

THE PROCESS TOWARD ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD
IN THE
DIOCESE OF WEST MISSOURI

Preface

The Commission on Ministry (COM) in the Diocese of West Missouri, with the approval of the Bishop, has prepared this handbook as a guide for persons who believe themselves called to the priesthood. It will also prove useful to other persons involved in the process, e.g., presenting priests, Congregational Discernment Committees, Vestries, Bishop's Committees, and others.

The formation process through which an individual moves from nomination to postulancy to candidacy to ordination is explained in detail. This handbook provides an explanation of the steps along the way, a description of the roles of various participants in the process, and a list of the key concerns of the COM.

Those whose vocation is discerned to be in the lay order rather than the ordained order will be so affirmed.

Discerning the ministry to which one is called is a matter of prayerful deliberation. One useful resource for this is Listening Hearts, by Suzanne L. Farnham, et. al., Morehouse Publishing, 1991. This book also contains an extensive annotated bibliography. Nominees should also acquaint themselves with the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, as they pertain to ordained ministry (see Title III, Canons 5, 8 & 9).

N.B. God's call to ordination is always tested by the community of the faithful and its consent to ordination is an act undertaken for the whole Church. For a Christian, there is no such thing as an exclusively private faith or a private call to ordination. A fundamental purpose of the process outlined in this handbook is to establish the integrity and meaning of each call in order that the Church might authenticate that call.

INITIAL STEPS

A. National Canons and Diocesan Policy

➤ Title III.8.2

A confirmed adult communicant in good standing may be nominated for ordination to the Priesthood by the person's congregation or other community of faith."

➤ Diocesan Policy

A nominee must have been a communicant in good standing of the presenting priest's congregation, in active leadership for no less than one year prior to January 1st of the year in which the individual is being proposed as a nominee for ordination to the priesthood.

B. Letter of Information and Discernment

A person who has been identified by a congregation or community of faith, or who believes he/she is called to priesthood should consult with his/her rector or vicar. If the congregation of which the person is a member has no rector or vicar, the person should contact the Senior Warden of the congregation. The Senior Warden shall contact the Bishop, who will assign a priest to act as "presenting priest."

If the rector/vicar or other presenting priest concurs in the individual's desire to begin the formal diocesan process, he/she shall write a *Letter of Information* to the Bishop stating that the individual seeks to engage in the formal process of discernment for ordination to the priesthood. The *Nominee Information Form* shall be completed by the individual and a copy enclosed with the *Letter of Information*.

C. Nominee's Packet

The individual so named as a nominee shall receive a Nominee Packet which contains:

- 1) Autobiographical and Self-Reflection Questionnaire
- 2) Behavior Screening Questionnaire
- 3) Medical Report Form
- 4) Background Check Authorization Form
- 5) Financial Information Form.

D. The Process of Discernment within the Congregation

Once the presenting priest has determined that the process should move forward he/she shall nominate and the Vestry/Bishop's Committee shall approve a Congregational Discernment Committee (CDC) composed of members of the congregation. The purpose of the CDC is to aid the nominee in an in-depth exploration of his/her call to ordination, to identify the nominee's evident gifts and fitness for ordination to the priesthood, as well as to identify any factors which might be a hindrance to ordination. Appendix A of the Handbook contains suggestions for establishing a CDC and guidelines for its work in authenticating and affirming the call of the nominee.

To assist its work, the CDC will receive a copy of the nominee's *Autobiographical and Self-Reflection Questionnaire*.

At the conclusion of the work of the CDC, the CDC should determine 1) that the nominee be presented to the Vestry/Bishop's Committee for nomination for admission to postulancy; or 2) that the nominee needs additional discernment, or needs to wait for some other reason; or 3) that the nominee should not be presented to the Vestry/Bishop's Committee.

If the CDC believes that additional discernment or delay is needed, the CDC shall draft a report to be presented to the presenting priest and the nominee explaining what needs to happen for the nominee to proceed further.

If the CDC believes that the person should not go forward, the CDC and the presenting priest shall meet with the nominee to discuss the decision of the CDC. The Committee shall make a report to the Bishop regarding its decision not to recommend the nominee to the Vestry/Bishop's Committee.

