point to the love of God which we have begun to let ourselves feel and know. We say yes to the love which is the true origin of all knowledge and tangles us in the web of life. We say yes to the love which wraps the knower and the known in cords of compassion and the bands of deep responsibility and transforming joy. We turn in acceptance to Jesus Christ. We put our whole trust in Christ's grace and love, and it is Christ whom we promise to follow and obey.

In our baptismal covenant, we proclaim our belief in the person of the Holy Trinity and their saving work on our behalf. Seeking God's help, we promise continuance in the faith, perseverance in resisting evil and practicing repentance, proclamation of the Good News, and a willingness to seek Christ in all people, respectfully laboring for their justice, peace and dignity.

So that the baptismal community may live into these promises, its members – collectively and individually – undertake specific acts called “ministry.” The acts of our baptismal ministry are divided into three different but related types: diaconal ministry, presbyteral ministry and episcopal ministry.

Diaconal ministry happens when we seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves. When we care for friends, family, or strangers we are engaging in diaconal ministry. When, because of our commitment to Christ, we undertake a public service or volunteer in our community, we are engaging in diaconal ministry. Diaconal ministry is as close to us as our own hands.

Similarly, presbyteral ministry happens when we persevere in resisting evil and whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord. In other words, presbyteral ministry is about reconciliation, about relationships. Whenever our commitment to Christ moves us to work, on our relationships - pushing us to make them more honest and more life - affirming-we are engaging in presbyteral ministry. When we help people in conflict at work or at home to reconcile, we are engaging in presbyteral ministry. Whenever we promote peace or draw the tight circle of our affections wider so as to include the stranger, we are practicing presbyteral ministry. Whenever we choose to see the presence of Christ in all of creation - just as we see that presence in bread and wine - we are engaging in presbyteral ministry. Presbyteral ministry is as close to us as our next breath.

Episcopal ministry happens when we continue in the apostle's teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers. Episcopal ministry is about continuing, about learning and teaching, about shepherding. When we strive to be faithful and loving parents we are engaging in episcopal ministry .

When we shepherd someone into the baptismal community we are engaging in episcopal ministry, as we are when we lead a Sunday School class or adult forum. When, because of our commitment to Christ we practice oversight on a community service's board of directors we are engaged in episcopal ministry. When we tell the story of our salvation, we are engaging in episcopal ministry. Episcopal ministry is as close to us as our next heart beat.

Diaconal ministry, presbyteral ministry, and episcopal ministry – all three belong to Christ and are the delightful work of the baptismal community. The mystery of ministry is that we all practice these ministries out of thanksgiving for being God's beloved. At the same time, we feel it is God who gives us

the will to do these things as well as the grace and power to perform them; hence the much loved prayer which we pray over the newly baptized.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed on these your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised them to the new life of grace. Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer, p. 308.)

The story of baptismal ministry, however, does not end here. The baptized identify persons within the community who remind, encourage and call us to diaconal, presbyteral and episcopal ministry. Deacons, priests, and bishops are persons whose lives within the baptismal community stand as a sign for and an activator of the community's ministry. Such ordered ministry within the baptismal community is based on an economy of "power with" as opposed to "power over," and shapes the community according to a discipline focused not on rules or will power but on gifts.

Thus the deacon coaches the community in diaconal ministry. The deacon is a sign within the community and the call to the community to seek Christ in the world. The deacon motivates the baptismal community to engage in acts of service and speaks to the community of the world's needs. The deacon is set within the baptismal community as one whose life and presence shows us that God's love is so abundant that we can and should share that love with a needy world.

The priest mentors the community in presbyteral ministry. The priest is the sign within the community and the call to the community to tangle itself in the web of life. The priest is a collaborative leader who motivates the baptismal community to practice reconciliation. The priest is set within the baptismal community as one who breaks open the word and breaks bread to reveal the sacramental character of all creation. The priest feeds us by proclaiming that we are the Body of Christ which gathers to feed on the Body of Christ for our broken world.

Finally, the bishop guides the community in episcopal ministry. The bishop is the sign of continuance, shepherding and unity. The bishop is a sign of and a call to the community to continue in the faith and to bring others into the fold. The bishop is one who grasps the community's gospel vision, expresses that vision compellingly, sets up processes for good leadership, and ensures the creative freedom necessary for the baptismal community to minister effectively. The bishop is set within the baptismal community as one whose oversight testifies that in working, praying and giving for the coming of God's reign we can, through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, bind together and make one our divided world.

In sum, the baptismal community is motivated by and responds to an awareness that every person is God's beloved. The community responds by ministering to our needy, broken and divided world. Baptized persons are God's people, the laos. Certain members of the laos are set within the baptismal community as signs for and activators of our diaconal, presbyteral and episcopal ministry. This ordered ministry shapes the community according to a discipline focused on gifts, thereby deepening our awareness of and strengthening our commitment to our common baptismal ministry.

Discernment Resources

Books

Beach, Rachel *The Passion of Reverend Nash* (novel)
Campbell, Will *Brother to the Dragonfly*
Countryman, L. William *Living on the Border of the Holy*
Farnham, Suzanne *Listening Hearts*
Hays, Edward *Holy Fools and Mad Hatters: A Handbook for Hobbyhorse Holiness*
Palmer, Parker *Let Your Life Speak*
Ramsey, Michael *The Christian Priest*
Plater, Ormand *Deacons in the Episcopal Church: Guidelines for the Selection, Training and Ministry*

Web sites

<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/recruit.htm>
<http://www.listeninghearts.ang-md.org>
<http://www.andromeda.rutgers.edu/~lcrew/lbgaspirants.html> (written for lesbian and gay aspirants, but good for all)

Spiritual Gifts Inventories

<http://www.cforc.com/offline.html> (For individuals)
<http://www.kodachrome.org/spiritgift/> (For individuals)
<http://www.churchgrowth.org/analysis/intro.html> (For teams)

Workshops, Retreats, Institutes

<http://www.sewanee.edu/lillyproj/lldi.html> (A place to explore God's call in our lives)