

# Discernment for Ministry



## Congregational Discernment Team Curriculum 2024

The Episcopal Church in Southeast Florida

## **Congregational Discernment Team (CDT) Curriculum**

The phases of the congregational discernment process are set out here in detail. Please note that this schedule is set out in “phases” rather than in “sessions.” A phase may take more than one session to work through appropriately, and each phase must be given the time that it needs. This schedule must be followed closely, as the report that is expected at the end of the discernment requires reflection on the work that is outlined here.

Each phase’s curriculum is preceded by notes and reflections from the Commission on Ministry (COM) that are meant to help frame the work to be undertaken.

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## Phase One: Organizational Meeting and Introductions

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.*<sup>1</sup>

You have been challenged to engage in a holy task. A member of the community of faith has expressed a desire to explore further the service of God and God's work in the world. This is a precious gift laid before God and the Church and needs to be honored throughout the work of the discernment process.

Does the seeker, in fact, have a call from God? Absolutely. We are all called by God in baptism, and God has challenges for all of us throughout our lives. The discernment team is not asked to discern *if* there is a call, but what *how that call might be lived out*. The seeker is asked to explore that call, not as a matter of private reflection or revelation, but in and for the community. The manner in which the call may be lived out, whatever it may be, is never an insight given only to one person; it is a shared realization.

All too often, both seeker and the Church assume that a call to ministry implies a call to ordained ministry. Such an assumption puts pressure on a discernment team to say "Yes" to a particular understanding of that call. This curriculum instead assumes a) that most seekers are in fact called to a deeper commitment as lay persons in the Church; and b) that any further discernment is an open-ended process that is not determined at the beginning. Both seeker and team begin with the assumption that every baptized person has a vocation to a unique and important ministry in the Church and in the world. If one assumes at the outset that the goal of the process is to discern a call to ordained ministry, then if another vocation emerges from the process, both seeker and team might hear that answer as "No" to ordination rather than as "Yes" to a different ministry. The end of all proper discernment is always a Yes.

More authentically the seeker may enter the discernment process for a variety of reasons. He or she may be seeking the affirmation of the Church that his or her life as a layperson and his or her vocation as a baptized person in the world is itself holy. The seeker may have arrived at a point of transition in life and seek the help of the Church in finding a new direction. Or the seeker may have reached a point where ministries in the Church that once provided deep satisfaction no longer do so, and he or she seeks to find refreshment in the ministries in which he or she is engaged in her congregation. A person can approach the discernment process for many reasons. And, of course, it is possible that God may be nudging the seeker toward ordained ministry. Both seeker and discernment team need to attend to all possibilities.

Done faithfully, there is an intimacy that develops in the discernment process. The discernment team is asked to learn about the seeker at deep levels and assist him or her in matters that can be life changing. For this reason, confidentiality is of utmost importance throughout the process.

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<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:1.

If the discernment team is to help the seeker hear the voice of God, the seeker will need to share some of this vulnerability before God with the team as well. The team therefore needs to be scrupulous in protecting private information. Unless a matter rises to the level of triggering legally-mandated reporting, the team must honor all confidences. If a matter does rise to the level of legally-mandated reporting, the team should seek the counsel of the priest.

In addition, discernment teams should remember the following:

- 1) The discernment team is not constituted or professionally qualified to engage in counselling. If the conversation begins to become therapeutic, this is best handed over to persons with appropriate professional qualifications.
- 2) The discernment process is not simply evaluating the present fitness of the seeker for a particular ministry. The team should remain open to God's Spirit and to what that person might become. This is especially important when working with a younger seeker who may have gaps in experience and training.
- 3) The team should be clear that ordination (should this topic arise) is not a reward for devoted lay service, nor does ordination resolve crises of faith; it is far more likely to produce them. Ordination is also not a way of "paying back" God for answered prayer and it is certainly not a penance for sin.
- 4) The work of the discernment team should always be grounded in love, which is not "affection," but a commitment to another's well-being. We are all imperfect creatures, but as Christians we are called to tap into the love that God has for all of humanity.
- 5) It may be tempting, given the practical challenges to assembling the discernment team and arranging meetings, to accelerate or condense the process. A discernment process may take more than the prescribed number of meetings, but for the sake of thoughtful reflection and to allow time for prayer, it is not allowed to take fewer. Some phases outlined below may take two meetings to complete properly.
- 6) If at any time the discernment team feels that the process needs to be completed early and the team dissolved prior to a formal outcome, you should feel free to do so. That is not a failure of the process; that is simply the process working itself out in a particular way. In such a case, we recommend that the team make a report, either written or verbal, to the priest of the community.
- 7) While inevitably members of the discernment team will find this work personally enriching, the team should not lose its focus on the one being presented for discernment.

Thank you for being willing to serve in this manner.

## PHASE ONE CURRICULUM

### Goals

- 1) Everyone will be introduced to the concept and process of discernment
- 2) Members of the group will begin to know one another more in-depth

### Objectives

- 1) Prayer
- 2) Go over the ground rules and the process
- 3) Exercises for developing relationships

### Outline

#### Opening Prayers:

- The Lord's Prayer
- The first Collect for Mission (BCP p. 100) *Almighty and everlasting God, by whose spirit...*

#### Greetings and personal introductions

- Each member should share their name, home congregation, and relationship to the seeker.

#### Bible Reflection

- 1 Samuel 3
  - How did Samuel experience God's call?
  - What was Eli's response to Samuel's call?
  - Why do you think God chose this method to call Samuel?

#### Reviewing the Process

- Representatives from the Commission on Ministry will explain the discernment process and emphasize the issues of openness, prayerfulness, and confidentiality. They outline the various phases the process, and take the team and seeker through the Prayer Model for the discernment phases. They will answer questions posed by the members of the discernment team and the seeker. They will explain the holiness of the process and give thanks for the individual seeking discernment.
- Once all the technical matters of the work of the team are explained and settled and questions are answered, the members of the COM will leave the seeker and the team to begin their work together.

#### Developing a Spiritual Autobiography

- The seeker begins with a reflection on a passage of the Scripture of the seeker's choice and why this passage is important. This shared Bible reflection will then move into an overview of his or her life in Christ (sometimes called a "spiritual autobiography") and the seeker will explain why he or she has requested a discernment process or accepted the suggestion of the priest to be in the process.
- This exercise provides insight into the seeker's personality, strengths, and weaknesses and ought to include four or five significant life experiences that have helped shape his or her present identity and life direction. The congregational discernment team should become sensitive to the following characteristics in the seeker:
  - An articulate Christian faith
  - Communication skills
  - Ability to relate to others
  - Personal integrity and self-esteem
  - Physical health and energy
  - Intellectual gifts and strengths
  - Self-awareness of own strengths and weaknesses
- Members of the team are invited to verbally share briefly their own spiritual experiences and Biblical texts that have shaped their faith journey.

#### Review assignments in preparation for Phase 2

- Designate a facilitator, a scribe, and a timekeeper for the group. Members of the team may also keep their own notes, but it is important for the scribe to keep sufficiently clear and complete notes for the purpose of the report that is due at the end of this discernment.

