

COMMISSION ON MINISTRY

A Guide to the Priestly Ordination Process and its Requirements in the Diocese of Western Michigan

April 13, 2011



A Guide to the Priestly Ordination Process and its Requirements in the Diocese of Western Michigan

Introduction

Welcome to the priestly ordination process in the Diocese of Western Michigan. Discerning a call to ordination is a process involving both the individual's sense of vocation and the church's affirmation of that call. The Bishop, Commission on Ministry (COM), and Standing Committee are grateful for your willingness to share your sense of vocation with us. We are committed to making the ordination process one of depth, dialogue, and faithful discernment. We have designed the process to create an environment for this discernment, and for the ongoing stages of formation.

You bear responsibility for providing the required paperwork to the appropriate persons and for meeting all requirements and deadlines throughout the process.

These guidelines describe the required paperwork and the sequence of meetings and steps in the ordination process. Throughout the process you should contact your assigned Commission on Ministry liaison with any questions.

Gifts Appropriate to the Priesthood

As you proceed through this booklet and consider the process toward ordination, know that the following are the gifts which the Diocese of Western Michigan seeks to discern in those pursuing this priestly call.

1. A sense of "call"

- An openness to holiness as present in sacrament, the community, the gospel and Creation; an ability to communicate that awareness to others.
- A personal, spiritual desire to live in communion with others as an ordained leader and specific to the Episcopal tradition.
- A desire to preside at the sacraments with an awareness of both mystery and presence.
- An ability to articulate this calling.

2. A desire to spread the Gospel

- A desire to proclaim the good news of Christ and share one's faith.
- An awareness of and honesty about one's own story and Christ's presence on the journey.
- A desire to invite/shape a community into the living of the Gospel good news.

3. A gift of leadership

- The desire and ability to empower others to live into their baptismal calling and ministries.
- A sense of vision, held in community and guided by the Spirit; ability to give voice to that vision, inspiring communal participation in it.
- An ability to see the big picture and think in systems terms.
- The personal qualities of authenticity, humility, strength and trustworthiness.
- The ability to be a “non-anxious” presence.
- A willingness to take risks and encourage change.
- The abilities to problem solve, plan, delegate, and follow through.
- An intellectual curiosity and commitment to “life-long learning” and formation.
- A willingness to be accountable to the parish, the bishop, the diocese and National Church.

4. An active prayer life and spiritual maturity appropriate to one's age

- A grounding in the teachings of Scripture and commitment to the ongoing study of Scripture.
- A practiced rule of life with personal prayer, meditation and reflection.
- An inclination toward personal growth and an ever increasing knowledge of self.
- An awareness of the challenges, pains, healings and joys of one's own personal journey; the ability to articulate and interpret that story to self and others.
- A personal practice of good stewardship of resources.

5. A pastoral inclination

- The ability to listen well.
- A compassionate presence and the desire to serve those who are hurting.
- A concern about the well-being of others and a desire to help them seek wholeness.
- The ability to relate well to a diversity of types and ages of people.
- A call and ability to be sacramentally present as a representative of God's people.

6. Personal Health

- Physical health: practices well-being of body, mind and soul; passes the medical examination as required by canons.
- Emotional health and stability: easily articulates personal strengths and limitations; has sought out the help of professional support when needed; keeps healthy boundaries; passes the evaluation as required by canons.
- Stable relationships with spouse/partner, colleagues, community of faith, family and friends.
- Financial responsibility: has managed personal finances with integrity and does not carry unmanageable personal debt.

The Roles of Those Involved in the Ordination Process

The Individual (who throughout the process is Nominee, Postulant, Candidate, Deacon, Priest) either initiates or agrees to the initial discernment process and *is responsible for providing the required paperwork to the appropriate persons and meeting all the deadlines throughout the ordination process.*

The Rector, Priest-in-Charge or Vicar provides support in the initial phase of discernment, names a Parish Discernment Committee and then at every phase in the ordination process, is asked to officially nominate, support and/or recommend the individual.

The Parish Discernment Committee spends several months prior to nomination helping the individual discern whether or not he or she feels a call to ordination. They will also communicate their impressions of the individual and his or her calling to the Rector, Bishop and Commission on Ministry.

