

# Appendix D5

## Guide for Parish Discernment Groups

*This appendix is for the use of the applicant and parish discernment group, in order to guide their deliberations. It provides detailed instructions for completing Step A5 or B3 as outlined in the introductory website materials entitled “Process for Identifying Potential Deacons in the Parish Community.”*

### Overview and Purpose

Once the applicant has submitted the Enquirer’s History form (Appendix D2), the clergy leader assembles a parish discernment group, in consultation with the director of deacons and the applicant.

This group typically includes five to six lay people. At least one member of the group must be a member of the parish council. In addition, at least one member of the group must be thoroughly acquainted with the current practice and theology of the diaconate. The director of deacons will assist in the selection of this individual, who will often be from another parish.

The clergy leader remains available to support the group leaders but, with the exception of the first meeting, does *not* participate in the group’s meetings.

The group will begin its work together *after* an orientation meeting with the director of deacons to describe the process, clarify the role of the group, and review the distinction between diaconal and presbyteral ministry. Both the applicant and the clergy leader are to attend this orientation meeting.

The group then meets with the applicant (but not the clergy leader) a minimum of 8 times over a period of up to 9 months (and no fewer than 6). The work of the discernment group has a triple focus:

- The diaconal identity and commitment of the applicant
- The character of the applicant
- the skills of the applicant

The group should follow the general flow of meetings and conversations outlined below. After the final meeting with the applicant, the group writes a letter to the bishop and director of deacons (using the form at Appendix D6), outlining what they observe to be the applicant’s gifts and vulnerabilities, with recommendations concerning whether the applicant should move forward in the process. This report is to state explicitly the overall recommendation of the group: “Yes,” “No,” or “Not at this time.”

### Session Guide Introduction

This guide is provided as a means for the parish discernment group to help the applicant explore their sense of call, and to help the group explore its own experience of the applicant both in the parish, and in the meetings of the group.

The sessions in the guide are largely based on the Criteria for Ordination to the Diaconate (Appendix D1). There are nine session outlines, including the introductory orientation with the director of deacons,

and a concluding meeting in which the group deliberates on its recommendations. The concluding meeting is not attended by the applicant.

Most sessions cover a given topic or theme, and include work to be done before the session, question prompts, and activities. The sessions are designed to ensure that groups are equipped to comment knowledgeably on the questions they will be asked to answer in their report to the bishop and director of deacons (Appendix D6). Therefore, groups should cover all the topics laid out in the guide. They may also augment it with their own appropriate questions.

To help facilitate meetings, each group should select a convener and a secretary. (Neither of these roles is appropriate for the applicant).

- The convener is responsible for setting meeting dates, contacting the group and distributing any materials. The convener should be willing to be a point-person for communications with the director of deacons and the bishop's office regarding the applicant's process. During meetings, the convener facilitates the conversation, steering it back to its focus should it begin to drift. It is helpful if the convener has had prior experience in small group leadership.
- The role of secretary can be rotated among members (again, with the exception of the applicant). Notes gathered by the secretary will provide form the basis of the group's formal submission to the bishop and director of deacons (Appendix D6).

### **General Outline for Meetings**

Groups will normally meet for six to nine months and should plan to meet for at least 90 minutes per session, no less than once a month. Groups begin when the clergy leader and applicant agree that the applicant is ready. They conclude when the group has examined all the questions in the guide and has arrived at a consensus about the applicant's call to holy orders.

Each group will find its own rhythm and style. Groups should open and close each session with prayer, silence or both. Each session should also include some time for personal sharing, prayer and mutual support.

Session Nine provides for a time for members to meet without the applicant for their own discernment conversation. Groups may find the need to do this more frequently, for instance, at mid-point in the meeting cycle. This check-in time can be used to identify areas of the applicant's call, experience or learning that members wish to revisit or to explore more fully. If differences in discernment are identified during the process, the group can then take steps to attempt resolution.

Groups are welcome to supplement, but not to replace the guide with their own work.