#### Closing Prayers:

- The Collect for the Diocese (BCP p. 817)
- The Grace (BCP p. 102) *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...*

### **Assignments in preparation for Phase Two**

- Read the sections “The Church” and “The Ministry” in “An Outline of the Faith, or Catechism” in the Book of Common Prayer (pp. 854-856).
- Read the following passages of Scripture, reflecting on God’s mission as described in these passages.
  - Isaiah 42:1-4
  - Isaiah 61:1-4
  - Matthew 25:31-46
  - Mark 10:41-44
  - Luke 4:16-21
  - John 17:20-24
  - Acts 1:8
  - 2 Corinthians 5:14-21
- Drawing from the discussion of his or her spiritual journey, the seeker should broadly outline his or her spiritual autobiography.

## **Phase Two: God’s Mission – the Mission of the Church**

In Phase 2 we explore how the Church exists in the fulness of God’s creation. We all know that the word “church” means different things in different contexts. It is nice to say that a church is not a building, but if someone asks for directions to Saint Swithin’s-in-the-Swamp, it is clear that they are looking for a building, not a group of people. The word “church” can obviously mean a building, but it might also mean a specific congregation, a diocese, a denomination, or Christianity as a whole.

For this phase, the seeker and discernment team will explore the nature of the Church and its mission in the world. This is a vital question in an age when more and more people describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious.” Why does the Church exist? Why do we not each go about our lives as Christians simply believing in God or Christ and expressing our faith as we each feel moved? This is an especially important question in our virtual age, when people can “go to church” online.

As Episcopalians, we see draw wisdom from the famous “three-legged stool” of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. For Scripture, there will be specific passages from the Bible that talk about how God works with the human race. For Tradition, we will look at the teachings found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Finally, for Reason, we will draw on theological reflection as well as from our own experiences and the lessons that they have taught us.

The questions contained here about the nature of the Church and its mission are not intended as an academic exercise. The seeker and the discernment team are not tasked to produce a particular correct answer. Rather, you are asked to engage in holy conversation and reflection about a topic of profound significance.

## PHASE TWO CURRICULUM

### Goals

- 1) Reflect on the nature of God's mission in the world

### Objectives

- 1) Prayer
- 2) Bible study
- 3) Discuss the questions in the Catechism on "The Church" (BCP pp. 854-855)

### Outline

#### Opening Prayers:

- The Lord's Prayer
- Collect 16 "For the Mission of the Church" (BCP p. 257)

#### Bible Reflection (different people read aloud):

- Isaiah 42:1-4
- Isaiah 61:1-4
- Matthew 25:31-46
- Mark 10:41-44
- Luke 4:16-21
- John 17:20-24
- Acts 1:8
- 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

As people reflect on these passages, use the following questions to help guide your reflection:

- What recurring themes do you see?
- What does God do to achieve God's mission?
- How are human beings invited to participate in God's mission?
- What is the role of the Church in God's mission?
- Where have you seen this understanding of God's mission in your own experience of the life of the Church?
- *"The Church does not have a mission. God's mission has a Church."*
  - What do you understand this statement to mean in light of these passages of Scripture?

Read and discuss the Catechism questions on “The Church” (BCP pp 854-5), especially the last three questions.

- How does your congregation proclaim the Gospel?
- If the Church is to be about restoring right relationship, our very purpose for existence presumes a current state of broken relationships. Name some examples of brokenness you currently see. What are some factors that inhibit people living in right relationship with God? With our neighbor?
- How do you see your present faith community participating in God’s mission, working for reconciliation of people with God and with one another? How is this seen in the worship of the congregation? What is the congregation doing to promote justice, peace, and love?

Frederick Buechner defines vocation as that intersection “where our deepest gladness meets the world’s deepest need.”

- Take some time to name some of the gifts/resources/passions of your current congregation and identify some needs in your community. Where do you already see engagement as well as future possibilities for intersection?
- How does the seeker see him- or herself within the context of this mission, both in general and in detail?
- What possibilities could you imagine in the future? What are members expected to do? How are those expectations articulated/communicated?

Review assignments for Phase 3

Closing Prayers:

- Collect for Mission BCP p. 100 *O God, you have made of one blood all the nations of the earth...*
- The Grace (BCP p. 102) *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...*

### **Assignments in preparation for Phase 3**

- Read the Baptismal Covenant (BCP, pp. 304-305)
- Read the following passages of Scripture:
  - Matthew 25:31-46
  - Matthew 28:16-20
  - Mark 10:41-44
  - John 17:20-26
  - Acts 2:43-47
  - Acts 4:32-35
  - Luke 4:16-20
  - Philippians 2:5-11
- The seeker should begin writing his or her spiritual autobiography from the outline produced in the previous phase. See Form COM-3 for instructions.

## Phase Three: Being Christian

What does it mean to be a Christian?

*...and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called "Christians."*<sup>2</sup>

The word "Christian" probably began as a dismissive slur; the word means "little Christ." The Church quickly embraced the term and we now consider it an honorable label.

In the Episcopal tradition, we believe that we become Christians when we are baptized. In baptism, we believe that "God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God."<sup>3</sup> We express our understanding of what it means to be a Christian in our Baptismal Covenant. That Covenant defines our understanding in this way:

- We embrace the historic definition of belief found in the Apostle's Creed.
- We promise to gather together, study the Scriptures together, pray together, and celebrate the Eucharist together.
- We denounce the forces of evil and call ourselves to lives of repentance.
- We say that we will "proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ."
- We commit ourselves to love our neighbors as ourselves.
- We commit ourselves to promote justice among all peoples.

In the previous section, we identified the mission of the universal Church as *working with God to redeem the world*. The Church is not simply the number of "the saved;" it is the Body of Christ, and as such, one of the instruments which God uses to re-make the world. We believe that God acts in the world through the whole body of the Church, of which each denomination and congregation is a member, so that the values of the Kingdom of God may be lived now.

We believe that God can use us both in our strengths and in our weaknesses. There is no single model of what it means to be a Christian. In his Letters, Saint Paul frequently compares the Church to a single body which has different parts and different functions:<sup>4</sup> *the eye is not the hand and the hand is not the foot*. Each performs a vital function, and though the body can survive the loss of an eye or a foot or a hand, it is diminished when it is not complete.

Being a Christian means participating in the Body of Christ, through which God is working out Christ's redemptive mission in the world. In baptism, each Christian accepts the vocation as a member of the Church to proclaim and enact God's Good News. We are each expected to do this in ways that are authentic, loving, and true to the person God has made us. It is the work of the

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 11:26.

<sup>3</sup> BCP p. 858.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. 12; I Cor. 12; Eph. 4.

Holy Spirit to raise up believers throughout the world who can speak God's truth in ways appropriate to different people and cultures.

We are not the same, but there many things which are expected of all Christians. The Baptismal Covenant gives us a picture of what should be true of all believers.

