



## **Ministerial Discernment Process Guide**

Updated: March 2024

## Abstract

This guide is for use by persons discerning a call to ordained ministry and for clergy leaders and others in the church who are assisting in their discernment. The aim of this guide is to empower clergy leaders, congregations and enquirers for the priesthood and the diaconate with the knowledge and tools needed to do the work of discernment. The guide lays out the principles and procedures to be used consistently throughout the diocese so that we raise up faithful, disciplined, effective and inspirational leaders for our church.

The guide introduces the [Criteria for Holy Orders](#), as developed by Archbishop Melissa Skelton and the House of Bishops of our ecclesiastical province, with the addition of contributions from the director of Anglican Formation at Vancouver School of Theology, the regional deans and archdeacons of the diocese, the diocesan Ministerial Development Committee and Bishop Anna Greenwood-Lee.

These criteria describe the qualities of those people our diocese is seeking to ordain as priests and deacons and remind us of the calling of all the baptized into the ministry of the church.

Following the criteria, the guide describes the process of discernment, from initial exploration of call through to application to the bishop to be considered for postulancy.

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Current versions found on diocesan website under Parish Resources → [Ministry Discernment](#)

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## A Word from Bishop Anna

Dear friends,

Frederick Buechner defines vocation as the place where “your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.” The needs of the world and of the church are many, and as baptised persons, we all have a vocation to live into our baptismal covenant. We are all children of God, created in the image of God with particular gifts, abilities and charismas. We are all called to discern the best way to express these gifts in what poet Mary Oliver calls our one “wild and precious life.”

The Anglican Church calls out some from among us to serve the church as deacons, priests and bishops. Discerning who is called to such ministry is the collective responsibility of the church. The church must affirm and raise up leaders from its midst and help them discern a call, or not, to ordained ministry.

This guide is intended to assist congregations form discernment committees for those who think they may or may not be called to ordained ministry. It is meant to create a space for fruitful and faithful conversations about the nature of ministry, an individual's journey and service in the church. All those participating in this process are entering into a journey of discernment and growth in their own sense of vocation, faith and communion.

To those discerning a call to ordained ministry, bless you on your journey and thank you for being real, vulnerable and honest with yourself, with God and with the church. To those serving as the discernment committee, please enter this sacred responsibility prayerfully and carefully. To have someone share their journey with you in such an intimate way is no small thing and should be treated with respect and compassion.

With every blessing on our shared work of discernment,



+Anna

*The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.*

Ephesians 4:11-16; New Revised Standard Version

# Ministry in broad perspective

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## Ordained or Lay?

More often than not in the Church, when we talk about ministry it is quickly narrowed down to ordained ministry, and even more quickly to presbyteral (priestly) ministry. Ministry within the Church of Christ, however, is the calling of the whole body of Christ: every baptized Christian has a responsibility to do the work of the Church in prayer, in service, in governance and leadership.

Ministerial discernment, therefore, is the role of discerning not whether someone is called to presbyteral ministry, but what ministry someone is called to exercise—be it as an active lay person, a deacon or a priest. To that end, the process in the diocese of islands and inlets should begin as an open-ended process, and—at the parish level—end with a recommendation that a person further pursue their vocation in whatever direction the group has discerned. It should be noted that the end of this process is not ordination but a sense of being called to whatever ministry, lay or ordained, to which one is suited.

However, within this process we do wish to encourage gifted, capable people to explore whether the diaconate or the priesthood might be their calling. We are seeking those who have both *an inner awareness of a call from God* and are *affirmed in that call as observed by others*. We are seeking people who show both passion and realism in their commitment to the Church as a bearer of God's mission in the world, and a current involvement in that mission through the life of a congregation within the diocese. We are seeking those whose spirituality is centered in their baptismal identity, rooted in a relationship with God, lived out in their practices of private and public prayer, and demonstrated through the stewardship of their relationships and their resources.

Withholding judgement for the outcome of the discernment, the Criteria for Holy Orders and the process for discernment described in the following pages are tools developed to help enquirers and parishes identify what ministry someone is called to exercise: *ordained or lay*.