## Session by Session Discussion Guides

### Session One: Orientation Meeting with the Director of Deacons

*The clergy leader attends this meeting, and shares chairing responsibilities with the director deacons.*

#### **Preparation**

Before the group gathers, each member (including the applicant) should prepare as follows:

*Read the following short documents (which will be provided ahead of the meeting):*

- *The Diaconate FAQ (posted on the diocesan website under Ministries & Programs/Chapter of Deacons)*
- *The Examination of the Deacon (BAS Ordination rite, pp 655-656)*
- *“Section I: Preface” of The Iona Report: The Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada, pp 15-20*

*Read the following materials included in the “Ministerial Discernment Process Guide for the Diaconate” (found on the diocesan website, nested in Parish Resources/Ministry Discernment):*

- *Abstract*
- *A Message from Bishop Anna*
- *Ministry in Broad Perspective*
- *Purpose of the Criteria*

*In addition, please read and keep handy the following appendices, which you will need throughout the process:*

- *Appendix D1 - Criteria for Ordination to the Diaconate*
- *Appendix D3 – Ministry Discernment Worksheet (for an example of a completed worksheet, you may wish to review Appendix D4)*
- *Appendix D5 – Guide for Parish Discernment Groups*

#### **When the group gathers:**

1. Prayer and connecting exercise: Pray together the following collect for mission:

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified: receive our supplications and prayers which we offer before you for all members of your holy church, that in our vocation and ministry we may truly and devoutly serve you; through your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

2. Briefly introduce yourself to the group: your name, how long you have been associated with the parish, and any role(s) you may have
3. The director of deacons outlines the purpose of the meeting
  - describe the discernment process;
  - clarify the role of the group;
  - provide a brief history of the diaconate;
  - review the distinction between diaconal and presbyteral ministry; and
  - address concerns and next steps.

4. Activity: In go-round fashion, each member shares any previous experience of deacons (who, how many, where, etc.)
5. Questions to Explore:
  - What did you perceive to be their chief role?
  - What differences did you note between the role of the deacon and the role of the priest in these situations?
6. Background on the Diaconate – the director of deacons provides some background on the history of the diaconate, and the place and role of deacons.
7. Housekeeping matters: questions for clarification, selection of chair and secretary, next meeting date.
8. Distribute completed copies of the Enquirer’s History form. End with any preparatory comments about the next session, and a prayer of your choice.

## Session Two: Introductions and Spiritual Autobiographies

### Preparation

Before the group gathers, each member (including the applicant) should prepare as follows:

*Prepare the story of your spiritual life. Make sure you include many aspects of your life in what you share: personal life, family life, vocational life and life in the church are all relevant. Forms that your autobiography can take may include (but are not limited to): a timeline with milestones and turning points; a collage with images that communicate important themes; a picture or pictures that communicate your spiritual history and life via images; or the use of some other medium that best suits you. After you complete this in a comprehensive form, decide what you would be willing to share with the group in a 10-minute presentation.*

### When the group gathers:

2. Prayer and connecting exercise: Pray together the following collect for mission:

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

If necessary, briefly re-introduce yourself to the group: your name and any role(s) you may have in the parish. In addition, what is your day-to-day ministry in the world, and what is one expectation that you are bringing to this process?

3. Go over any norms for the group, e.g.: arrive and end on time, what is said in the group stays in the group, use “I statements,” etc.
4. Activity: Each member of the group should spend 10 (maximum 15) minutes sharing their spiritual autobiography. Group members simply receive someone’s story after it is offered (no need to probe further or comment on it). If the sharing needs to be carried over to a second session, do so.
5. Reflection: After everyone has had a turn telling their story, the group explores:
  - in what ways do our spiritual journeys connect thematically to one another?
  - what similarities do our stories share?

- what differences?
6. End with any preparatory comments about the next session, and a prayer of your choice.

