



THE CALL TO MINISTRY

A Workbook for Those Discerning a Call
into Ordained Ministry

Introduction

This workbook is for those discerning a call to ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church. As an aspirant to ministry who has heard God's call, you will prayerfully engage in this biblical study of leadership with your Rector, Associate Priest, or Spiritual Director. This workbook should be completed immediately after the aspirant submits an application to be admitted to the discernment process for ordination and before the formation of the Parish Discernment Committee.

The first portion of the workbook provides an introduction to Christian discernment. It describes the unique characteristics of the lay, diaconal, and priestly ministry, focusing on the distinctive aspects of each order of ministry. You may read this section on your own or as part of the overall collaborative study.

The following pages walk through different essential qualities of a person called to ministry. You should complete this section with the priest or spiritual director. As you complete each section, both of you should initial where indicated. Please take your time in prayerfully considering the different characteristics and questions about each one.

At the end is a list of recommended resources for further reading. There is no requirement for you to read them; however, they may be helpful in your process of discernment.

Upon completion, you and the person with whom you have engaged in this study will sign the workbook, then submit it to be included in your ordination file. You can scan and email the workbook to the assistant to the Canon for Vocations at cmiller@cfdiocese.org or mail a hard copy to:

Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida
Attn: Caroline Miller
1017 E. Robinson St.
Orlando, FL 32801

A Reflection on Leadership:

The Right Reverend Gregory O. 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. Use it to collegially explore the calling in your life.

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a small cross symbol followed by the name "Gregory" and a large, stylized "B" that extends into a long horizontal flourish.

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On Discernment*

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Discerning your call is a serious matter. The results of the choices you make will affect the rest of your life. The good news is you are not alone in this! It is important, even essential, to have help with discernment. Your parish, your rector, the Commission on Ministry, the diocesan staff, and the Holy Spirit are all ready to walk this path with you.

Christian discernment, like all of Christian ministry, starts with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works in the lives of Christians to help them grow into and to equip them for the service to which God is calling them. Over time, the nature of this calling may become clear to you or to the people around you before others are even aware of it.

At different times in life, God may call people to different orders of ministry. One person may be called to be a layperson for the first 50 years of his life only to receive the call to be a deacon in middle age. Another person may hear the call to the priesthood from childhood and then pursue that call as soon as he/she is an adult. Each person's story of discernment is unique.

The process of discernment is rarely simple. As sinful human beings living in a sin-broken world, "we see in a mirror, dimly" (1 Cor. 13:12). At times, others may see a call in you that you do not see, or you may feel drawn to a specific form of ministry while others are less certain. The reactions of the people you care about may be supportive or they may be discouraging. This is why discernment in community with your parish and your diocese is essential.

Authentic Christian discernment begins with the Holy Spirit, not only working in the individual, but also guiding the people of God into increasing awareness of the truth in faith, especially the truth about God, the world, and the individual members of the Body of Christ. It involves making reasonable judgments in the light of faith as well as growing in awareness of your own inclinations and desires in relationship to the truth. Discernment must take place in humility, constant prayer, deep reflection, and close consultation with other discerning Christians who know you well.

Furthermore, Christian discernment is permeated with love. It begins, continues, and ends with the love of God. It is carried out in love for Jesus Christ and his Bride, the Church, and in godly love of self as a member of that Bride. As a result, discernment is less a search for self-fulfillment or identity and more a quest for the life for which God created us, the life he designed us to live. As the Rev. Canon Jeremy Bergstrom writes,

Christian freedom is not the ability to become whatever one wishes to become, to decide whether or not one wishes to be celibate or married, a deacon or a priest, or even ‘safely’ to remain a member of the laity; rather, Christian freedom is found in becoming who and what God created us to be, embracing the way in which he intended our lives to unfold in order to share in and testify to his saving purposes in the world through Christ. (*Hearing the Call*, 7)

In the end, the question you need to ask yourself is not, “Am I called?” As Bishop Brewer wrote in his reflection at the beginning of this workbook, God calls us all to ministry in the Church. The real question is, “To which order of ministry is God calling me?” The four orders are Lay Persons, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. Since Bishops are elected from among the priests, that order of ministry will not be addressed in this workbook. Below is a brief guide to the ministry and specific call of each of the other three orders.