## Purpose and functionality of the Criteria

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To assist us in identifying those people, in this document referred to as “enquirers,” who would be suited to explore discernment for Holy Orders, we have a set of criteria with the following objectives:

- to guide those who initiate conversations with potential enquirers;
- to assist enquirers in their own reflections on vocation;
- and, to use in conversations between enquirers and Parish Discernment Groups, as well as a basis for the enquirers’ action-reflection.

As is always the case, the gifts, abilities and characteristics may be present in each person in varying degrees given their age, church background, life experience and time in the discernment process. Thus, we are seeking people who currently possess the gifts, abilities and characteristics which will serve them and the Church well, *or*, who demonstrate a clear potential to develop these gifts, abilities and characteristics during their discernment and formation.

### The Diaconate

In the case of ***those enquiring for the diaconate***, the gifts, abilities and characteristics listed in the Criteria for Holy Orders are in the service of the deacon’s role of being both a sign and an animator of the Christ-like service of the whole people of God in the world. As such, the deacon both personally enacts this servanthood, and leads others in the church community into such service in the world.

### The Priesthood

In the case of ***those enquiring for the priesthood***, the gifts, abilities and characteristics listed in the Criteria for Holy Orders are meant to be in the service of the role of the priest—the spiritual and pastoral ministry of gathering a community of faith; presiding in that community through proclaiming the Word and presiding at the Eucharist and at Baptism; the preparation of people for Christian life and ministry; and participating in the oversight and overall integration of a community of faith as it focuses on its purpose of gathering, renewing baptismal identity and sending the baptized into the world as salt, light and leaven.

*The full Criteria for Holy Orders is found on the following page so that it may be printed as a single document for easy reference for both the enquirer and the Parish Discernment Group.*

## Criteria for Holy Orders

1. **A person who is a gatherer and builder of community:** We seek a person who is gifted in gathering diverse people into a community and then building and developing that community over time. We seek those who can help groups of people come together around shared values and a sense of purpose. We seek those who can assist others in identifying and developing their gifts and skills in service to God, the Church and the broader community.
2. **A person who has a pattern of spiritual practice that is rooted in a Christ-centered, Anglican approach to spirituality:** We seek a person who is committed to a life of prayer. We seek a person who is regular in the Daily Offices, faithful in their participation in the Eucharist, and active in the practice of personal prayer. We seek a person who is working with or seeking a spiritual director and pays attention to their internal life.
3. **A person who has a sense of presence and who is emotionally and relationally mature:** We seek a person whose presence grounds, encourages and inspires others. We seek a person who is working on their self-awareness and who nurtures authentic and productive relationships with others. This includes: understanding emotions and having the ability to communicate emotions; being aware of strengths and areas needing attention in terms of relationships with others; and, having and being attuned to the impact of their presence, words and actions on others. We seek a person of emotional resilience who can persevere and stay in relationship with others when situations get difficult.
4. **A person who can exercise leadership that carries authority and can live productively in relationship to those in authority:** We seek a leader who is comfortable exercising a style of leadership that is both relational and carries authority. We seek a person who, having made ordination vows, acknowledges the authority and responsibility that others (archbishops, bishops, archdeacons, rectors, elected and appointed lay leaders, etc.) carry in relationship to them and can nurture productive relationships with those carrying authority and responsibility.
5. **A person who listens and loves to learn:** We seek a person who is open and intrigued by the learning process and who sees God as moving and active in Scripture, tradition and reason—learning from other disciplines and in the wisdom of the community. We seek a person who is committed to increasing their own learning and theological understanding over time. We seek people who learn from their experience: both their successes and their failures.
6. **A person who is a good steward.** We seek a person who cares for themselves in terms of body, mind and spirit, and who nourishes the important relationships in their life. We seek a person who generously gives time, talent and treasure in gratitude to God who is the source of all. We seek the person who has developed and is working with a “Rule of Life” and whose life reflects a deep commitment to all the dimensions of their baptismal covenant, including care for creation.