- We must know about our faith, at least in a basic way, so that we have something to share with people. *“Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you...”*<sup>5</sup>
- We must be a people united in love. The world is hungry for true community. *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*<sup>6</sup>
- We must be a prayerful people. It is in prayer that we spend time with God. Prayer is not just about asking for things. In addition to making requests for ourselves and others, we need to praise the God who made us and spend time simply conscious of and abiding in God's presence. *“...pray without ceasing...”*<sup>7</sup>
- We must be good people. The message of Christ will be judged, whether we like it or not, by the behavior of those who call themselves Christians. We cannot save the world if we ourselves are in slavery to sin and evil. We need to set good examples and refuse to give the world an excuse to ignore our message because of our failings. *“...be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.”*<sup>8</sup>
- As Christians, we are called to testify to God's saving action in our own lives. The world craves authenticity, not a polished speech that is focus-group approved. *“But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?”*<sup>9</sup>
- Christians must love all people, especially the least lovable. How can we save a world that we hate? *“And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you.”*<sup>10</sup> We also have a great testament to the truth that love is not primarily a feeling, but an act of the will. Love *acts*, and in Saint Paul's great “hymn to love,” we never hear about how love *feels*; we only hear about what love *does*.<sup>11</sup>
- Christians must strive for justice. The message of Christ is not simply about where people go when they die; we are not some religious version of fire insurance salespeople. We are to strive for peace and justice in a world that often seems entirely uninterested in such things. We are to live by the standards of the Kingdom of God even in this life, and help

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<sup>5</sup> I Pet. 3:15.

<sup>6</sup> Jn 13:35.

<sup>7</sup> I Thess. 5:17.

<sup>8</sup> Phil. 2:15.

<sup>9</sup> Rom. 10:14.

<sup>10</sup> I Thess. 3:12.

<sup>11</sup> I Cor. 13. Read this passage carefully, and you will see that it is all about what love *does*.

shape human society in that pattern. *“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”*<sup>12</sup>

- If we are at all honest with ourselves, we shall realize that the preceding list is daunting. In truth, there are people that we find impossible to love. In truth, there are injustices that we would allow to endure since they benefit us. In truth, we do not want to proclaim the Good News because it is socially uncomfortable.
- Christians have no claim on perfection. Yet perfection has a claim on us. Weak and broken as we are, God wants to use our hands to help rebuild the world, and use our mouths to speak eternal truth.

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<sup>12</sup> Micah 6:8.

## PHASE THREE CURRICULUM

### Goals

Come to a group understanding of what it means to be Christian, living our Baptismal Covenant.

### Objectives

- 1) Prayer
- 2) Bible Reflection
- 3) Review the Baptismal Covenant

### Outline

Opening Prayers:

- The Lord's Prayer
- Collect 7, "For All Baptized Christians" BCP p. 252

Bible Reflection: considering the question, "How do Christians participate in God's mission?"

- Matthew 25:31-46
- Matthew 28:16-20
- Mark 10:41-44
- John 17:20-26
- Acts 2:43-47
- Acts 4:32-35
- Luke 4:16-20
- Philippians 2:5-11

Be prepared to discuss God's mission as reflected in these passages, using these questions as starting points:

- For whom are we acting?
- Can we evaluate our effectiveness?
  - If the answer is No, why is this so? Can we change?
  - If the answer is Yes, how does our most recent action propel us to future action?
- What is the learning here about the Spirit and the work of active service to others in the name of Christ?
- Do you believe attitude and action are intimately related? Why or why not?
- "Actions emerge from the way a person's spirit has been formed." Discuss.
- "Spiritual formation results from action." Discuss.

Review the Baptismal Covenant, BCP pp. 304-305.

- A “mini” catechism used at baptisms, at Easter, and other special occasions, the Baptismal Covenant opens with a question-and-answer version of the Statement of Faith that is the Apostle’s Creed and adds five questions regarding how we, as Christians, are called to live out our faith.
  - How do we honor our baptismal vows in our own present situation of life and work?
  - How can we be more open to Christ's presence with us?
  - Are there areas in our life where it is easier to be faithful? Are there areas where we struggle to be faithful?
  - How has your faith changed and grown during your spiritual journey?

Closing Prayers:

- Collect 10, “At Baptism” BCP p. 254
- The Grace (BCP p. 102) *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...*

#### **Assignments in preparation for Phase 4**

- Scripture reading
  - Romans 12
  - 1 Corinthians 12
  - Ephesians 4:11-16
- The seeker should complete the Spiritual Gifts Inventory, Form COM-4 (This document is independent of the Forms document. Please bring copies of this assessment to the next phase.

## Phase Four: Exploration of Gifts for Ministry

*The gifts Christ 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...*<sup>13</sup>

From its very beginning, the Church has recognized that when persons are baptized, they are made part of the Body of Christ *and* given gifts by God through the Holy Spirit to participate actively with God and the Body of Christ in God's mission. Each member of the Body of Christ is given particular gifts, including the gift of call to ministry so that they are able to minister with and for and to the Body of Christ in the world.

While the announcement of the giving of gifts is given at baptism, the evidence of the gifts may be some time in emerging. Rarely are the gifts complete; most will need care, nurture, and practice to develop all the possibilities within them.

One of the responsibilities of the Church is to be constantly discerning the gifts which are possessed by, but may be hidden within, our members. While the baptized are responsible for developing their gifts, this is never a do-it-yourself project. All members of the Church should be able to expect pastoral oversight and care from the other members of the Church. This includes naming gifts that are observed, sharing in the joy of exploring how God might be encouraging gifts to be offered, and supporting persons as they seek to develop further and put their gifts at the service of the community.

Though some gifts seem to be primarily for offering within the Body (as, for example, preaching), there are many ministry gifts which may enhance the work of a congregation (for example, for a congregational ministry of tutoring local students, the gift of teaching math would enhance that ministry). Or gifts may be used in ministry outside the life of the congregation (for example, a person with strong leadership skills might volunteer on a local non-profit board, or serve as an elected or appointed public office).

To see everything done by the members of the Church as ministry and participation in God's mission is to see the world as God sees it and to claim the possibilities for mission that God offers the Church. This is the work of discernment and is the responsibility of all members of the Church.

Discerning the gifts of the baptized is not simply a congregational responsibility. There are gifts given for ministries beyond a particular congregation and both congregation and diocese are called to support one another in discerning and calling forth such gifts.

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<sup>13</sup> Eph. 4:11-12.

A word about age:

As we have noted, some of the gifts given a person may be hidden for a time, but there are always gifts — at any age — which are present and which the Church and the congregation may need. How will we learn how to enter the Kingdom if children and younger people are not encouraged to use their gifts to show us? Will we not become complacent in our understanding of our faith if not challenged by the gift of questions from children and teenagers? There are elementary-age children who are quite capable of reading in worship and leading prayers if properly taught. They are also capable of participating in congregational activities like gardening and cleaning up after storms. The more we look for the gifts of others and find imaginative ways to incorporate them in our common life, the more we learn to expect to find those gifts, and find them in unexpected and surprising forms.

Discerning gifts and call in the Life of the Congregation

*“The gifts Christ gave were...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.”<sup>14</sup>*

### *TITLE III MINISTRY*

#### *CANON 1: Of the Ministry of All Baptized Persons*

*Sec. 1. Each Diocese shall make provision for the affirmation and development of the ministry of all baptized persons, including:*

*(a) Assistance in understanding that all baptized persons are called to minister in Christ's name, to identify their gifts with the help of the Church and to serve Christ's mission at all times and in all places.*

*(b) Assistance in understanding that all baptized persons are called to sustain their ministries through commitment to life-long Christian formation.<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>14</sup> Eph. 4:11-13.

<sup>15</sup> *Constitution and Canons together with The Rules of Order* (2018), p. 99.

In baptism, as persons are incorporated as members of the body of Christ by the power of Holy Spirit, they are also given gifts by the Spirit. These gifts are different and particular for each person. But despite their difference, the gifts have a common purpose:

- They are for the work of ministry.
- They are for the building up of the Body of Christ.
- They are to promote the faith of Jesus Christ and the knowledge of Jesus.
- They are to ensure that each member, by sharing his or her gifts within the community of faith, assists his or her fellow Christians to grow to become as much like Christ as humanly possible.