The Congregation or other community of faith nurtures the individual in faith, offers ongoing support, and (through their **Vestry or Bishop's Committee**) are asked for official recommendations at every stage of the ordination process.

The Bishop meets with the individual early in the process and has authority to grant Postulancy and approve a process of formation. With the support of the Standing Committee the Bishop may approve Candidacy and ordain to the Diaconate and Priesthood. (The Bishop, at his or her sole discretion, also has the authority to remove a Postulant or Candidate from the ordination process.)

The Commission on Ministry (COM) works to "advise and assist" the Bishop in the implementation of the Title III Canons, providing discernment, establishing programs of formation and maintaining oversight of the ordination process. The COM also provides a primary diocesan contact and support for persons in the ordination process.

The Standing Committee meets with the individual prior to Candidacy and ordination, and has a representative present prior to Postulancy. They offer their recommendations at these stages and ultimately certify that all canonical requirements for ordination have been met.

The Seminary or other Formation Program provides for, monitors and reports on the individual's academic performance and on the Postulant's, Candidate's or Deacon's personal qualifications for ordination.

The Phases of the Ordination Process

General Guidelines for Submission of Documents

Unless noted otherwise:

- o Forms that are provided on the diocesan website are to be used.
- o Documents that are typed are to include the individual's name and date
- o Originals are to be sent to the Bishop's office.

Also note that the documents and other requirements for each stage are listed on "Priestly Ordination Process Checklist." **You should refer to that list to ensure that all documents are submitted as required.** At any time, should you have any questions, you should contact your assigned COM contact or the COM Chair.

1. Local Discernment: (III.1, III.3, III.8.2a)

During this initial phase of discernment (usually about one year in length,) the individual looks closely at their life calling, reflecting thoughtfully and prayerfully while experiencing the input and support of one's Congregation or community of faith. This phase of discernment is an intentional process beginning with the Rector/Priest-in-Charge/Vicar and continuing with a Parish Discernment Committee as appointed by the Rector and attended by a member of the COM. At the point at which the Rector believes it is time for a Discernment Committee, he or she should contact the Chair of the COM for support and guidance. *Finding Your Gifts*, (the guide to this process) can be found on the Diocesan website.

The Discernment Committee plays several roles. First, at this early stage of the process this committee serves as a sounding board for the individual discerning a call. Second, this committee offers to the Vestry, Bishop, COM and Standing Committee their observations regarding the strengths the individual would offer the church as a priest, the areas in which the individual would need to grow to become a well rounded priest, and the way the committee experienced the individual in the course of their meetings. The role of the Discernment Committee is not to recommend for or against ordination for the individual, but rather to provide a descriptive written report, which should be 2-3 pages in length. This report then becomes one of several sources of information which the Bishop, COM and Standing Committee use at the different stages of the ordination process.

Following this experience with the Discernment Committee, if the individual discerns a call to ordination, he or she requests the support of the Vestry/Bishop's Committee along with formal recommendation from the Rector/Priest-in-Charge/Vicar.

The Congregation may nominate the individual for ordination.

2. Nomination: (III.8.2b- 3d)

Nomination is a period in which discernment is expanded beyond the local congregation or community of faith into the larger body of the Diocese. Officially nominated by the Rector/Priest-in-Charge/Vicar and the Vestry/Bishop's Committee, the individual is a "Nominee." The Nominee contacts the Bishop's office and schedules a meeting. At least four weeks prior to that meeting, the Nominee submits required documents and information including:

- Ordination Process Information Form
 - Certificate signed by the Rector/Priest in Charge/Vicar and Vestry/Bishop's Committee, which indicates the Vestry's/Bishop Committee's support of the Nominee
 - A letter from the Rector, Priest-in-Charge, or Vicar recommending the Nominee to the Bishop for the ordination process
 - The report of the Parish Discernment Committee
 - A one-page, single-spaced autobiographical statement
 - Transcripts of all academic work (undergraduate and graduate)

 - A one-page, single space statement of the Nominee's sense of call
 - If married or partnered, a one-page letter from the Nominee's spouse/partner expressing his/her thoughts on the Nominee's seeking ordination

 - Financial Inquiry Form
- The Nominee meets with the Bishop.