### **Session Three: Diaconal Identity and Community Engagement**

#### **Preparation**

Before the group gathers, each member (including the applicant) should prepare as follows:

*Using the Criteria for Ordination to the Diaconate (Appendix D1), first read through the description of Criteria #1 and #4). Read the applicant's Enquirer's History form, paying special attention to Parts 4-8 inclusive. Make notes for yourself about how you perceive the applicant to be functioning in accordance with these two criteria. The applicant does the same in self-reflection.*

#### **When the group gathers:**

1. Prayer and connecting exercise: a member offers prayer. Read together Luke 4.18-19. Reflect briefly on how you see the mission Jesus describes in this passage being carried out today.
2. Activity: The applicant describes a local or regional need/issue about which they are passionate, and ways in which the faith community could be called to engage. Group members are invited to list other such issues.
3. Questions for the group to explore with the applicant:
  - What would people need to learn in order to address one or more of the issues raised meaningfully? What would you need to learn? With whom could you or the church collaborate?
  - What challenges do you see in the church becoming involved in these issues? How could these challenges be addressed?
4. End discussion by going around the group and each person sharing one insight (for themselves or about the applicant) they will take away from exploring these criteria.
5. End with any preparatory comments about the next session and with prayer.

### **Session Four: Personal Awareness and Understanding**

#### **Preparation**

Before the group gathers, each member (including the applicant) should prepare as follows:

*Using the Criteria for Ordination to the Diaconate (Appendix D1), read through Criterion #3 on personal awareness and understanding. Make notes about where you have seen this lived out in the applicant's time in the parish or in the group.*

#### **When the group gathers:**

1. Prayer and connecting time: A member offers prayer. Read together Ruth 1.16-18. Briefly share one relationship that has been important to you in the last month.
2. Activity: Each group member shares one situation in their life that has called on them to be emotionally or relationally mature. What is the situation and how has it asked you to function? Share in a go-round fashion.
3. A group member will read aloud the criteria on personal and awareness and understanding. Explore some or all the following discussion questions with the applicant:

- Where in your daily work or in your personal life do you most struggle with this criterion? What are the specific situations or personal characteristics/behaviours in others that are the most challenging for you?
  - Who for you exemplifies the kind of qualities described in the criteria?
  - What are you doing to nurture your best self in terms of personal awareness and emotional resilience?
4. In a go-round fashion, each person shares their description of where they have seen elements of the criteria in the applicant. Applicant shares as well.
  5. Applicant shares what they have heard in the group and what they believe they continue to need to work on.
  6. End with any preparatory comments about the next meeting, and with a prayer of your choice.

## Session Five: Christ-Centered Anglican Spiritual Practice

### Preparation

Before the group gathers, each member (including the applicant) should prepare as follows:

*Using the Criteria for Ordination to the Diaconate (Appendix D1), read through Criteria #2 and #9. Read “The Examination” in the ordination liturgy for deacons (BAS pp 655-656, provided at Session 1). Make notes about what kind of spiritual practice you imagine would best support the kind of presence and activity described.*

### When the group gathers:

1. Prayer and connecting time: A member offers prayer. Read together the “Hear O Israel” (BAS p. 53).

Hear, O Israel,  
the Lord our God, the Lord is one.  
Love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
with all your mind,  
and with all your strength.

This is the first and the great commandment.  
The second is like it:  
Love your neighbour as yourself.

There is no commandment greater than these.

2. Share one challenge you experience in keeping the “Great Commandments,” i.e. in loving God through nurturing your emotional life (“heart”), spirit (“soul”), intellect (“mind”), and physical wellbeing (“strength”); as well as “loving your neighbour as yourself.” The applicant also shares.
3. Activity: Read through the criteria related to Anglican spiritual practice and stewardship (Criteria #2 & #9). The applicant shares their current Rule of Life or spiritual practice, and connects it to the criteria.
4. Other questions the for the group to explore with the applicant:
  - What do you think is the importance of having a spiritual practice as an ordained deacon?

- What about the Anglican spiritual tradition feeds you spiritually? Challenges you?
  - What parts of your current rule or spiritual practice are easiest for you keep? What parts do you need to continue to work on or refine?
  - How do you understand Christian stewardship? What does it include, and what are the important things that are a call on your own time, treasure, and talent?
  - How do you understand your stewardship of the earth and its resources? How specifically do you practise care for creation?
5. End by going around the group with each member identifying one insight about the applicant or about spiritual practice that they will remember from the discussion.
  6. End with any comments on the next meeting and with prayer.