True gifts of the Spirit are not private possessions, or indications of special status. They cannot be spoken about as though they are badges of pride. Most truly gifted people are reticent about their gifts, and these gifts are given to members *of* the community for use *for* and *by* the community. The term “community” in this sense can be understood both broadly and narrowly. In order for the congregation to engage in its mission to their larger community, the congregation must receive the benefit of particular gifts within their fellowship to tap into particular gifts outside their fellowship. The gifts of a teacher may be called forth within the congregation to teach members and/or they may be called forth by the congregation to teach residents of the surrounding community who are not in relationship with the congregation.

Obviously, for any of this to happen, gifts must be named and claimed by the persons to whom they are given - named, claimed, and freely shared. The fact that gifts are as different as members are different increases the challenge of identifying them. The purpose of discernment is to assist members to discover their gifts and then call for the sharing of those gifts.

Additionally, as gifts are identified and called forth within a congregation, the congregation will begin to get a sense of what God is calling them to be and do as the Body of Christ in their particular situation. The intersection of the needs of the larger community and the gifts of the faith community must be seriously examined to find out what God is calling forth from the congregation, because another gift that God gives is the gift of mission, the invitation to join God in fulfilling God’s mission in the world. To fail to name a gift of the Spirit is to miss the opportunity and joy of putting that gift to God’s service in God’s mission of redemption and restoration.

In like manner, as congregations become more aware of their collective gifts of and for ministry, the diocese knows better the ways in which God is leading the regional Body of Christ into mission and ministry.

## PHASE FOUR CURRICULUM

*Before this session, the seeker is to complete the Spiritual Gifts Inventory Form COM-4.*

### Goals

- 1) To name the gifts of the Spirit
- 2) To name gifts of the team members
- 3) To explore the seeker's spiritual gifts inventory and be prepared to have a conversation about what you are learning

### Objectives

- 1) Prayer
- 2) Bible Reflection
- 3) Mutual reflection on gifts

### Outline

Opening Prayers:

- The Lord's Prayer
- Collect 14 "For the Unity of the Church" (BCP p. 255)

Bible Reflection

- Romans 12
- 1 Corinthians 12
- Ephesians 4:11-16

List the gifts evident in these passages of Scripture.

Look at the lists and compare them.

- How are they the same?
- How do they differ?
- What does each passage give as the purpose or reason for giving the gifts?
- Are there gifts that belong to a particular group or order in the Church?

Discussion questions

- Where do you see these biblical gifts expressed in your congregation?
- Where have you experienced the discovery of unexpected gifts?
- What gifts have others seen in you that you did not see in yourself?
- How were they revealed?

- Describe gifts seen in members of the discernment team and in the seeker
- What gifts are given for ministry beyond your local congregation?
- What gifts do you think that the Episcopal Church need in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- Are there gifts which are not being identified in your local congregation?

Take some time to share results and responses of the Spiritual Gifts Inventory.

- Are members using their gifts in their respective vocations? Remember, ministry is not limited to what happens in church - it's our whole lives.
- What new possibilities for ministry might this inventory open up for you?
- What limits your exercise of these gifts?
- What is the purpose of our gifts and talents? Whom do they serve?
- What are your primary gifts and how have they been manifested?
- How does the seeker view his or her strengths and weaknesses?
- How does the seeker cope with failure to live up to his/her sense of call?
- How does the seeker's work experience contribute to his/her sense of call?

Closing Prayers:

- Collect 11, "At Confirmation" BCP p. 254
- The Grace (BCP p. 102) *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...*

#### **Assignments in preparation for Phase 5**

- Read Acts 9:1-20 and 13:1-4
- The seeker should complete his or her written Spiritual Autobiography and send it to every team member at least one week before the next phase.
- Each team member should carefully read the seeker's Spiritual Autobiography.

## Phase Five: Discernment

### Discernment – The Call

*“But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed. And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘Beautiful are the feet of those who bring Good News.’ ”<sup>16</sup>*

A proper understanding of call is essential to all ministry in the Church. All members of Christ’s Body are called and sent in baptism – as we hear at the end of every Eucharist, when the celebrant or deacon instructs us *Go in peace to love and serve the Lord*. All have received the Great Commission.<sup>17</sup> In becoming members of the Body of Christ in baptism all are grafted into the covenant through the promises. We would not be making those promises had we not been called and responded in baptism, or if, baptized as a child, in our renewal in the sacrament of confirmation. Discernment is that ongoing process whereby we attempt to determine how we will respond to this fundamental vocation to the baptized life.

- Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?
- Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
- Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
- Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect with dignity every human being?

And the response, “I will, with God’s help.”

So all are called and sent in baptism to “proclaim by word and example,” and perhaps “I will, with God’s help” is nowhere better expressed than in the BCP Collect for the Second Sunday of Easter:<sup>18</sup>

*Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ’s Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*

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<sup>16</sup> Rom. 10:14-15.

<sup>17</sup> Mt. 28:19-20.

<sup>18</sup> BCP p. 224.

All are called, all are sent, but some are assigned or commissioned to particular ministries. In the Scriptures, we see that often the call is received from God, mostly in an intimate way. The recipients of the call are chosen by God, not the reverse. They are often not the people we might expect to be receiving a call, they are often reluctant recipients, and profess their inadequacy. But they are equipped by God to fulfill their call, even in their reluctance.

One reflects on Abraham, an old man with a barren wife who received and accepted the call to journey to the Promised Land. Moses, an exile who fled from Pharaoh and his own people and a refugee, tells God at the burning bush that he is not a good speaker, but he went to Pharaoh and the Hebrews to proclaim God's Word and to lead. Jonah, fleeing to the sea to dodge his call to go to Nineveh, at last preached to them and saved a city and a people. David, the youngest son, was called from the sheepfold to be King of Israel. Jeremiah, saying to God that he is too young to be a prophet, fearlessly proclaimed to Kings and to the people. They are not self-appointed, and at some point all were affirmed in the call, one way or another. They sense and respond to a call, they are equipped by God, and in their response they go, they proclaim, and they act, and, through their proclamation and actions they are received and heeded by those to whom they are sent.

In 1 Peter we read, "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."<sup>19</sup> From this comes our understanding of "the priesthood of all believers," an affirmation of what we have been saying that all the baptized have been given the capacity to represent Christ to the world, and bring the world to God in prayer.

But Saint Paul also tells us of the grace through which we are each granted and empowered to exercise various gifts to carry out the ministries to which each of us is called.<sup>20</sup> The purpose of the gifts and the ministries through which these gifts are offered is to build up the Church, the Body of Christ. These gifts range from leadership, pastoral care to the flock, liturgical service, prophetic works and action, preaching, teaching, as well as active life in the wider community and quiet participation in prayer and worship from the pews or at home.

Discernment then is the process by which all believers seek to understand the calling and the gifts of each member of the Body of Christ. Discernment is not limited to those who are seeking affirmation of a call to ordained ministry. Discernment is a process which all should understand, all should undertake, and which some may choose to undergo in a formal process like the one outlined in this curriculum. Discernment is an ongoing process for each member of the Body of Christ.