# Educational Requirements and Funding

## Educational Requirements

Whether discerning for the priesthood or the diaconate, individuals who wish to practice ordained ministry are normally asked to complete a Master of Divinity degree. It is best practice to discuss your educational plans with the bishop and/or the director of deacons before beginning your studies, although this is not required. The national Church of Canada has a list of educational institutions affiliated with the Anglican Church at: [anglican.ca/about/educational](http://anglican.ca/about/educational).

In addition, all those seeking ordained ministry must complete a Clinical Pastoral Education program, preferably through the Vancouver School of Theology.

## Funding

When considering attending a seminary, we encourage considering how the program reflects or speaks to your personal call to ministry, rather than the cost of tuition. There are many opportunities for funding available, although in many cases, the applicants only become eligible to apply after they've been identified by their bishop as a confirmed *postulant* for ordination or (in the case of the priesthood) have been recommended by the Advisory Committee on Postulants for Ordinations (ACPO). For this reason, most begin their formal education after having entered Phase 2 of the discernment process described in this guide.

Many institutions offer entrance scholarships, bursaries, and grants. At some institutions, those who have been confirmed as postulants by their diocese are eligible for tuition assistance. The Anglican Foundation of Canada has a Theological Student Bursary that is available to those who have been recommended by ACPO. There are also specific funding opportunities available for past members or family members of those who served in the Canadian Forces. In this diocese, funding is available through the Educational Trusts Board, as follows:

## Educational Trusts Board

The Diocese of British Columbia administers a legacy trust portfolio through the Educational Trusts Board that offers educational grants to lay and clergy. The "C.H.G. Mann Scholarship" was established "to support ordination candidates in their theological studies." The maximum amount granted for the scholarship is \$6,000, and may be used to cover tuition, travel, accommodations, meals, learning materials, and other specified expenses. The scholarship is for individuals who have been identified by the bishop as "on the path to ordination"; candidates can apply for funding once they have been offered acceptance by a theological college and they've entered the *applicant* phase of the discernment process, having met with the bishop to discuss their educational plans.

The "Stanley Flitcroft Bursary Fund / Ellenor Swallow Trust / Lay Ministry Trust" was established for laity to attend a short-term course, seminar, workshop or conference. The maximum amount granted from either the Flitcroft Fund or Swallow Trust is \$1,000, but funds more than \$1,000 may be available from the Lay Ministry Trust. Individuals in any phase the discernment process may apply for funding for courses, workshops, etc. related to their discernment.



## At a glance: Journey of ministerial discernment

<p><b>Phase 1:</b> <b>In the Parish</b> “Enquirer”</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Initial conversations between enquirer and clergy leader.</li> <li>2. The enquirer completes the Enquirer’s History Form.</li> <li>3. The enquirer completes an assessment of ministerial gifts and skills.</li> <li>4. The enquirer sets goals and develops an Action Learning Plan.</li> <li>5. Enactment of the Action Learning Plan and continued exploration.</li> <li>6. Police Information Check with a Vulnerable Person’s Sector check.</li> <li>7. Completion of Safe Church training.</li> </ol> <p>Once all or most of the above steps are complete, at the discretion of the clergy leader, the applicant is named an <i>applicant</i>.</p>
<p><b>Phase 2:</b> <b>In the Parish</b> “Applicant”</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Formation of a Parish Discernment Group.</li> <li>2. Continued work on the Action Learning Plan.</li> <li>3. Continued meetings between the applicant and the clergy leader.</li> <li>4. Parish Discernment Group completes Appendix 9 and possibly Appendix 11 and sends to Diocesan Archdeacon for Ministerial Discernment.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Phase 3:</b> <b>In the diocese or province</b> “Applicant”</p>	<p>Should the parish group recommend that the applicant continue, and the bishop concurs, the following will occur (not in this order, necessarily):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Meet with the bishop or executive archdeacon.</li> <li>2. Meet with Diocesan Archdeacon of Ministerial Discernment.</li> <li>3. Paired with a companion chaplain.</li> <li>4. The applicant attends a diocesan discernment conference.</li> <li>5. Readiness for ACPO or diaconal discernment.</li> <li>6. Psychological Assessment</li> <li>7. Reports received from ACPO or director of deacons.</li> </ol> <p>Once all the above steps are complete, at the discretion of the bishop, the applicant is named a <i>postulant</i>.</p>
<p><b>Postulancy &amp; Ordination</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Internship or Field Education Placement &amp; Ember Day Letters.</li> <li>2. Complete Clinical Pastoral Education program.</li> <li>3. Readiness for Ordination / Pre-Ordination Retreat.</li> <li>4. Following Ordination: Vocational Deacons begin their ministry; Transitional Deacons begin a curacy.</li> </ol>