## **Session Six: Rootedness in the Biblical Narrative**

### **Preparation**

Before the group gathers, each member (including the applicant) should prepare as follows:

*Using the Criteria for Ordination to the Diaconate (Appendix D1), read through Criterion #5. Think of biblical characters, stories and themes that touch on your growing understanding of diaconal ministry. Make a list of societal, ethical or doctrinal issues which pose a challenge to scripture, or to which scripture poses a challenge.*

### **When the group gathers:**

1. Prayer and connecting time: Pray together the collect for Proper 32:
 

Eternal God,  
 who caused all holy scriptures  
 to be written for our learning,  
 grant us so to hear them,  
 read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them,  
 that we may embrace and ever hold fast  
 the blessed hope of everlasting life,  
 which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ,  
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
 one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
2. Activity: Have someone read aloud Criterion #5 concerning rootedness in the biblical narrative. In a go-round fashion, each member names one biblical story or character important to them, and briefly explains why.
3. Other questions for the group to explore with the applicant:
  - After the group shares its prepared list of social or ethical issues, the applicant describes how Scripture could (or could not) be helpfully brought to bear on two or more of them.
  - What does it mean to say the bible has “authority”? How do you perceive the Anglican Church to differ from other traditions in its use and understanding of the bible?
  - Pick one story or passage of scripture that you believe goes to the heart of a deacon’s role in the world. If you had the opportunity to preach to the church about this text, what would your main point be to your listeners?
4. End by going around the group with each member identifying one insight about the importance of rootedness in the biblical narrative. Applicant shares one thing they want or need to work on in order to deepen their own biblical groundedness.

5. End with any comments on the next meeting and with prayer.

## **Session Seven: Gatherer & Builder of Community who Functions Productively both With and Under Authority.**

### **Preparation**

Before the group gathers, each member (including the applicant) should prepare as follows:

*Using the Criteria for Ordination to the Diaconate, read through Criteria #6 and #7. Make notes about one or more times when you have experienced the applicant functioning in these ways. Review the Examination from the ordination rite (BAS pp 655-656, previously provided, as well as the question regarding obedience on p 654). Think about a time when you have exercised authority in the past month. The applicant does the same.*

### **When the group gathers:**

1. Prayer and connecting time: A member offers prayer. Read together Criteria #6 and #7.
2. Activity: the applicant shares a time when they have functioned as a gatherer and builder of community (either within or outside the church). Other group members share what they have experienced of the applicant as a gatherer and builder of community in the parish.
3. Questions for the group to explore with the applicant:
  - In what way is the work of gathering and building community important to the work of a deacon – in the world? In the parish?
  - In your own parish context, what issues or needs can you imagine gathering and equipping people to address?
  - Where are you comfortable and uncomfortable in exercising authority, and how do you perceive your own leadership style?
  - How do you interact with those who have been given authority in relationship to you, particularly on matters where you disagree?
4. In a go-round fashion, members of the group share their thoughts on this question: what is one insight about the applicant that you will take away from the discussion and what is one question you would invite the applicant to explore? Lastly, the applicant shares one learning they have had about themselves in relationship to these criteria, and one area they believe they still need to explore.
5. End with any comments about the next meeting and prayer.

## **Session Eight: The Love of Learning**

### **Preparation**

Before the group gathers, each member (including the applicant) should prepare as follows:

*Make notes: Why might it be important for a deacon to be not only open to learning, but relish it?*

### **When the group gathers:**

1. Prayer and connecting time: A member offers prayer. Read together Proverbs 8.22-31. Share the name of a favourite teacher at school, and how they inspired you.
2. Activity: Explore some or all with the applicant:
  - Who (besides the person you have mentioned) have been your most important teachers in life? Who were they and what did you learn from each?



- What life events have taught you the most important lessons or have opened you to the most important learning in your life?
  - What bible story has taught something very important in your life? What did you learn?
  - What book, movie, saint, theologian or artist (etc.) has been your teacher? What did you learn?
  - What situations or people make it difficult for you to learn?
  - What do you want to learn about in the future?
3. Group members go around the circle and share with applicant what they have learned in this session about the applicant and this criterion. Applicant then repeats back what they have heard from the group.
  4. End with any comments about the next meeting, and with prayer.

