

Dear Deans, sponsoring clergy, chairs, and members of discernment committees:

We are grateful and excited for you to put together a discernment committee (DC) for aspirants in your deanery! **Every member of a DC should have this document.**

Requirements for members of the discernment committee:

Members of the DC should have good listening skills, good pastoral skills, and a thorough understanding of the expectations, duties, and responsibilities of licensed lay ministers, deacons, and priests.

DC members should also have a clear understanding of the different orders of the church (deacon, priest, and bishop), and clarity in the differences between the roles of the laity, priests, and deacons.

The DC should include members that represent the diversity of the diocese and the community of the Aspirant.

The DC may not include members of the Aspirant's family, the sponsoring clergy, members of the sponsoring clergy's family, or anyone whose participation may represent a conflict of interest or the appearance of such a conflict.

Members of the COM may serve on a DC, but should the aspirant come for a vote before the COM that member will recuse herself.

Sponsoring clergy and Dean will assemble the DC and appoint a chair, plus 3-4 members of the committee.

The chair of DC and COM liaison will review requirements before the first meeting of the DC.

The Aspirant may ask for up to 2 persons on the DC, but there is no guarantee of placement.

One clergy member may serve on the DC, not the Dean or the aspirant's sponsoring clergy.

The discernment meetings will take place in person and that the entire committee be present. The standard number of meetings is 6 (or more—only if necessary). The next meeting should be scheduled before the end of each meeting.

There will be at least 2-4 weeks between meetings of the committee so that it usually takes about 6 months to complete. For the meetings of the DC, you will use *Listening Hearts Discerning Call in Community*, reading through it as well as the first two appendices. **(NB-there are many versions of this book and pagination may differ as well as appendices depending on edition)**

Discernment Committee Final Reports are due September 25

Here is a breakdown of how to use Listening Hearts to guide and structure your meetings:

Meeting one:

Discuss Call chapter 1 (pp. 1-19) and the aspirant's life. Start by using the aspirant's spiritual autobiography and answers from page 3 in the application to Holy Orders. What is call, and how do Christians experience and understand call? Read appendices one and two (pp. 77-94).

Additional resources: Consider the call of the prophets: Jeremiah 1:1-10, Ezekiel 2-3:11, and Isaiah 6. There are two excellent essays on vocation (pp. 147-159) in *A Ray of Darkness* by Rowan Williams.

Meeting two: Discuss Discernment, chapter 2 (pp. 23-50) and the role of discernment in the aspirant's life. What is discernment and how do we know we are hearing the voice of God?

Meeting three: The importance of community, chapter 3 (pp. 53-74): why are we doing this in community? How do we hear God's voice in community?

Meeting four: What kinds of ministries is God calling you? Read Encouraging ministries in appendix three pp. 95-98. Read and review the Baptismal Covenant in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP, p. 304-305), the service for the Ordination of a Deacon (BCP, p. 543), and a Priest (BCP, p. 524) to discern and discuss the lay and/or ordained ministries to which God is calling the aspirant.

-Is there an agreement between the aspirant and the committee in the matter of call?

-Is the committee and aspirant in agreement that sufficient discernment has taken place to write a report to the COM?--If **yes**, then on to meeting 5, if no then meet again to get to that place.

Meeting Five: If there is agreement that sufficient time for discernment has been met, the Committee meets without the aspirant and draws up a draft final report of the work of DC.

Meeting Six: The final session of the committee shares the draft report with the aspirant and they meet to go over it and then if needed include response from the aspirant in italics at the end of the document.

The final report of the discernment committee will be 3-5 pages (single spaced, 12 point font), pdf format, covering the following topics in detail:

1. List of names who have served on the committee including chair
2. Introduction to the aspirant with some basic facts, have they gone through the process before, ordained before, single/family, and other details that will change the shape of the discernment committee's work
3. List of meeting dates, who was present along with what was discussed in detail, did you open in prayer, what were the questions, how did the discussion proceed or not, how did the aspirant respond to the questions, etc.
4. What consensus was reached by the committee (note in report if no agreement) as to whether the DC believes this person should continue in the discernment process and does the DC hear God's call of the aspirant to holy orders (provide details). Can the committee see this person as a future possible deacon/priest in the church?
5. If the committee believes the aspirant is called, is it the right time to actively pursue this call? If the committee recommends they do (or not) go forward in the process, explain how the committee came to that conclusion and why.

You will be asked to rewrite the final report if you fail to provide sufficient detail

You should email final reports to rector@christchurchcooperstown.org

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