## In detail: Journey of ministerial discernment

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### Before a formal process begins

Before a formal process begins, a person perceives a call to Holy Orders. Whether the person perceives this call within themselves, or a clergy leader recognizes and invites the person to consider such a call, the process is the same. A person wishing to be an *enquirer* must be a confirmed member of the Anglican Church of Canada and an active member of a parish for at least one year before beginning the process described in this document. During this time, the person should exhibit a stable connection to the parish and in their relationship to God through regular attendance and participation in the Sunday liturgy (or the parish's principal liturgy); they should participate in other parish activities; they should exhibit a pattern of life that expresses a connection to God; and they should model healthy interpersonal relationships with others.

If and when the clergy leader believes an individual is ready to begin the formal process of discernment, the initial portion of the formal three-phase discernment process begins.

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### Phase 1: In the Parish

*Participants:* Enquirer, clergy leader, Ministry Discernment Committee, parish members

*Time and Scope:* This phase should take 6 to 9 months.

This phase is a time of **connectedness and stable participation in the life of the parish**.

#### 1. Initial conversations between enquirer and clergy leader.

Early meetings should be times for the enquirer and the clergy leader to pray together and to explore the enquirer's sense of call, the enquirer's spiritual biography and their experience in the Church. The clergy leader should also share these and any other materials describing the steps in the discernment process and the likely timeframe for each phase.

#### 2. The enquirer completes the Enquirer's History Form.

The clergy leader will share the Enquirer's History Form (Appendix 2) with the enquirer and the enquirer will complete it and return it to the clergy leader. The clergy leader will forward it to the bishop, the Ministry Discernment Committee (MDC) and the director of deacons (if discerning for the diaconate). The MDC will arrange for a member to meet with the clergy leader to review the discernment process and answer any questions the clergy leader may have about it.

3. The enquirer completes an assessment of ministerial gifts and skills.

Using the Criteria for Holy Orders (Appendix 1), both the clergy leader and the enquirer will explore and complete the Discernment for Holy Orders Assessment Tool (Appendix 3). The enquirer should also meet with individuals from the parish (the list to be worked out with the clergy leader) to discuss the enquirer's call, to ask invited parish members to complete the assessment tool and, after they complete the tool, to sit together and share their perspectives. The purpose of the assessment is to assist the enquirer in learning more about how they are perceived and experienced by others in the parish.

There are two examples of a completed Assessment Tool worksheet as Appendix 4 (for the priesthood) and Appendix 5 (for the diaconate).

4. The enquirer sets learning goals and develops an Action Learning Plan.

Drawing on all the assessments (the enquirer's, the clergy leader's, and the assessments of members of the parish), the enquirer then meets with the clergy leader and agrees upon learning goals and the specific "action learning plan" the enquirer is going to undertake. A plan typically includes activities related to tending to ones' mental, spiritual and physical health (engaging in a practice of prayer, meeting with a spiritual director, etc.) as well as functioning in new ways in the life of the parish (liturgy, teaching, pastoral care, outreach, community-building, administration and organization, leadership, etc.).

There are two examples of Action Learning Plans as Appendix 6 (for the priesthood) and Appendix 7 (for the diaconate).

5. Enactment of the Action Learning Plan and continued exploration.

As the enquirer enacts the Action Learning Plan, they will be meeting on a regular basis with the clergy leader to reflect on the learning. Also, during this phase, the enquirer will read books and articles about the priesthood or the diaconate and will meet with others who are priests or deacons and hear about their experience of their own vocations. This reading and learning from others will also be discussed in one or more of the enquirer's regular meetings with the clergy leader. Costs for books and materials will be assumed by the enquirer; the parish may consider subsidizing if they wish.