Lay Persons

The calling of lay people is by far the broadest category. The Book of Common Prayer states, “All baptized people are called to make Christ known as Savior and Lord, and to share in the renewing of his world.” All laypeople are called to live out their universal call to evangelism and renewal through the specific gifts, circumstances, and resources the Lord has given them.

Within the lay order, there are certain licensed offices in which people may serve, including: lay Eucharistic ministers, lay Eucharistic visitors, lay preachers, lay catechists, lay pastoral leaders, and lay worship leaders. Different lay offices require different types of training, but all of these require a license from the bishop.

If you are interested in serving in a lay office, you should talk to your rector about discerning that call.

The ways in which the laity can minister are too many and too varied to imagine or list them all. Lay ministry is carried out in the love of Christ expressed as love for others in all settings and relationships. If you are called to lay ministry, you have an exciting and ever-growing mission ahead of you. Please take a look at the resource section at the end of this workbook for recommendations for further reading.

Priests

Priesthood is often misunderstood. An Episcopal priest is not a continuation of the Old Testament Levitical priesthood, but a symbol of the one and only priest, Jesus Christ. In his book on the subject, Bishop George Sumner writes, “The minister at the table is a counter-sign that works by its own displacement, by becoming a great finger stretched away from oneself and toward the dying Jesus at the Center of the Church’s life” (*Being Salt*, 25).

Priests are called by God and set apart through ordination to be representatives of the priesthood of all believers. In that representative role, they preside over the Lord’s Table, pronounce the Lord’s forgiveness, and declare the Lord’s blessings. Likewise, in that representative role, they bring the concerns of the people before God – not because the people need a human mediator but because they are symbolic of the invitation to all Christians to “approach the throne of grace with confidence” (Hebrews 4:16). In the ordination vows for the priesthood, *The Book of Common Prayer* states that priests are commissioned “to preach, to declare God’s forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God’s blessing, to share in the administration of Holy Baptism and in the celebration of the mysteries of Christ’s Body and Blood”. In that way, the ministry of a priest focuses more on the life of the Church than that of a layperson or deacon.

As such a symbol, priests must be members of the community who are “above reproach” (1 Timothy 3:2). They must live Christ-like lives of love, prayer, and service. As Bishop Brewer expressed it, “Servanthood is the foundation on which all Christian leadership is built.” More often than not, priesthood is unglamorous: this type of servanthood requires being willing to do whatever needs to be done from scrubbing the toilet to presiding at the Eucharist on Easter Sunday, and everything in between.

Deacons

The order of deacons is almost as old as the Church itself. Acts 6:1-6 details the calling and ordination of the first deacons and their first role, which was to take care of the neglected people in the community. The story represents the role of

deacons well. Their ordination service directs them: “You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.” Deacons are called to be a bridge between the Church and the world. They are particularly called to serve the poor, the neglected, and, in general, “the least of these” (Matthew 25:45).

The liturgical duties of deacons represent this special role. For example, when they bring and declare the Gospel in the middle of the congregation, it is a representation of their call to take the Gospel into the midst of the people in the world. Likewise, when they pronounce the dismissal at the end of the service, the deacon is serving as a symbolic bridge for the attendees to bring the life of the Church into the world.

Archdeacon Kristi Alday summed it up well:

Deacons should be on the front line of mission in the world pointing, directing and drawing people to Jesus and the Church. Their presence and ministry outside of the church building should be a ‘living billboard’, if you will, proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the deacon creates awareness in his/her local church of the missional opportunities in the community.

*This exploration of discernment is indebted to the excellent work of the Rev. Canon Dr. Jeremy W. Bergstrom's "Hearing the Call," which is the discernment guide he created for the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas.

Community & Confirmation

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

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.