Discernment is, however, not limited to persons. It is also the task of groups – congregations, Vestries, dioceses, faith communities, religious orders, and groups within the Church. All of the

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<sup>19</sup> 1 Pet. 2:9.

<sup>20</sup> See for example Rom 12 and 1 Cor. 12.

parts of the Body need to be in a continuing process of discerning and re-discerning our place in God's mission and the gifts that have been given to respond to that call.

### **How do we discern calls to ministry?**

We understand, through the catechism, that the mission of the Church is to “restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ;” that the Church pursues this mission “as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love;” and that, further, the mission is carried out “through the ministry of all its members.”<sup>21</sup>

So it is clear that not only are all Christians called to exercise the common vocation given to them by God in baptism to carry out the mission of the Church; it is also clear that all of us have a duty to be in a lifelong process of discernment to determine how we shall live out this vocation. In addition, the baptism and confirmation vows found in the Book of Common Prayer require that a place of support will be given to those who have chosen to offer their lives in Christ.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the community is called into responsibility for the nurturing of each person.

While an individual may discern a call to ministry in any number of ways, any discernment process must consist of three active participants: the individual, the Church, and the Holy Spirit. An invitation to a new mode of Christian living, perhaps including Holy Orders, can begin either with the community or with the person. The work of discernment, however, is ultimately to determine, within the scope of human weakness and limitation, where God is leading at this particular point in life. Discernment is not a means to an end; rather, it is the ongoing pathway to discover the next step that God desires for the person, the community, and the Church.<sup>23</sup> The emerging discernment must make sense not simply to the individual in discernment, but also to the Church. However strongly an individual may feel about taking on a particular role or responsibility in the life of the Church, if it is not clear also to the Church that this is the best direction, then it is not a call.

In our baptismal vows, we promise to renounce evil, to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, and to love our neighbors as ourselves by striving for justice and peace among all people and by respecting the dignity of every human being. All this, we believe, is only possible through the work and grace of the Holy and Undivided Trinity. Our vows constitute a covenant between the people who make them and God, and this covenant is made as a community of the One Body. To enter into such a covenant is transformational, for these vows direct all our actions, our hearts, and our minds toward God. We are "transformed by the renewing of [our] mind."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> BCP p. 855.

<sup>22</sup> BCP p. 303.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Suzanne G. Farnham, Joseph P. Gill, R. Taylor McLean, Susan M. Ward, *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community* Revised edition (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing 2002), pp. 23 ff.

<sup>24</sup> Rom. 12:2.

As we intentionally love one another as Christ loves us, we are knitted together as a community of God and as a result, each part within that community works properly, promoting the growth of the whole. Relationship with God and with community is necessary to discern God's call properly. God calls persons, congregations, communities and the Church continually to discern their call to mission. Discernment must be entered into with humility, care, and authenticity by all involved.

The community has special responsibilities to those seeking formal discernment. "...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 knitted 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."<sup>25</sup>

We are called into community as one body with many members.<sup>26</sup> Our gifts from God are many. The community is made up of particular members with particular gifts. Some are called as apostles, some as prophets, and some as teachers. Some have gifts of leadership and/or gifts of mentoring/assistance.<sup>27</sup>

As all have gifts given by God, it is important to understand that God "activates all of them in everyone."<sup>28</sup> These develop more fully as Christians live in relationship with God and with one another. In those relationships, a rootedness develops in a process of growth that comes from an integration of "desires, feelings, reactions and choices with a continuing commitment to abide in Christ."<sup>29</sup>

It is the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that calls individuals to specific roles and responsibilities, and it is the Church that authorizes all such ministries. Ultimately ministry in the Church is carried out under the bishop's oversight and with the bishop's specific authorization. Much of the responsibility for this is delegated to congregational clergy, but in the end it is the bishop who is responsible for all authorization.

We discern calls to ministry by being restored to unity with one another and God, through the prayer and worship, by proclaiming the Gospel, and by promoting justice, peace, and love as the one body of Christ. "The genuine call of any person in a Christian community is rightly the concern of all – and a shared responsibility."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Eph. 4:16.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Cor.12.

<sup>27</sup> See Eph. 4.

<sup>28</sup> 1 Cor. 12.

<sup>29</sup> Suzanne G. Farnham, Joseph P. Gill, R. Taylor McLean, Susan M. Ward *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community* Revised edition (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing 2002), p. 25.

<sup>30</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 74.

## PHASE FIVE CURRICULUM

### Goals

To understand the seeker's journey with Christ.

### Objectives

- 1) Prayer
- 2) Bible Reflection
- 3) Discussion of the seeker's spiritual autobiography

### Outline

Opening Prayers:

- The Lord's Prayer
- Collect for Guidance, BCP p. 100

Bible Reflection

- Read Acts 9:1-20 and reflect together on the following questions:
  - Saul and Ananias react very differently to the voice/presence of Jesus. Why?
  - What is Ananias called to do?
  - How is Ananias equipped to receive Saul?
- Now read Acts 13:1-4 and reflect on the following questions:
  - What is the significance of Paul and Barnabas being commissioned and sent forth by the Church in Damascus and not by the Apostles in Jerusalem?
  - What is significant about the fact that the Holy Spirit did not specify the work to which she was calling Paul and Barnabas?
  - What is the role of the community in these two passages?

General Discussion of the seeker's spiritual autobiography

- What are the significant features of the seeker's call?
- What signs are there of a call?
- How has a call been experienced?
- How does the seeker perceive this?
- How do others perceive this?
- Does the seeker sense a call, at this point, to a particular ministry?

Closing Prayers:

- Collect 58, for Guidance, BCP p. 832.

- The Grace (BCP p. 102) *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...*

**Assignments in preparation for phase 6**

- Read “The Ministry,” in the Catechism, BCP, pp 855-6.
- Read “Ordination Vows,” BCP, pp 511-55
- Scripture Reading
  - Acts 6:1-7
  - Acts 9:36-38
  - Romans 10:14-15
  - 1 Timothy 3:1-13
- Invite a priest and a deacon to join the next phase.

## Phase Six: One Body, Many Members

*For this Phase it will be important to invite a deacon and a priest to participate. The COM can recommend participants. You are welcome to invite your own priests and deacons to participate.*

What do “Laity,” “Bishop,” “Priest,” and “Deacon” mean?

The laity are the whole people of God, as a group, and without distinction. All the baptized, whatever they may do in the life of the community, are members of the *laos* – the laity. Over time we have come to refer to those who are not ordained as “the laity,” and while this is true, it is only partly true, since technically the ordained are still a part of the *laos*. We simply have no word for those members of the *laos* who are not ordained, and that is a theological problem, not least because it gives the impression that ministry is defined by ordination. And as we have said, this is never true; ministry is defined by baptism.

However, we are stuck with the distinction, as imperfect and misleading as it is, and we shall use it here for convenience. But we must not lose sight of the fact that there is a tension here.

The ministry of the laity is the ministry of all the baptized, which is to represent Christ and his Church by bearing witness to him wherever they may be. The baptized are able to do this according to the gifts given to them by God both personally and collectively. Exercising these gifts in all their God-given diversity, we carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world. The laity bring these diverse gifts, likewise, into the life, worship and governance of the Church.