 - If the Bishop approves the Nominee to proceed, the Nominee gathers and submits the following information:
 - Application for Postulancy
 - A psychological evaluation form (completed by a designee of the Bishop) as required by the Church Pension Fund
 - A completed Medical Examination form
 - Background checks
 - Passport-sized photo, not older than six months

 - The COM and representative(s) from the Standing Committee will review the application and meet with the Nominee.

- Within one week following the meeting/conference with the COM, the Chair will contact the Bishop to respond to the Nominee's presentation of his or her sense of calling, advising him or her about the strengths and areas of concern that the COM members discerned, and to share the COM's recommendation regarding Postulancy. The Chair will provide the Bishop with one of three recommendations from the COM:
 - o That the nominee be made a Postulant for Holy Orders.
 - o That the Nominee take time to address concerns raised by the COM and meet with them again at a later date.
 - o That the Nominee not be made a Postulant for Holy Orders.

The Bishop will contact each Nominee/Postulant, usually within one week of receiving the COM's report.

In consultation with the Bishop, the COM Chair will arrange for a member of the COM to meet with the Nominee/Postulant in person, to go over the COM's feedback in depth and to invite the Nominee's/Postulant's response to the feedback. If the individual is made a Postulant, this COM member will generally then continue to serve as their COM liaison.

-

3. Postulancy: (III.8.2.e- 8.4.b)

The period of postulancy includes official approval of and initiation of a Program of Formation. This is expected to be a time of significant spiritual growth for the individual and it normally encompasses the first one to two years in the ordination process. During this phase, individuals continue to explore their call and formulate (or "postulate") working models or images of what priestly ordination means to them.

Postulant, Candidate and transitional Deacons must write the bishop four times a year in Ember Weeks, reflecting upon his or her formation experience and personal and spiritual development.

Requirements for Seminary Coursework and Spiritual Development

The Diocese recognizes that while many pursue traditional models of seminary education, the models are changing and more approaches to formation are available today. To ensure a thorough background in theological studies and formation in the Anglican tradition, the Canons name the following seven subject areas for study during the time of preparation and require "proficiency" in these areas prior to ordination:

- o The Holy Scriptures, the study of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament;
- o Church History, covering the history of the early church to the present day including the Ecumenical Movement with an additional semester in Anglican Church history for those attending an ecumenical seminary ;

- o Christian Theology, including Missionary Theology and Missiology;
- o Christian Ethics and Moral Theology;
- o Studies in contemporary society, including the historical and contemporary experience of racial and minority groups, and cross-cultural ministry skills.
- o Liturgics and Church Music; Preaching; Christian Worship and Music according to the contents and use of the Book of Common Prayer and the Hymnal and authorized supplemental texts;
- o Theory and practice of ministry including leadership, and the ministries of evangelism and stewardship;

The Diocese considers the emotional and spiritual development of persons in the process to be as important as their intellectual development. To this end, by the time of ordination to the transitional Diaconate, individuals are expected to have completed the following or their equivalents:

- Two years of regular meetings with a spiritual director
- A full unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (with evaluation by the Director of the CPE Program to be submitted to the Bishop's office)
- A full year's field placement in a supervised ministry at an Episcopal parish or mission (not their home or sponsoring parish)
- Regular attendance at their seminary chapel or local congregation
- A practiced rule of life
- Adult Sexual Misconduct Prevention training
- Child Abuse Awareness training
- Anti-Racism training
- Sensitivity training with regard to LGBT persons
- Title IV Canon Training

It is highly recommended that all trainings listed above be completed as early in the process as possible, preferably before attending seminary or immediately after being granted Postulancy. It is required they be completed before Candidacy and it is the responsibility of the individual to complete such training and submit proof of completion to the Bishop's office.