6. Police Information Check with Vulnerable Person's Sector Check.

As it is a requirement of all ordained and lay leaders in the diocese, the enquirer must provide the bishop's office with a current (less than five years old), original Police Information Check with Vulnerable Person's Sector Check. There should be no cost associated with this check, as the enquirer is not paid staff. Please contact the bishop's office for more information.

## 7. Completion of Safe Church Training.

As it is a requirement of all ordained and lay leaders in the diocese, the enquirer must participate in Safe Church training, which must be renewed every five years. Please contact the bishop's office for more information.

At the end of this phase, should the clergy leader determine that it is appropriate to explore further the enquirer's call to ordained ministry, the clergy leader will recommend that the second phase of discernment begin. The completed Discernment for Holy Orders Assessment Tool ([Appendix 3](#)) is submitted to the Ministry Discernment Committee. Once approved by the MDC (in consultation with the bishop's office), the individual is referred to as an *applicant*.

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### Phase 2: In the Parish

*Participants:* Applicant, clergy leader, parish discernment group, parish members

*Time and Scope:* Six to twelve months.

In this phase, work continues on **enacting the Action Learning Plan** and the formation of and engagement with a lay **Parish Discernment Group**.

#### 1. Formation of the Parish Discernment Group.

The applicant and the clergy leader identify, and the clergy leader invites, a group of five or six laity to serve on the applicant's Parish Discernment Group. The clergy leader is not a member of this group. Using the Guide for Parish Discernment Groups (Appendix 8), the Group meets with the applicant to explore the applicant's sense of call and spiritual life, and to have a frank discussion about the progress and learning of the applicant on the Action Learning Plan. At the end of the process, the Group is asked to assess whether it affirms the applicant's call to the priesthood or the diaconate and recommends to the clergy leader whether the applicant should continue in discernment for ordained ministry.

The expectation is that the Group will meet with the applicant at least nine times for at least two hours and will meet without the applicant once for a total of ten meetings during this phase. At the end of this phase of the process, the Group will determine whether:

- a) it affirms the applicant's call to ordained ministry ("yes") and the applicant's readiness to proceed to the diocesan phase of discernment;
- b) it does not think the time is right to proceed towards ordained ministry, but that this may be a path to follow in future ("not at this time, and please work on \_\_\_\_\_");
- c) or, it affirms the applicant's calling as an active lay member and encourages exploration of further lay ministry, rather than ordained ("no");

If the Group affirms the applicant's call to ordained ministry, the committee will draft and send a report (Appendix 9) to the bishop's office, copying to the clergy leader and the director of deacons (if

applicable). For applicants to the priesthood, the committee also completes the ACPO Parish Commendation Form (Appendix 11).

If the Group does not think the time is right to proceed, the applicant and the clergy leader spend a period of at least one year working on the areas requiring further consideration and/or development. Alternatively, the clergy leader, a spiritual director, and the Group may assist the applicant in discerning their baptismal ministry.

If the committee does not recommend the applicant proceed further towards ordination, the applicant should undertake a period of discernment and reflection alongside the clergy leader and/or a spiritual director to determine areas where the applicant's gifts can be used in baptismal ministry.

## 2. Continued work on the Action Learning Plan.

The applicant and the clergy leader refresh the Action Learning Plan as needed. The applicant continues to work on their own personal, spiritual and physical wellbeing and to work in the parish.

## 3. Continued meetings between the applicant and the clergy leader.

During the second phase, the clergy leader and the applicant will continue to meet to reflect on what the applicant is learning in their Action Learning Plan and to engage in any additional reflections on vocation. As such time that the Parish Discernment Group is marking their recommendation, if the clergy leader affirms the applicant's call, the clergy leader will also send a letter (Appendix 10) to the bishop's office.

If the Parish Discernment Group and the clergy leader have agreed in affirming the call of the applicant, and both submitted their reports, Phase 3 begins. The clergy leader continues to be engaged with ongoing formation and discernment alongside the applicant.

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## Phase 3: In the diocese and province

*Participants:* applicant, clergy leader, bishop, Ministry Discernment Committee (MDC), director of deacons, companion chaplains, Advisory Committee for Postulants for Ordination (ACPO; a provincial body for those discerning priesthood)

During this stage, the applicant is in conversation with those **outside the recommending congregation to gain a broader perspective** on discernment for Holy Orders.