The life of the Church in which the ministries of all the baptized are exercised alternates between gathering for worship, education, and fellowship and then dispersing into the world for service to others. Our rhythm is one of gathering and being dismissed; of being together and (often) being on our own as a living witness for Christ in the world. Together the laity gathers to deepen our knowledge of and commitment to the Baptismal Covenant. The laity disperses to share in the mission of the Church to restore and reconcile all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. We gather to bring the lives and concerns of the world to Christ’s altar. We disperse to witness to the transforming power of Christ.

The life of the Church is enriched by the diverse gifts for ministry that the Holy Spirit bestows on all the baptized. Some are called to various ministries within the life of the gathered Church in areas such as worship and education, hospitality and compassion, justice and peace, administration and facilities. All are called to be a Christian presence through their vocations in their families, their workplaces and their communities.

In summary, the ministries of the laity, of all baptized, are those of the whole Church, the Body of Christ, Christ’s continuing presence in our own world. We gather to be fed by Christ in Word

and sacrament. Empowered by the Holy Spirit we disperse to be God's fellow workers in the world so that it might be transformed into an ever greater approximation of the Kingdom of God.

Within the ministry of all the baptized are three distinct and equal orders. They exist to equip, animate and oversee diverse ministries within the Church. In the Episcopal Church those orders are bishops, priests and deacons. All three are authorized to represent Christ and the Church in their own distinct ways.

Bishops are called to represent Christ and the Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese. In their apostolic role, bishops proclaim the Word of God throughout the congregations and in their diocesan gathering. As chief priests of their diocese they preside at the Eucharist whenever they are present and especially as they administer the rite of confirmation. They gather the diocese in convention and the clergy in convocations to strengthen the mission of the Church. They represent their dioceses in their communities by acting in Christ's name for the reconciliation of the world. They are called to build up the Church by ordaining others to continue Christ's ministry. They are further called to guard the faith, unity and discipline of the Church, whether it be within their dioceses, the wider Church, or even in the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Priests are called to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as pastor to the people of their congregations. They do so by proclaiming the Gospel and administering the sacraments. On behalf of the priesthood of Christ in and through the whole Church, the priest offers to God the fruits of God's creation and human labor for God's purposes in reconciling the whole world to God and each other. God blesses those offerings by building up the members of the congregation as they receive their offering back, now becoming the Body and Blood of Christ. Through presiding at the Eucharist, the priest assists the Church to remain part of Christ's ongoing sacrifice offered for the life of the world. The priest also serves as a pastor, who acts as the steward of the congregation's common life and by providing pastoral care. In the life of the diocese the priests share with the bishop the overseeing of the Church.

The deacons represent Christ and his Church, particularly as servants of those in need. They bring the needs of the world to the attention of the Church and help organize, animate, and oversee the Church's response to those needs. Together with the bishop and the priests they share in the governance of the Church and in public worship. At all times they are called to show Christ's people that in serving those in need they are serving Christ himself.

## PHASE SIX CURRICULUM

### Goals

To identify and distinguish between the laity and the ordained by naming examples.

### Objectives

- 1) Prayer
- 2) Bible Reflection
- 3) Discuss Catechism section on “The Ministry,” BCP pp. 855-6
- 4) Discuss “Ordination Vows,” BCP pp 511-555

### Outline

Opening Prayers:

- The Lord’s Prayer
- Collect 15 III “For All Christians in their Vocation” (BCP p. 256)

Bible Reflection

- Acts 6:1-7
  - In Acts 6 we read about the formation of the diaconate. How did the Church discern the need for deacons? How were individuals selected for that office?
- Acts 9:36-38
  - Tabitha/Dorcas is not said to have had a formal “office,” but she obviously played an important role in her community. What was her role? And why was it important?
- Romans 10:14-15
  - In Romans we read of the need for preachers and evangelists. What does that passage have to say about the qualifications for preachers and evangelists?
- 1 Timothy 3:1-13
  - 1 Timothy describes the qualifications for bishops and deacons. What do these lists have in common? In what way are the roles different from each other?

General Discussion

- Having looked at questions and answers about the Ministry found in the Catechism (BCP, pp 855-6) and the Ordination Vows (BCP pp. 511-555), consider how the Episcopal Church has defined the duties and responsibilities of bishops, priests, and deacons. What are the common elements of their vows? In what ways do their roles differ (i.e., what can those in one order do that others cannot?).
- How do the seeker’s gifts seem to fit within the ministry of the Church?

### Sharing of the Priest and Deacon about their roles within the Church

- The priest and deacon who have been invited to this phase should spend some time sharing their own experience as ordained members of the Church. This conversation should include questions by the seeker as well as other team members.

### Closing Prayers:

- Collect 59 For Quiet Confidence, BCP. 832.
- The Grace (BCP p. 102) *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...*

### **Assignments in preparation for Phase 7**

- Read Philippians 2
- Invite a co-chair of the Commission on Ministry to join you for Phase 7.

## **Phase Seven: Where is the Spirit calling?**

After several months of working together, CDTs may find that they come to a point of clarity, sometimes explicit, sometimes unspoken. Members sense that there is a moment when either a deeper invitation has emerged, requiring relationships to grow deeper and more self-revealing, or team members begin to drop out mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and sometimes physically. The team may decide to recommit to this discernment and go deeper, or you may decide to end this discernment together.

To assist in this discernment, a member of the COM will join you for the first half of the Phase. Their role will be to facilitate a conversation about whether the Seeker is called to lay ministry or further discernment of ordained ministry. If the Team believes further discernment towards ordained ministry is appropriate, then the COM member will highlight and explain a few dynamics to consider moving forward. These will include:

- Time as an Episcopalian and time in the parish
- Timeline of discernment, formation, and ordination
- The Seeker's future relationship with the sponsoring parish
- Immersion in the life, language, liturgy, and history of the Episcopal identity
- Personal challenges facing the Seeker
- Costs and expectations moving forward borne between the Seeker and the Parish

After meeting with the COM member, team members will check in with each other, share any discoveries that need to be discussed with the seeker, and perhaps give a general impression of any group dynamics challenges or relational issues that the group has. The seeker can share how discernment is shaping his or her Christian life.

There should be clarity at this point about whether the Seeker is being called to lay ministry or further discernment towards holy orders.

For those called to lay ministry, this will be the conclusion of the Congregational Discernment Team. It will be necessary for the Seeker and the team to contact their priest so that a proper meeting can be had to express appreciation, offer prayers, and connect the Seeker with the necessary resources and people so that he or she can begin to do the work God has called them to do!

For those sensing a call to holy orders, there are a few more phases which will require the attention of the team. They should continue through the remainder of the curriculum, realizing that the final phases will entail a reporting section that should have careful attention. In addition to completing the curriculum, the member from the COM will most likely have specific recommendations for the Seeker to practice, often with aid of his or her priest.

## PHASE SEVEN CURRICULUM

### Goals

- 1) To meet with a member of the COM to discuss continued discernment to ordained ministry
- 2) To discuss any group dynamics or patterns that have emerged
- 3) To decide whether to continue the work of the CDT

### Objectives

- 1) Prayer
- 2) Bible Reflection
- 3) COM Member Discussion
- 4) Mutual reflection on the progress of the group

### Outline

#### Opening Prayers:

- The Lord's Prayer
- Collect 58 "For Guidance" (BCP p. 832)

#### Bible Reflection

- Philippians 2

#### COM Member Guided Conversation

#### Discussion questions

- How do we look out for the interest of others in the Church?
- What does it mean to "have the same mindset as Christ Jesus?"
- What is going on in the early Church?
  - How does the early Church compare with the modern one?
    - How is it similar?
    - How is it different?