If the CDC believes that the person should be recommended for nomination, the CDC shall draft a final report to the presenting priest which should include a summary of the topics discussed in the meetings of the CDC and the CDC's recommendations.

The presenting priest may determine that further work by the nominee is required before the nominee is presented. Or, the presiding priest may determine that presentation would be inappropriate. If the presenting priest determines that further time or discernment is needed before the nominee is presented, or that the process should not continue, he/she shall inform the nominee in writing.

When the presenting priest and the CDC concur that the nominee should proceed in the process, the CDC will present its final written report with recommendations to the Vestry or Bishop's Committee.

THE NOMINATION PROCESS

A. Nomination for Admission to Postulancy

A nominee for admission as a Postulant for ordination to the priesthood shall provide to the Bishop the following:

- 1) Full name and date of birth,
- 2) The length of time resident in the Diocese of West Missouri,
- 3) Evidence of Baptism and Confirmation,
- 4) A statement as to whether an application for Nomination has been made previously for Postulancy in any diocese,
- 5) A description of the process of discernment by which the nominee has been identified for ordination to the Priesthood,
- 6) The level of education attained and if any, the degrees earned and the areas of specialization, including official transcripts, unless such transcripts have been submitted previously.
- 7) A letter of support by the nominee's congregation or other community of faith, including a statement committing the congregation or other community of faith 1) to pledge to contribute financially to the preparation and 2) to involve itself in such preparation.
If it be a congregation the letter shall be signed and dated by at least two-thirds of the Vestry or the Bishop's Committee and the Member of the Clergy or Leader exercising oversight,
- 8) A written request for admission to Postulancy,
- 9) A copy of his/her *Autobiographical and Self-Reflection Questionnaire*
- 10) A copy of the final report from the CDC
- 11) A statement of support for the nominee from the presenting priest

B. Nomination to Admission

- 1) The Bishop shall confirm that the nominee is a confirmed adult communicant of the nominating congregation
- 2) The Bishop shall notify the COM of the nomination and may invite the nominee to the Annual Vocations Conference
- 3) The Bishop shall confer with the nominee prior to the Vocations Conference
- 4) The nominee shall complete the evaluations as outlined in Item C prior to the pre-Vocations Conference interview with the Bishop.
- 5) The COM shall present its evaluation and recommendations to the Bishop following the Vocations Conference.
- 6) The Bishop will confer with the nominee following the Vocations Conference and may admit the nominee as a Postulant for ordination to the Priesthood.

C. Evaluative Materials

1. The nominee must submit to and pay for a Background Check covering misconduct, driving records, credit records, and criminal records through

Oxford Document Co. and ChoicePoint, as required by the Diocese. This process is arranged through the Bishop's Office, and is initiated once the signed authorization form is received from the nominee.

2. Two wellness examinations are required.
 - a. The nominee must arrange (and pay for) a medical examination by the physician of his/her choice. A copy of the required medical report form is included in the Nominee Packet. This may be done at any time.
 - b. The nominee will undergo a psychological examination arranged and paid for by the Diocese of West Missouri.

Following the psychological interview a nominee may be asked to have a psychiatric interview. The nominee is responsible for the cost of the psychiatric interview, and the report goes to the nominee. Should the nominee wish to continue in the process he/she must have the psychiatrist send a copy of his/her report to the Bishop.

D1. Vocations Conference

The Commission on Ministry will conduct nominee interviews normally on the first Friday and Saturday in October at the Vocations Conference. However, the COM may interview a nominee at other times at the discretion and direction of the Bishop.

The Vocations Conference begins with a Quiet Day on Friday for nominees and spouses/partners, and continues Friday evening and Saturday morning through and including lunch. Spouses/Partners should be present for the entire Vocations Conference. The interviews will follow the outline of the "Characteristics Required for Persons Seeking Ordination" listed in Appendix B. Before the interviews, the COM will have reviewed the written materials submitted by the nominee. During the interviews the nominee will be given an opportunity to ask and answer questions and make comments.

Following the Conference the COM reports its findings and recommendations to the Bishop. These recommendations should be submitted to the Bishop no later than ten days after the end of the Vocations Conference. The COM serves in an advisory capacity; the final decision rests with the Bishop.