### **Session Nine: Discussion (held without the applicant)**

#### **Preparation**

Before the group gathers, each member should prepare as follows:

*Read through the Criteria for Ordination to the Diaconate again, as well as your notes. Review the questions that will be asked of the discernment group in its final report (See Appendix D6). Make notes about the following:*

- *What are the criteria or other areas in which I experience the applicant's gifts and strengths?*
- *What vulnerabilities and areas do I believe the applicant needs to continue to work on?*
- *Given my experience of the applicant in the parish and my/our experience of the applicant in the group, can I envisage this person as a deacon?*

#### **When the group gathers:**

1. Prayer and connecting exercise: Pray the following collect together:

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light,  
 look favourably on your whole Church,  
 that wonderful and sacred mystery.  
 By the effectual working of your providence,  
 carry out in tranquillity the plan of salvation.  
 Let the whole world see and know  
 that thing which were cast down are being raised up,  
 and things which had grown old are being made new,  
 and that all things are being brought to their perfection  
 by him through whom all things were made,  
 your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In light of your work together as a diaconal discernment group, choose one phrase of this prayer that particularly strikes you, and share your reasons why with the group.

2. Activity: Go around the circle and share:
  - perceived strengths and gifts of the applicant
  - perceived vulnerabilities and areas that the applicant needs to continue to work on
  - group members' sense of whether the applicant could be a priest or deacon
3. It may be desirable to take a short break at this time.

4. The group (reconvenes and) discusses what they have shared, and decides whether or not they are affirming the call of the applicant, and recommending that the applicant continue to the next phase of the process (normally, attendance at a diocesan discernment conference and designation as a postulant.) The group must state their decision clearly, choosing one of the following three options, and stating their reasons.
  - Yes
  - No
  - Not at this time
5. Group decides who will draft the report (using Appendix D6) and how it will be distributed for comment and finalized.
6. End with any comments concerning next steps. Regardless of the outcome of the group's deliberations, it may be desirable to convene one last time to debrief and express gratitude.

### **Next Steps: Sharing the Report with the Applicant**

The convener of the group shares the report with the clergy leader *before* it is shared with the applicant, in order to clarify next steps.

#### **If the recommendation is “Yes”:**

- a. The convener and the clergy leader share the report with the applicant.
- b. The report is signed and sent to the bishop and director of deacons.
- c. The group and the applicant meet to debrief as outlined below.

#### **If the recommendation is “Not at this time”:**

- a. The convener meets with the clergy leader and director of deacons to clarify the steps recommended before the applicant would be eligible to re-apply.
- b. The convener and clergy leader share the report with the applicant. (The director of deacons may attend at the discretion of the convener and clergy leader.)
- c. The report is signed and sent to the bishop and director of deacons.
- d. The group and the applicant meet to debrief as outlined below. The applicant or the group may choose to have the clergy leader present.

#### **If the recommendation is “No”:**

- a. The convener meets with the clergy leader and the director of deacons to clarify what pastoral care and supports may be needed by the applicant.
- b. The convener, clergy leader and the director of deacons share the report with the applicant.
- c. The report is signed and sent to the bishop and director of deacons.
- d. The applicant is offered an opportunity to meet with the group as outlined below in order to debrief. The applicant or the group may choose to have the clergy leader present.

#### **When the group gathers:**

1. Prayer and connecting exercise: Read together Psalm 98. Share one moment of joy you have experienced in the group's work together.
2. Distribute copies of the report. Group members take turns reading each section aloud.

3. Applicant asks any questions they might have about the report.
4. Discussion of any specific sections of the report and discussion of next steps.
  - If “yes,” what is the next step?
  - If “not at this time,” what is the recommended next step?
  - If “no,” what is the next step?
5. Group members reflect together on their experience of the group:
  - What was energizing or uplifting?
  - What was more of a struggle?
  - What new insights were gained?
6. Close with prayer for the applicant and for all the members of the group.