Each person should speak during this next discussion, answering the following questions. Between each person, there should be a moment of silence so that the group is able to absorb what has been said. Once everyone has shared, then a discussion should ensue, but not before each person has shared.

- How has this CDT process enriched your own spiritual life?
- What are the best features that have developed within the team?

- What might be impeding or distracting the team from its work?
- Are there any dynamics that the group should discuss before moving forward?
- A discussion about the group dynamics should happen with mutual respect and forbearance.
- After a period of prayer, the seeker should share his or her desire about how to move forward with the CDT or not. Should the seeker discern that he or she does not need to move forward with the CDT process, a conversation should ensue that identifies how the seeker will be moving forward and how the Church might support him or her in his or her new or enhanced ministry. A meeting should be made with the priest for a proper farewell and as a way of connecting the Seeker with resources and people so that they might answer God's call.
- For those discerning a call to Holy Orders: Review assignment for Phase 8 (please see the notes for each of the next phases before scheduling them).

Closing Prayers:

- Collect 11, "At Confirmation" BCP p. 254
- The Grace (BCP p. 102) *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...*

**Assignments in preparation for Phase 8-A**

*The seeker's spouse or fiancé(e) is invited to participate in this phase. If the seeker does not have a spouse or fiancé(e), please skip this phase.*

- Read Matthew 10:5-16
- Invite the seeker's spouse, if her or she has one, to join the next session. If the seeker does not have a spouse, then please skip phase 8-A.

### **Assignments in preparation for Phase 8-B**

*This phase is only for those who have been ordained in another denomination or tradition. All other seekers may move on to Phase Nine.*

- Read the Scripture passages:
  - 1 Corinthians 1: 10-17
  - 1 Peter 1:22-25
  - Ezekiel 34:12-13

### **Assignments in preparation for Phase 9**

- Read Judges 6:11-40
- Review the previous material, including the Spiritual Gifts Inventory, Spiritual Autobiography, and any notes taken.

## **Phase Eight-A: Counting the Cost of Discipleship**

*The seeker's spouse or fiancé(e) is invited to participate in this phase. If the seeker does not have a spouse or fiancé(e), please skip this phase.*

The cost of ministry is often felt and paid beyond the individual minister. Sometimes that cost is felt most acutely in the home. This session is designed for the married or engaged couple to participate in a supportive conversation with the CDT about the weight of ministry and how best to support each other through it. This will be a time to ensure that each person in the marriage, the seeker and spouse, are able to openly share their expectations and questions. It is also a time when they may discuss boundaries of ministry, so that their marriage has the structure to sustain them both.

The role of the CDT is crucial here. The CDT is not to be a marriage therapist nor a family court judge. It will be important that the convener of this session remind the CDT that a group dynamic has formed among the CDT and that this will be the first experience the spouse has had within the group. Therefore, each member of the team should tread lightly and with grace. It is also important to realize that the seeker may have had significant conversations with his or her spouse about the process.

Overall, this session will be dictated by the comfort of the spouse to participate. The spouse should not be pressured to share overtly but rather invited to participate freely.

## PHASE EIGHT-A CURRICULUM

### Goals

To have an open discussion about both the blessing and the cost of ministry upon marriage.

### Objectives

- 1) Prayer
- 2) Bible Reflection
- 3) Supportive Discussion

### Outline

Opening Prayers:

- The Lord's Prayer
- Collect 45 For Families (BCP p. 828)

Bible Reflection: Matthew 10:5-16

- How are Christ's instructions to the twelve related to the cost of discipleship and taking up one's cross today?

General Discussion

- How can we differentiate "taking up your cross" and being a self-styled martyr (developing a martyr syndrome)? What are the differences in attitude?
- How does one sustain oneself for the marathon and not the sprint?
- How do the seeker's significant relationships (spouse/fiancé(e), children, others) fit into his or her sense of call?
- If following that call would impact another career in the household, what conversations have taken place?
- What are some boundaries that would aid in supporting the marriage in a ministry?
- Has there been any reflection on the potential personal and financial stresses?
- What does "radical generosity" look like within the relationship(s) of the home?

Closing Prayers:

- Collect Saint Mary the Virgin (BCP p. 243)
- The Grace (BCP p. 102) *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...*

### **Assignments in preparation for Phase 8-B**

- Read the Scripture passages:
  - 1 Corinthians 1: 10-17
  - 1 Peter 1:22-25
  - Ezekiel 34:12-13
  
- Phase 8-B is only for those who have been ordained in another denomination or tradition. All other seekers may move on to Phase Nine.

## **Phase Eight-B: Those Ordained in Other Denominations**

*This phase is only for those who have been ordained in another denomination or tradition. All other seekers may continue to Phase Nine.*

Those who have lived as ordained persons in another Church or denomination find themselves in a unique position within the Church. On the one hand, they have experienced leadership in ministry and have gained much experiential knowledge. On the other hand, they are new to the Episcopal Church and thus have much to learn and to which to acclimate themselves. In our diocese, those ordained from other denominations will have had to follow their previous denomination's procedures for becoming a lay person before being received or confirmed in our Church. By this point in their discernment, they will have already been in touch with the Bishop's Office and have received the Guidelines for Those Ordained in Other Churches. That document sets out their process, especially leading up to the work done in the CDT.

The purpose of this phase is to allow the seeker and the CDT to discuss some of the unique dynamics of his or her position. The hope is to be able to give the seeker an opportunity to reflect on his or her ministry in another denomination and for the CDT to give thanks, as appropriate, for their work in answering God's call during that season of their life. It is also for the CDT to spend some time discussing some unique characteristics of the Episcopal Church and our ordained ministry, paying particular attention to the differences between local parish customs and church-wide distinctions.

By this phase, the seeker will have spent significant time in the Episcopal Church and should be able to reflect on noted differences and similarities between denominations. He or she should also be able to share with some confidence why the Episcopal Church seems to be the right fit for their future life as a leader in the Episcopal Church.

Finally, great care should be taken when discussing the circumstances and rationale behind the departure of the seeker from his or her previous denomination. While this needs to be discussed in the CDT, this discussion is not to become a therapeutic session. The facilitator of the CDT should be particularly attuned to the sensitive nature of such a monumental life choice and the ensuing history up to this point. If the seeker or the facilitator feel it would be best, they should invite the priest to join for this phase.

There is no assumption that simply because the seeker has exercised ordained ministry in another Church or denomination that he or she will exercise ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church. There are no pre-determined outcomes and this is the same discernment as it is for those who have never previously been ordained.

## PHASE EIGHT-B CURRICULUM

### Goals

Discussing the history of leadership in another denomination and a future in the Episcopal Church

### Objectives

- 1) Prayer
- 2) Bible Reflection
- 3) Discussion

### Outline

Opening Prayers:

- The Lord's Prayer
- Prayer 14. "For the Unity of the Church" (BCP p. 818)

Bible Reflection

- 1 Corinthians 1: 10-17
- 1 Peter 1:22-25
- Ezekiel 34:12-13

Discussion

- Why is the Christian Church divided? How do the Scriptures seem to handle such divisions? What was the state of the early Church in terms of unity?
- What are the modern lines along which we divide and separate? Have those issues been resolved? Are there issues which threaten the unity of the Church?