At the appropriate time, the Postulant applies to the Bishop for admission to Candidacy and submits the following information:

- The Postulant assures that all required documents are submitted and other requirements met including:
 - o Ordination Process Information Form – updated
 - o Application for Candidacy

- Reaffirmation of Rector/Priest in Charge/Vicar and Vestry/Bishop's Committee for Candidacy Status
- Seminary/Program transcript to date
- Seminary/Program Leaders' evaluations of the postulant's fitness for ministry; the Postulant is responsible for obtaining this evaluation from the Dean of Students at their seminary or from the coordinator of their formation program
- Clinical Pastoral Education evaluation
- Field placement supervisor's evaluation - The Field Placement Supervisor's Evaluation should be a report that includes information regarding the period of field placement, the goals set for the field placement, the accomplishments achieved, and observations of the supervisor.
- Anti-Racism training—proof of completion
- Adult Sexual Misconduct Prevention training—proof of completion
- Child Abuse Awareness training—proof of completion
- The COM reviews the documents, meets with the Postulant and “attests to the Postulant’s continuing formation.”
- The Standing Committee “interviews the Postulant” and gives (or does not give) their approval for Candidacy.
- The Bishop may admit the Postulant as a Candidate for ordination.

4. **Candidacy:** (III.8.4.c-8.6.d)

The term “candidate” reflects the church's expectation that by this stage of the process, persons are expected to integrate their academic studies, spiritual development, and field experience so that they are prepared to offer themselves for ordination. Candidacy is a time of education and continued formation which generally lasts a year or more and (without guarantee of ordination,) is established by formal commitment by the Candidate, the Bishop, the COM, the Standing Committee and the Congregation or other community of faith. Normally, during this phase, the Candidate will take the General Ordination Exams.

The General Ordination Exams

Candidates will normally take the General Ordination Exams during the January of their last year in seminary or other program of formation. The Candidate will contact the Bishop’s office and the Bishop’s office will register the individual for the upcoming exam.

The General Board of Examining Chaplains (GBEC) evaluates each candidate's exams, grading the Candidate's performance in each of seven areas of study. Based on the grades given by the GBEC and the judgment of the COM, if a Candidate needs further work in any area, the COM will assign him or her a tutor or additional class work. The candidate will complete this work on a schedule set by the COM or tutor.

If a candidate's performance on the GOEs calls his or her preparedness for ordination into question, the Standing Committee and/or the Bishop may decline to approve the ordination of such candidates.

At the appropriate time, the Candidate applies to the Bishop requesting ordination to the Diaconate.

- The Candidate assures that required documents are submitted and all other requirements met, including:
 - o Application for Ordination to the Diaconate
 - o Endorsement for Ordination to the Diaconate by the candidate's Rector/Priest-in-Charge/Vicar and Vestry/Bishop's Committee
 - o Completed seminary transcript
 - o Recommendation of seminary, theological school, or director of the program of studies
 - o Medical Examination Form update, if required
 - o Psychological Examination update, if required
 - o Background Check update, if required

Note: Medical, Psychological Examination, and Background check reports submitted for postulancy must be updated before ordination if more than three years have elapsed since the original exams, or at the request of the Bishop or COM.

- The COM normally meets with the Candidate. The COM submits a recommendation regarding ordination to the transitional Diaconate.
- The Standing Committee normally meets with the Candidate. The Standing Committee certifies that "the canonical requirements for ordination have been met, there is no sufficient objection on medical, psychological, moral, or spiritual grounds and that they recommend ordination."
- The Bishop, having received the Standing Committee's testimonial and seeing "no sufficient objection on medical, psychological, moral or spiritual grounds," may ordain the Candidate to the transitional Diaconate.

5. **Transitional Diaconate: (III.8.6.e-8.8.c)**

While the individual has been ordained to the Diaconate, this time is normally used as continued formation to the priesthood. The person may serve in a liturgical capacity as a Deacon. This period of transitional diaconate must last at least six months.

At the appropriate time the transitional Deacon applies to the Bishop requesting ordination as a Priest.

