



THE CALL TO MINISTRY

A Workbook for Those
Discerning a Call into
Ordained Ministry



In accordance with the Canons of
the Diocese of Central Florida
regarding the process of
ordination,

I, _____,
have prayerfully reflected on the
biblical characteristics of calling
into ordained leadership.

Aspirant _____
Date _____

Priest _____
Date _____

I understand that this document
will become part of my ordination
file.

Aspirant _____
Date _____

Questions to Consider

(1) What reasons do you have, whether subjective or objective, that you have been “called” into ordained ministry?

(2) What reasons do you have to doubt whether you have been called?

Aspirant _____

Priest _____

Introduction

This workbook is for those discerning a call to ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church.

The aspirant to ministry who has heard God’s call will prayerfully engage this biblical study of leadership with his/her Rector, Associate priest, or Spiritual Director.

Upon completion, the workbook will be signed by the aspirant and the person with whom he or she has engaged this study, then submitted to the Canon for Vocations’ office to be included in the aspirant’s ordination file.

This workbook will be completed immediately after the application to be admitted to the process for ordination. This step should precede the formation of the Parish Discernment Committee.

Leadership Qualities:
A Reflection

The Right Rev. Greg Brewer,
Bishop

We are all called to ministry by virtue of our baptism. There are four orders of ministry in the church: Lay Persons, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. This booklet is to help one explore the call to the permanent diaconate or priesthood.

This work book has my full support and encouragement. Discernment is not just an individual sense, which is necessary, but also requires discerning with those whom you trust. So I invite you on that journey as you go through this material prayerfully.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Brewer", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

Consecration

This is the final step in the response to a divine call in which the individual is formally and officially set apart and acknowledged as qualified for ordained ministry. Typically, this is called “ordination.” It is essential that established and proven leaders in the church provide affirmation in determining both the individual’s potential for service to the church as well as the proper time for one to enter ordained ministry.

Having spoken of “ordained ministry” in this way, R. Paul Stevens rightly reminds us of the liberating perspective of Scripture in which “ministry is defined by Who is served (the interior form) rather than the shape and location of the deeds done (the exterior form). Ministry is *service to God and on behalf of God in the church and the world*. Ministers are people who put themselves *at the disposal of God* for the benefit of others and God’s world. It is not limited by the place where the service is rendered, the function, the need met, by the title of the person or even by the overt reference to Christ” (*The Other Six Days*, 133).

Questions to Consider

(1) Do I have both a desire and proficiency for theoretical and practical aspects of ordained ministry?

(2) What are my spiritual gifts? How would they fit with the tasks of ordained ministry? In what context would they make the most sense and best serve the Kingdom of God?

(3) What evidence of leadership gifts is already clear in my life? In what ways have I participated in God's mission to the world?

Aspirant _____

Priest _____

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Community & Confirmation

The Episcopal Church raises ordained leadership in community. Welcome to that community discernment.

A “call” to ministry is typically confirmed or even initiated through the recognition by others that one possesses the gifts that ministry requires. Others will see God’s grace at work and affirm the call.

John Leith contends that “of all the fallible signs of the authenticity of a call none is of greater value than the approbation of the people of God, who through a period of time become increasingly convinced that the minister in preaching, teaching, and pastoral care gives evidence of having been called by God” (*Crisis in the Church: The Plight of Theological Education*, 101). Therefore, the call most naturally comes in the context of the community of faith itself, in the midst of church life, as people are exposed to the tradition, practices, principles, and faith of the family of God.

Charisma

This Greek word means “a gracious gift,” and points us to the importance of those spiritual skills essential to fulfill the role to which God has called a person. The Spirit distributes these “gifts” according to His will (1 Cor. 12:11). There is an essential balance that also must be maintained. Some who sense a divine call confess their dominant interest to be the theoretical aspects of theology with minimal desire to undertake the practical duties of ordained life. Others are skilled in administration, mission, and the responsibilities of ordained ministry but have little inclination to study or address the theological issues facing the Church today. Ordained ministry requires that one demonstrate both a desire and proficiency in each area.

Two important areas of focus regarding a call to ordination are leadership and mission. A call to ordained ministry is a call to lead others in ministry; therefore, evidence of leadership gifts is essential. Additionally, a call to ordination requires gifts in mobilizing people for mission.

Questions to Consider

(1) Do I have an internal sense of “direct, immediate, powerful” calling?

(2) Is my call to ordained ministry specifically or to general discipleship?

(3) To which questions listed in point #3 can I confidently answer “yes”? To which is my answer “no”?

(4) Please provide a brief explanation of your “call” into ministry.

Aspirant_____

Priest_____

Questions to Consider

(1) What do others think about the idea of me as a clergy person?

(2) Has anyone asked me about ordination without prior knowledge of my sense of call?

(3) When I discuss my sense of call with others around me, especially those in my church family, how do they react to the idea?

Aspirant_____

Priest_____

Character

If God has called someone to ministry, then He will provide the grace to meet its challenges. The biblical criteria for those in church leadership pertain to intellectual and theological skills as well as character, with an emphasis on moral and spiritual maturity. Any effort aimed at identifying those called to church leadership and encouraging them must entail appropriate steps in character development, chief among which are the following:

A person of excellent reputation

Above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6)
Blameless (Titus 1:6-7; 1 Tim. 3:10)
Good reputation with those outside the church (1 Tim. 3:7)
Respectable (1 Tim. 3:7)
Serious (1 Tim. 3:8,11)
Trustworthy in all things (1 Tim. 3:12)

A person with an exemplary family life

Husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6)
Children not licentious or rebellious (Titus 1:6)
Children who believe (Titus 1:6)
Children who respectfully obey (1 Tim. 3:4)

negatively? How open to criticism am I? Am I thin-skinned? Am I team oriented or more of an individualist?