The seeker should discuss his or her life in ministry within his or her previous denomination.

- What gifts were exercised in that context? What about that denomination made his or her gifts flourish? What about that denomination stifled his or her gifts?
- What type of church leader did he or she become? What was the role of the local community during that season of leadership for the seeker?

The seeker should discuss his or her impressions of the Episcopal Church up to this point.

- How is the Episcopal Church similar to his or her previous context? How is the Episcopal Church different? What are some of the best qualities of the Episcopal Church? Where are the areas of struggle for the seeker within the Episcopal Church?

- How does the seeker imagine his or her leadership specifically in an Episcopal context? How might the Episcopal Church nurture and grow his or her gifts? What challenges might arise around his or her gifts?

The CDT should share their own experiences of life in other denominations if there are any. Time can be spent comparing and contrasting different denominations and how they work together with the Episcopal Church or how they may be more distant.

The Seeker should share, as appropriate, the circumstances by which he or she left their previous denomination. Great care should be taken with this section as there are many pitfalls in which the CDT might fall undergoing such a delicate task.

The phase should conclude with members of the CDT affirming the seeker for the life and service he or she gave the Church universal, whatever the eventual outcome of this discernment may be.

#### Closing Prayer

- Prayer 9 “For Clergy and People,” BCP. 817.
- The Grace (BCP p. 102) *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...*

#### **Assignments in preparation for Phase 9**

- Read Judges 6:11-40
- Review the previous material, including the Spiritual Gifts Inventory, Spiritual Autobiography, and any notes taken.

## Phase Nine: Aligning Gifts and Ministry

It is tempting to consider the Church's call to be a simple matter of matching needs with abilities. "You're an accountant? Great! You can be the congregation's treasurer." If we were simply a human organization relying on human wisdom, this might be sufficient. But throughout the history of God's people, God has demonstrated an ability to do incredible and surprising things with imperfect servants.

When God called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of slavery, Moses protested that he was a terrible public speaker.<sup>31</sup> When God called Gideon, Gideon complained that he was a nobody – "He responded, 'But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.'"<sup>32</sup> Through Jael and Esther, God was able to work with women to save his people despite the constraints on them mandated by their societies. Saint Paul was an enemy of the Church, but Christ transformed him into one of the greatest champions of the faith.

In prayerful reflection, the discernment team is now asked to dare to enter into God's courts and share in a measure of divine wisdom. It is for this purpose that the discernment team was formed. As we have stated so many times in this handbook, the team should be confident that there is a call to be understood.

The discernment team is being asked to weigh a number of things, some of which may appear contradictory. The team must be at once loving and critical, practical and confident.

First, the team should know the seeker well enough by now to know his or her strengths and weaknesses of character and talent. Certainly the seeker has been given charisms which can be brought to service by the Church. He or she may also have limitations which must be faced honestly: a tone-deaf person should not direct a choir, no matter how great his or her love of music.

Second, anyone entering discernment should be active in the local congregation. What roles does the seeker currently fill? Which might change if he or she directs energies in a new way? What might be gained - for the seeker, for the congregation, and for the larger Church? What might be lost? What joy and satisfaction does he or she find in present activities?

Third, what roles outside the Church does the seeker have? What duties of work and family press on him or her and on his or her energies? Which obligations can be ended or changed, and which may not? How does the seeker identify a holy calling in what might otherwise be seen as secular work? What role would the congregation be called to fill - for the seeker, his or her family, and the congregation - in response to a new call by the Church?

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<sup>31</sup> Ex. 4:10-13.

<sup>32</sup> Judg. 6:15.

Fourth, the team should recognize that none of us is fully formed and that God may be calling us into new areas of growth. What is the trajectory of the seeker's life? What weaknesses in experience and education can be strengthened in by a thoughtful formation process? Especially in the case of a younger seeker, the discernment team needs to be able to see the oak tree in the acorn.

Finally, the team should have a sense of the needs of the greater Church. Obviously the "big picture" is a challenge even for those at the level of the diocese and the wider Church, but there needs to be a reflection on the match between the specific charisms of the seeker and the needs of the Church.

## PHASE NINE CURRICULUM

### Goals

Focus on the individual's call

### Objectives

- 1) Prayer
- 2) Review previous phases
- 3) Where have we been? What do we think?

### Outline

Opening Prayers:

- The Lord's Prayer
- Collect 15 II For the choice of fit persons for the ministry, BCP p. 256

Bible Reflection

- Read Judges 6:11-40, listening for the humor and irony and notice:
  - God's opinion of Gideon is higher than Gideon's opinion of himself
  - Gideon's willingness to engage with the God who is engaging with him
  - The irony and humor which pervades the story

Discuss the seeker's strengths and challenges. It will be important during this discussion that the scribe take good notes. This will inform the Report sent to the COM by the CDT.

- What personal limitations have been identified in the seeker?
- What are his or her current activities and sources of joy and satisfaction?
- How is the seeker's baptismal vocation currently being lived out? Consider his or her life in the family, in the Church, and in the wider community.
- How are others blessed by what he or she is doing?
- What potential does the discernment team see in the person?
- What might the seeker need to consider or change in the future in terms of training, formation, or education?
- What role would the congregation be willing to take in terms of training, formation and education?

Closing Prayers:

- Collect 61 A Prayer for Self-dedication, BCP p. 832.
- The Grace (BCP p. 102) *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...*

**Assignments in preparation for Phase 10**

- Prayerful consideration of all previous material

## **Phase Ten: Preparing the Report**

This phase will be different in character from the other phases.

First, the phase will be focused on the practical task of completing the “CDT Summary Report,” which is Form COM-5. The details of this report are included below.

Second, the priest may be invited to attend this phase to assist in the preparation of the report. Should the CDT believe the Seeker should be recommended for further discernment, the priest will need to complete “Priest Report,” which is Form COM-6.

Third, the Team will require the greatest amount of flexibility that it needs to prepare the report. Both the discernment team and the seeker have invested many hours in this discernment and they should have a strong collective sense of the work that needs to be accomplished. The seeker should be present for this work and will need to sign all reports after having read them.

## PHASE TEN CURRICULUM

### Goals

Prepare the “CDT Summary Report”

### Objectives

- 1) Prayer
- 2) Renewal of the Baptismal Covenant
- 3) Preparation of the report

### Outline

Opening Prayers:

- The Lord’s Prayer
- A Song of Creation, BCP p. 88

Recite the Baptismal Covenant, BCP p. 304-305

Draft the “CDT Summary Report,” Form COM-5. This report involves both a collective report and a section that is to be completed by each member of the discernment team.

Both reports will be reviewed by the priest as he or she completes his or her report.

The greatest effort needs to be taken to determine that any unfinished questions are forwarded to appropriate individuals or resources. The COM is glad to act as a resource in locating needed resources.

Closing Prayers:

- A Litany of Thanksgiving, BCP p. 836-837
- The Grace (BCP p. 102) *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...*

## **Checklist at the Conclusion of the CDT**

*You will have already submitted these two forms:*

- “Biographical Information” Form COM-1
- “Forming a CDT,” Form COM-2

*All of the following forms should be submitted together to the COM.*

- “Spiritual Autobiography,” Form COM-3
- “Spiritual Gifts Inventory,” Form COM-4
- “CDT Summary Report,” Form COM-5
- “Priest Report,” Form COM-6