

Instruction in Spirituality

The teaching faculty consists of the Discernment Director and two other diocesan faculty. Collaborative learning and sharing is encouraged. Course performance will not be letter-graded as such, but faculty – with the exception of the Group Spiritual Director – will provide feedback to each participant as well as to the Discernment Director. The course content covers:

- Ascetical theology, introducing classical and modern spiritual doctors
- Benedictine spirituality as lived from the *Rule of Benedict*
- Twelve-step spirituality and life recovery work
- Anglican spirituality and ethos
- How to design a personal *Rule of Life* appropriate to one's personality type
- How to practice various prayer techniques, e.g., contemplative prayer, *lectio divina*, etc.
- How to live out a common spirituality with one's life partner



**Office of Vocational Discernment
Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan**

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Office of Vocational Discernment Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan

Dear Seeker:

The Vocational Discernment Program (VDP) is designed to help parishioners who sense a further call on their lives for ministry, identify their particular gifts and fine-tune that call to the next level of service. VDP participants may discern a call to ordained ministry as a permanent or vocational deacon, may build on parish ministries they are already exercising, may hear God's call to diocesan priesthood, or to consecrated religious life as a nun or monk in the Episcopal Church.

The process of discernment for ministry begins in your own parish with your pastor. The pastor and parish discernment team work with individuals to help them listen to their inner sense of being called and identify their gifts for ministry. One may perhaps enter the Vocational Discernment Program with a thought in one vocational direction or another, but one remains open to the Spirit as well as guidance from the VDP faculty as well as one's own personal spiritual director.

The VDP is a freestanding program of "open discernment," but is the required preliminary course of study for any parishioner seeking ordination or admission to a religious order. One must successfully complete the VDP before being admitted to our diocesan Oakerhater School for Deacons or to an accredited theological seminary. Having completed the program, those called to remain in the lay state would be recommended for further training, ultimately to be commissioned and installed in that ministry by the Bishop.

Married persons or those living in committed relationships and aspiring to ordination as deacons or priests will be expected to participate in the VDP together with their spouse or significant other. This practice is to avoid potential conflicts between two sacraments: that of a lifelong, vowed commitment to another person, and to Holy Orders, a lifelong, vowed commitment to God and the Church. The spouse or partner co-discerns with the aspirant to authenticate the call. If that call is authenticated, the couple is able to see how their preexisting bond is strengthened, not weakened, by this new commitment.

Simply fill out and mail back the enclosed application so we can send you additional information about the program, class sessions and a contact person to help get you launched in this exciting new adventure. My prayers for you begin now, I promise.

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The Basics

Both Bishop and VDP faculty want to emphasize at the outset that a robust spiritual life, including ongoing discernment, formation and direction, is foundational to the exercise of any ministry, whether lay or ordained. But for ordained leadership in this diocese, a disciplined personal spiritual life is required.

The Timetable

Participants in the **VDP** commit to meeting approximately every other weekend from the last weekend of August through the first weekend of December inclusive for a total of eight sessions (see schedule). Each weekend consists of a Friday evening through Saturday afternoon. The eighth weekend concludes the **VDP** with a closed, traditional silent retreat all day Saturday. Activities during sessions two through seven include group spiritual direction, opportunities for private as well as corporate prayer, instruction on the spiritual life, and communal celebrations of daily offices and Eucharist (see schedule).

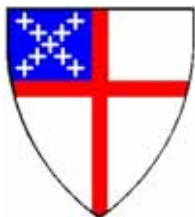
Each aspirant or participating couple will be accountable to this newly developing ministerial community. All will be invited to share leading community liturgies. The Director and/or other priests will (con) celebrate the Eucharist each Saturday before lunch.

The Finances

The diocese expects that sponsoring parish and applicant each contribute a fair share towards VDP tuition costs.

Tuition including lodging and meals but excluding textbooks for the eight sessions of **VDP** is **\$1,500**. There is no additional charge for spouse or significant other.

Full payment in the form of a check made payable to the "Diocese of Western Michigan" is due before or at the opening session in August. Arrangements for any other payment plan must be negotiated in advance with the Director.



Sample Session

Fri PM	5:00	Arrive
	5:30	Dinner
	6:30	Session I: <i>Group Spiritual Direction</i> (Heydens)
	9:30	Compline
Sat AM	Breakfast	
	8:00	Breakfast
	8:30	Morning Prayer
	9:00	Session II: <i>Benedictine Spirituality</i> (Crean)
	11:00	Break
	11:15	Holy Eucharist
Sat PM	12:00	Lunch with opportunity to consult with faculty
	1:00	Session III/IV: <i>Twelve-Step Spirituality</i> (Whiting) or <i>Anglican Spirituality</i> (Sherer)
	4:00	Parting Prayers & Adjournment

Methodology

Group Spiritual Direction

In a group setting, seekers, spouses and significant others will have an opportunity to grow spiritually by sharing how God has been present in their lives and how they have experienced that presence. The focus will be on discerning how the Holy Spirit has been moving in their lives, in prayer, in family, in service and in daily living in the market place and civil society. Participants will be guided in developing a pattern of daily prayer.

The specific goals of the group spiritual direction in the program are to help the participant grow spiritually toward a contemplative-in-action lifestyle and to support the participant's discernment whether s/he is being called to an enhanced lay, consecrated religious, diaconal or priestly ministry.

A trained, supervised spiritual director will facilitate the process. The deliberations in this session shall be kept confidential, that is, not shared beyond the group. The only information shared will be this: *Was the participant present? Did s/he participate actively?*