This internal call by which one has a conviction before God that s/he is called, is a necessary but not sufficient component in the pursuit of ministry. Other factors must play a part.

appointed office. Other factors in discerning a call to ministry:

(1) It is essential that the individual differentiate between a call to ordained leadership or ministry and the more general desire to discipleship. All Christians experience the latter, but the former is unique and restricted.

(2) Is the sense of calling persistent or occasional? One should be careful not to act on nothing more than a first impression.

“Let an initial impression grow quietly in a community of prayer until it becomes a sustained conviction” (Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, 18).

(3) Discerning the reality of a call involves asking several pointed questions: Do I have the intellectual ability to fulfill the task? Do I speak with clarity? Am I reclusive by nature or more relational? Can I share a compelling witness to Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit? Can I lead others to become faithful disciples and leaders in the faith? How much am I willing to sacrifice for the poor, the sick, the elderly, the abused? How deeply do I empathize with others? Can I make hard decisions that affect some people

Manages his/her own household well (1 Tim. 3:4-5,12)

A person with Christ-like relational skills

Hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8)

Not quick-tempered (Titus 1:7)

Not violent (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7)

Not contentious (1 Tim. 3:3)

Gentle (1 Tim. 3:3)

Not arrogant (Titus 1:7)

Not double-tongued, i.e., sincere in speech (1 Tim. 3:8)

Not slanderers (1 Tim. 3:11)

A person who lives a disciplined life

Prudent (1 Tim. 3:2)

Temperate (1 Tim. 3:2,11)

Self-controlled (Titus 1:8)

Not given to excess with alcohol (1 Tim. 3:3,8; Titus 1:7)

A person devoted to the Word of God

Able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2) (this is the only qualification not expected of all Christians)
Holds to the faith with a clear conscience (1 Tim. 3:9)

Holds firmly to the Word as it was taught (Titus 1:9)
Able to exhort others in sound doctrine (Titus 1:9)
Able to refute those who contradict sound doctrine (Titus 1:9)
Great boldness in the faith (1 Tim. 3:13)

A person characterized by biblical values

Free from the love of money (1 Tim. 3:3)
Not pursuing dishonest gain (1 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:7)
Loving what is good (Titus 1:8)

A person of maturity and spiritual devotion

Upright (Titus 1:8)
Devout (Titus 1:8)
Not a new convert, i.e., a seasoned disciple (1 Tim. 3:6)
One who has been tried/tested, proven faithful (1 Tim. 3:10)
Humble (1 Tim. 3:6)

Each of these characteristics is a matter of ongoing development. The fact that you may not now fully have one or more does not

“No one,” said Thornwell, “whether young or old, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, should presume to dispense the mysteries of Christ without the strongest of all possible reasons for doing so – the imperative, invincible call of God. No one is to show cause why he ought not to be a Minister: he is to show cause why he should be a Minister. His call to the sacred profession is not the absence of a call to any other pursuit; it is direct, immediate, powerful, to this very department of labour. He is not here because he can be nowhere else, but he is nowhere else because he must be here” (“The Call of the Minister,” *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, 25).

A disservice is done both to the individual and the church if people are encouraged to pursue ministry apart from this internal prompting. A survey of 1,500 pastors found that 48% thought the demands of ministry are more than they could handle (“The One Percent”, www.christianitytoday.com). This is simply another way of saying what the apostle wrote in 1 Timothy 3:1 – “If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.” Both the word “aspires” and “desires” point to the importance of volitional resolve, determination, an element of longing for the

Constraint

The word “constraint” is not intended to suggest an unwillingness on the part of the individual, as if he or she pursues ministry due to external coercion. Rather, it points to the theological truth that those who are called sense an inner conviction from God that makes the thought of pursuing another pathway untenable. The apostle Paul said: “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16). Jeremiah the prophet wrote, "But if I say, 'I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name, 'then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it" (Jeremiah 20:9).

This is inescapably subjective, and that is OK.

Some have argued that every Christian should devote him/herself to the ministry in the absence of some special reason to the contrary, when in fact the opposite is the case: no one should presume to enter ordained ministry apart from a clear call of God. James Henley Thornwell put it this way.

mean you are not called or will not someday qualify to serve as a priest or deacon. Also, remember that no one fulfills each of these qualifications perfectly.

The capacity to engage in honest self-examination to determine if these qualities are present is an essential element in discerning a call to ordained church leadership. Four passages of Scripture summarize the essence of missional and pastoral ministry in terms of character and commitment to the people of God:

(1) “For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do.” (Heb. 6:10). You can never differentiate your love for God from love for his people. In the absence of the latter, one may question the presence of the former.

(2) “And I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls” (2 Cor. 12:15a).

(3) “It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me. For I want you to know how much I am struggling for you... and for

all who have not seen me face to face. I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col. 1:28-2:3).

(4) "I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather, we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith." (2 Cor. 1:24).

Ordained ministry emanates from the heart, not the head. This ministry of the heart begins with the understanding that we love God by loving His people. We demonstrate our affection for His name when we minister to His saints (Heb. 6:10). And how do we minister to the saints? By expending ourselves for them (2 Cor. 12:15) in an effort to bring them to a true knowledge of Christ (Col. 2:2). This is what ultimately will bring them maximum joy (2 Cor. 1:24). And it is for their joy that we aim because God is most glorified in them when they are most satisfied in God.

Questions to Consider

(1) Which of the previously listed characteristics are strengths in my life? Why?

(2) Which are areas for growth? Why?

(3) Would someone observing my life and behavior see these characteristics?

(4) What would it mean for me to expend myself for others in an effort to bring them to a true knowledge of God? Am I willing to do that? Why? And how?

Aspirant _____

Priest _____