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 the Biblical characteristics for ordained leaders are the following:

A person of excellent reputation

Above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2)
Blameless (Titus 1:6-7; 1 Tim. 3:10)
Well thought of by outsiders (1 Tim. 3:7)
Respectable (1 Tim. 3:7)
Serious (1 Tim. 3:8,11)
Faithful in all things (1 Tim. 3:12)

A person with an exemplary family life

Married only once (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6)
Children are not accused of debauchery and not rebellious (Titus 1:6)
Children are believers (Titus 1:6)
Children are submissive and respectful (1 Tim. 3:4)
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 quarrelsome (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

Temperate (1 Tim. 3:2,11)
Self-controlled (Titus 1:8)
Not indulging in too much wine nor a drunkard (1 Tim. 3:3,8; Titus 1:7)

A person devoted to the Word of God

An apt teacher (1 Tim. 3:2) (this is the only qualification not expected of all Christians)

Holds fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience (1 Tim. 3:9)

Have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching (Titus 1:9)

Able to preach with 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

Not a lover of money (1 Tim. 3:3)

Not greedy for money or gain (1 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:7)

Lover of goodness (Titus 1:8)

A person of maturity and spiritual devotion

Upright (Titus 1:8)

Devout (Titus 1:8)

Not a recent convert, i.e., a seasoned disciple (1 Tim. 3:6)

One who has been tested and proved blameless (1 Tim. 3:10)

Not puffed up with conceit (1 Tim. 3:6)

Titus 1:6-9

“...someone who is blameless, married only once, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious. For a bishop, as God’s steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.”

1 Timothy 3:1-13

“The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way— for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and

fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.

“Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons. Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well; for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

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

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.

No one 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 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 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 he/she is called, is a necessary but not sufficient component in the pursuit of ministry. Other factors must play a part.

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_____

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 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_____

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) 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_____



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 _____

Resources

Below are recommended further readings and resources, organized by category. This is neither a required nor a comprehensive list.

Lay Ministry

Katelyn Beaty, *A Woman's Place: A Christian vision for your calling in the office, the home, and the world*

Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common grace for the common good*

Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and fulfilling the central purpose of your life*

Frederica Harris, "The Laity" in *The Study of Anglicanism* edited by Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight

Justin Holcomb, *What Do You Do for a Living?*

Amy Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational stewardship for the common good*

Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A biblical theology of the Church's mission*

Priesthood

Rosalind Brown and Christopher Cocksworth, *On Being a Priest Today*

Leander Harding, *To Persevere in Love: Meditations on the Ministerial Priesthood from an Anglican Perspective*

Michael Ramsey, *The Christian Priest Today*

George Sumner, *Being Salt: A theology of an ordered Church*

John Webster, "Ministry and Priesthood," in *The Study of Anglicanism* edited by Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight

St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or 2, In Defense of His Flight to Pontus*

St Ambrose of Milan, *On the Duties of the Clergy (De officiis)*

St John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood (6 treatises)*

St Augustine, *On Catechizing the Uninstructed (De catechizandis rudibus)*

St Gregory the Great, *The Pastoral Rule*

Diaconate

James Barnett, *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order*

John Booty, *The Servant Church: Diaconal Ministry and the Episcopal Church*

Rosalind Brown, *Being a Deacon Today: Exploring a Distinctive Ministry in the Church and in the World*

John Collins, *Deacons and the Church: Making Connections Between Old and New*

Ormonde Plater, *Deacons in the Liturgy*

Ormonde Plater, *Many Servants: An Introduction to Deacons*

Leadership

Dan Allender, *Leading with a Limp: Take Full Advantage of Your Most Powerful Weakness*

Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*

John Stott, *Basic Christian Leadership: Biblical Models of Church, Gospel and Ministry*

John Stott, *Problems of Christian Leadership*

Discernment

Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology*

Mark A. McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth: The Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge*

Gordon T. Smith, *Consider Your Calling: Six Questions for Discerning Your Vocation*

Gordon T. Smith, *The Voice of Jesus: Discernment, Prayer and the Witness of the Spirit*

Caroline A. Westerhoff, *Calling: A Song for the Baptized*