Each nominee meets with the Bishop after the Vocations Conference. The Bishop's pastoral judgment may be that the nominee 1) be admitted a postulant, 2) continue the discernment process under the direction of the COM or CDC, or 3) discontinue the process.

D2. Vocations Conference – Total Ministry Teams

Prior to the Vocations Conference the Commission on Ministry, or a subcommittee thereof, shall interview the members of a Total Ministry Team in the congregation or ministry setting to be served by that team. Thereafter the nominee for priesthood from the Total Ministry Team may be invited by the Bishop to attend the Vocations Conference.

The Vocations Conference begins with a Quiet Day on Friday for nominees and spouses, and continues Friday evening and Saturday morning through and including lunch. Spouses should be present for the entire Vocations Conference. The interviews will follow the outline of the A Characteristics Required for Persons Seeking Ordination listed in Appendix B. Before the interviews, the COM will have reviewed the written materials submitted by the nominee. During the interviews the nominee will be given an opportunity to ask and answer questions and make comments.

Following the Vocations Conference the COM shall report its findings and recommendation regarding the Total Ministry Team and the nominee to the Bishop. These recommendations should be submitted to the Bishop no later than ten days after the end of the Vocations Conference. The COM serves in an advisory capacity; the final decision rests with the Bishop.

Each nominee meets with the Bishop after the Vocations Conference. The Bishop's pastoral judgment may be that the nominee 1) be admitted a postulant, 2) continue the discernment process under the direction of the COM or CDC, or 3) discontinue the process.

E. Admission as a Postulant

The Bishop will notify the nominee in writing that he/she has been admitted as a postulant for ordination to the priesthood.

F. Ember Letters

Until ordained to the transitional diaconate, postulants and candidates are required by canon (Title III, Canon 8, Section 3(e) to communicate with the Bishop, in writing, four times a year at Embertide. The Standing Committee and the COM may request to review Ember Letters.

F. COM Liaison

The COM will assign two of its members to the postulant as liaisons to serve throughout the formation process. The primary role of the liaison is one of accountability, that is, 1) to hear any concerns or issues the postulant/candidate has about the process which the postulant/candidate wishes to convey to the COM and 2) to discern from the postulant/candidate how he or she is addressing issues and/or concerns raised about him/her at the Vocations Conference and/or via the School for Ministry and to convey that information to the COM.

G. Formation

Postulants shall pursue a program of preparation for ordination to the Priesthood as developed by the Bishop and the COM. The program shall include theological training, practical experience, emotional development and spiritual formation.

H. Other

No postulant or candidate may serve as a member of a Vestry or Bishop's Committee, or as a delegate to Diocesan Convention.

CANDIDACY

A Candidacy Interview

Those postulants who have completed two years of seminary and those postulants who have completed two years of preparation in the School for Ministry may apply and be interviewed by the Bishop and Commission for admission to Candidacy. Postulants will be notified of the date of the meeting well in advance of the interview day.

At least one month prior to the candidacy interview the postulant shall provide to the Bishop and COM:

- 1) A letter of application from the Postulant stating the Postulant's date of admission to postulancy. The letter shall include a report from the Postulant as to his/her academic experience and personal and spiritual development since being admitted a postulant.
- 2) A letter of support by the Postulant's congregation or other community of faith. If it be a congregation, the letter shall be signed and dated by at least two-thirds of the Vestry or Bishop's Committee and by the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight.
- 3) The final evaluative report written by the supervisor of the Postulant's Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), as well as the reflective overview of the CPE experience written by the Postulant. Similar reports should be provided for postulants who participated in an alternative clinical educational program as approved by the Bishop and the COM.
- 4) An evaluation and recommendation from the seminary or from the dean of the School for Ministry.

Following the interviews the Commission shall evaluate each postulant and prepare a report for the Bishop.

B. Once the Bishop receives the report from the COM the Bishop, with the approval of the Standing Committee, may admit the applicant as a Candidate for ordination to the Priesthood.

ORDINATION

A. Ordination to the Diaconate for those called to Priesthood

Candidates for ordination are referred to Title III, Canon 8, Section 6 in regard to the requirements for ordination to the Diaconate

B. Ordination to the Priesthood

Transitional Deacons applying for ordination to the priesthood are referred to Title III, Canon 8, Section 7 in regard to the requirements for ordination to the Priesthood.