

# Ministry Discernment at the Parish Level

## First Steps

1. When an individual expresses a sense of call to either ordained ministry or a more in-depth, intentional baptismal ministry, the parish priest should meet with the individual to pray and listen with the person as they try to give voice to the call.
2. If the incumbent feels there is evidence of a vocation or call to more intentional lay ministry, the incumbent contacts the Bishop to set up an appointment to discuss the sense of call.
3. The candidate and incumbent attend the appointment.
4. If the Bishop agrees that further discernment would be valuable the individual is advised to establish a parish discernment group with the help of the incumbent.
5. The incumbent advises the chair of the diocesan ministry discernment that a parish discernment group is being established.
6. The candidate and Incumbent are encouraged to go the diocesan website to access the ministry discernment guidelines and recommended process as a resource:  
<https://bc.anglican.ca/pages/parish-ministry-discernment-241>.
7. The candidate is also encouraged to seek out a spiritual companion/director to also support them in this spiritual discernment.

## Parish Discernment Group Formation

1. The incumbent works with the candidate to bring together a group of individuals from the parish to form a parish discernment group. It is important that there be a good cross-section of individuals in the group.
2. The group would normally, but not necessarily, include the incumbent; one of the wardens or a parish council member; if available, a deacon or a retired clergy person that is suitable for this work; and 3-4 other individuals of the parish who are in active lay ministry in their own right within the parish community.
3. The group agrees to a time and place that is agreeable to all involved. Each candidate is unique and the timing of their discernment is to be carefully handled. A healthy parish discernment process will likely take about 6 months, and can be longer depending on the circumstances.

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4. A member of the Diocesan Ministry Discernment Team should be invited to the first meeting to help review the discernment process, the purpose of the parish discernment group and to answer any questions about the process. To arrange this, contact the chair of the Team at [mdt@bc.anglican.ca](mailto:mdt@bc.anglican.ca)
5. The purpose of the time together is to get to know the candidate better and listen to what they are considering as they discern where God might be leading them. The group helps the candidate to articulate their sense of call and how they see themselves in ministry in the church. It's important to pray together and for the candidate throughout the process.

### Parish Discernment Group Process

Suggestions of a process might include some of the following:

1. Have the candidate complete one of the on-line spiritual gift questionnaires and discuss where they see their gifts being used.
2. Review the diocesan ministry guidelines
3. Review the National Church Guidelines for Competencies for the Priesthood:
  - a. [http://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Competencies\\_web.pdf](http://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Competencies_web.pdf)
  - b. or for Deacon: <http://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/009c-Appendix-3.pdf>
  - c. If applicable, invite the candidate to also consider religious community vocations and lay ministry possibilities within the church.
4. Review the ordination liturgies outlined in the BAS as a place for conversation regarding the role of Holy Orders/ordination and the commitments that are made.
5. Encourage the candidate to read one of the suggested books on the diocesan website: <http://www.bc.anglican.ca/resources/faith-in-formation/pages/parish-ministry-discernment>. Invite the candidate to share what they discovered in their reading and reflection on the book.
6. Consider using a discernment tools such as the Ignatian principles for discernment: <http://www.marquette.edu/faith/ignatian-principles-for-making-decisions.php>.
7. As a final activity, consider having a quiet day of prayer and reflection as a team with the candidate.

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8. Have someone facilitate the quiet day. The candidate is invited to consider all that they have heard and discerned with the parish discernment team, to spend some time alone to name what that experience has revealed to them and prepare a one or two page summary of where they feel they are in the process, including any relevant background information. The team are to also spend some time in individual prayer reflecting on what they have seen/heard/experienced of this candidate. The group comes together to listen to each other and to the candidate.
9. The group meets for two uninterrupted hours (or thereabouts), and the discerner is the center of attention. Committee members are forbidden to speak to her/him except to ask open, honest questions. Some attention should be paid to what "open" and "honest" means. Asking the question, "Have you ever considered therapy?" is a leading question—not open and honest. Asking "Have you often felt this way?" is acceptable. The discerner usually answers each question, but has the right to pass. There is lots of silence, and nothing is hurried. Advice and oversimplification from committee members are not allowed.
10. About 15 minutes before the session ends, the discerner is asked if she/he would like to do some "mirroring". If not, the group continues with questions. If so, committee members reflect, or mirror, what the discerner said or did, but might not be aware of. "When you talked about X, your voice dropped and you seemed tired, but when you spoke of Y, your energy rose and your eyes got bright."
11. At the end of the quiet day – close with a simply closing liturgy of thanksgiving and closure of this stage of the process.

## Recommendation Letter for the Bishop

1. The parish discernment team comes together to determine their conclusions about this person. A letter recording the results of their discernment is compiled and given to the Bishop with a copy to the candidate. The template for this letter of recommendation/observations is found as a pdf file on the diocesan website at <https://bc.anglican.ca/diocesan-ministries/faith-in-formation--222/pages/parish-ministry-discernment--241>. The file is downloaded to your computer and filled in. The saved version is then emailed to the Bishop's Executive Assistant.
2. If the letter confirms the call of the candidate, the Bishop will inform the chair of the Ministry Discernment Team and ask that a mentoring chaplain from the team is

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assigned to the candidate. Mentoring chaplains are responsible for assisting individuals as they continue through the process and act as a support for decision making.

### Final Steps

1. Upon completion of the parish discernment process, a candidate may then apply to the diocesan Ministry Discernment Weekend. The deadline for application to the weekend is *July 15* of each year. The Ministry Discernment Weekend is held in the late fall. Successful applicants meet with a team of assessors who continue to work with the candidate on discerning the nature of their call.
2. Following the Ministry Discernment Weekend, the assessors prepare a report to the bishop on future direction. One assessor, together with the candidate's mentoring chaplain, meets with the candidate a few days later to read the report and answer any questions.
3. After receiving the report from the weekend, the candidate meets with the bishop to discuss next steps.
4. The mentoring chaplain continues to companion the candidate until the candidate has been placed in ministry (whether as a priest, a deacon, or a layperson)
5. The Parish Discernment Group should continue to meet occasionally with the candidate and act as a support group for him or her during the remainder of the discernment process. This is especially important if the final decision is not to proceed towards ordained ministry but deepen the candidate's lay ministry and possibly seek further training or education in some aspect of this ministry.