### 1. If the bishop recommends the applicant, they meet with the bishop.

The applicant contacts the bishop's office and requests a meeting with the bishop. All materials completed in Phase 1 will be forwarded to the bishop's office. During the meeting, the bishop will discuss the applicant's Action Learning Plan, as well as plans for a formal education program (typically a 3-year Master of Divinity degree).

## 2. Meet with Ministerial Discernment Committee Lead.

The applicant schedules an appointment MDC Lead who reviews all the materials and, in consultation with the bishop, decides if the applicant should proceed to the diocesan process, including the potential for attending a diocesan or provincial discernment conference.

## 3. Paired with a companion chaplain.

The MDC Lead, in consultation with the bishop, will pair the applicant with a companion chaplain from the diocese who will offer support throughout the remaining process.

## 4. The applicant attends a diocesan discernment conference.

## 5. Readiness for ACPO or diaconal discernment.

Following the diocesan discernment conference, the bishop receives a report and decides whether the applicant (if discerning for the priesthood) should go to the Advisory Council on Postulants for Ordination (ACPO), which is held annually in May; or (if discerning for the diaconate), if they should proceed to diaconal discernment with the director of deacons.

## 6. Psychological Assessment

The bishop's office will arrange for the applicant to undergo a psychological assessment by a registered psychologist, at the expense of the diocese. The report will be shared with the bishop but will otherwise be kept confidential.

## 7. Reports received from ACPO or director of deacons.

After attending ACPO or completing diaconal discernment with the director of deacons, the bishop will receive a report on the applicant. At such time, the applicant will meet with the bishop, who decides whether the applicant becomes a *postulant*.

Should the applicant become a postulant, the person is given a certificate of sponsorship.

Should the bishop decide "not at this time," the applicant continues to work in the parish and with the clergy leader on specific learning goals identified in the process.

Should the bishop discern that the applicant is not suited to Holy Orders, the bishop will recommend a different continuing exploration of lay vocation in partnership with the clergy leader.

## Postulancy and Ordination

*Participants:* applicant, clergy leader, bishop, Ministry Discernment Committee, director of deacons, companion chaplains, ACPO

1. Internship or Field Education Placement & Ember Day Letters.

The bishop will assign the postulant a supervised internship and/or field education placement within the diocese. The length of this placement will depend on the amount of time the postulant has remaining in their formal education program. While completing their placement, the postulant will write an “ember day letter” to the bishop on each ember day, which will be followed up with short meeting.

2. Complete Clinical Pastoral Education program.

The postulant is expected to complete a Clinical Pastoral Education program, including hours of direct clerical experience in their community (see Education and Funding).

3. Readiness for Ordination / Pre-ordination Retreat.

At such time that the postulant has completed their educational program and placement, and if the MDC Lead and the bishop are in concurrence, the bishop will meet with the postulant to discuss readiness for ordination. At such time that a date is set for the ordination, the postulant is named an *ordinand*.

As a final act of preparation, the ordinand will attend a pre-ordination retreat, paid for by the diocese, the week before the ordination.

4. Following Ordination:

**Vocational Deacons** may begin their ministry immediately after ordination. The bishop will make an appointment.

Ordinands for the **Sacred Order of the Priesthood** will first be ordained to the **Sacred Order of Deacons as a “Transitional Deacon.”** This designation indicates that the ordinand intends to continue to prepare for the priesthood. Following the ordination, the bishop will appoint the Transitional Deacon to a *curacy* for the period of one year, under the direct supervision of an experienced incumbent who will further mentor the *curate*. At the conclusion of the curacy, and at the recommendation of the supervising incumbent, the bishop will again meet with the Transitional Deacon (curate) to discuss readiness for ordination to the priesthood.

As a final act of preparation, the Transitional Deacon will attend a pre-ordination retreat, paid for by the diocese, the week before the ordination.

Once ordained to the **Sacred Order of the Priesthood**, the new priest may begin their ministry immediately. The bishop will make an appointment.