- The transitional Deacon submits required documents including:
 - o Application for Ordination to the Priesthood
 - o Endorsement for Ordination to the Priesthood of Rector/Priest in-Charge and Vestry/Executive Committee where deacon is serving
- The COM reviews the documents and normally meets with the transitional Deacon. The COM attests to “the successful completion of the program of formation. . . and proficiency in the required areas of study” and offers recommendation regarding ordination to the priesthood.
- The Standing Committee normally meets with the transitional Deacon and certifies “that the canonical requirements for ordination to the Priesthood have been met and that there is no sufficient objection on medical, psychological, moral, or spiritual grounds and that they recommend ordination.”
- The Bishop, having received the Standing Committee’s testimonial and seeing “no sufficient objection on medical, psychological, moral or spiritual grounds,” may ordain the transitional Deacon to the Priesthood.

Priestly Ordination Process

Required Document Checklist

At Nomination – (Prior to Meeting with the Bishop)

- Ordination Process Information Form
- Certificate signed by the Rector/Priest in Charge/Vicar and Vestry/Bishop's Committee, which indicates the Vestry's/Bishop Committee's support of the Nominee
- A letter from the Rector, Priest-in-Charge, or Vicar recommending the Nominee to the Bishop for the ordination process
- The report of the Parish Discernment Committee
- A one-page, single-spaced autobiographical statement

- Transcripts of all academic work (undergraduate and graduate)
- A one-page, single space statement of the Nominee's sense of call
- If married or partnered, a one-page letter from the Nominee's spouse/partner expressing his/her thoughts on the Nominee's seeking ordination
- Financial Inquiry Form

_____ Bishop's Approval to Move Forward

For Postulancy

- Application for Postulancy
- A psychological evaluation form (Date on Form _____)
- A completed Medical Examination form (Date on Form _____)
- Background checks (Date on Forms _____)
- Passport-sized photo, not older than six months

_____ COM's Recommendation Given to Bishop

_____ Bishop's Granting of Postulancy/Date Granted

For Candidacy

- Ordination Process Information Form – updated
- Application for Candidacy
- Reaffirmation of Rector/Priest in Charge/Vicar and Vestry/Bishop's Committee for Candidacy Status
- Seminary/Program transcript to date
- Seminary/Program Leaders' evaluations of the postulant's fitness for ministry; the Postulant is responsible for obtaining this evaluation from the Dean of Students at their seminary or from the coordinator of their formation program
- Clinical Pastoral Education evaluation
- Field placement supervisor's evaluation - The Field Placement Supervisor's Evaluation should be a report that includes information regarding the period of field placement, the goals set for the field placement, the accomplishments achieved, and observations of the supervisor.
- Anti-Racism training—proof of completion
- Adult Sexual Misconduct Prevention training—proof of completion
- Child Abuse Awareness training—proof of completion
- LGBT Sensitivity Training – proof of completion

_____COM's Recommendation for Candidacy

_____Standing Committee's Approval for Candidacy

_____Bishop's Granting of Candidacy/ Date Granted

For Transitional Diaconate

- Application for Ordination to the Diaconate
 - Endorsement for Ordination to the Diaconate by the candidate’s Rector/Priest-in-Charge/Vicar and Vestry/Bishop’s Committee
 - Completed seminary transcript
 - Recommendation of seminary, theological school, or director of the program of studies
 - Satisfied the requirement for “proficiency” in the Seven Canonical Areas
 - Medical Examination Form update, if required
 - Psychological Examination update, if required
 - Background Check update, if required
 - Title IV Familiarity
- *Note: Medical, Psychological Examination, and Background check reports submitted for postulancy must be updated before ordination if more than three years have elapsed since the original exams, or at the request of the Bishop or COM.*

_____COM’s Recommendation for Ordination to the Transitional Diaconate

_____Standing Committee’s Approval for Ordination to the Transitional Diaconate

_____Bishop’s Support for Ordination to the transitional Diaconate/Date Ordained

For Ordination to the Priesthood

- Application for Ordination to the Priesthood
- Endorsement for Ordination to the Priesthood of Rector/Priest in-Charge and Vestry/Executive Committee where deacon is serving

_____COM’s Approval for Ordination to the Priesthood

_____Standing Committee’s Approval for Ordination to the Priesthood

_____Bishop’s Support for Ordination to the Priesthood/Date Ordained