

SECTION I

Discernment

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DISCERNMENT

Discernment is not undertaken only by those who may feel called to specialized ministry in the church. Throughout our lives we are all in discernment. When faced with the need to make a decision, we examine our choices or options in light of past experience, knowledge, known facts, and future goals or dreams. Sometimes this is done in a split second; other times, as when choosing a specific career path or a life partner, it happens over the course of months or years.

We, as Christians, are all ministers by virtue of our baptism. Through baptism, God calls us to share in Christ's eternal Priesthood. Every baptized Christian is called upon to bring the presence of Christ into the home, workplace, and community. The Church both in this Diocese and at large highly values lay ministry. Even though the Church does not always do an adequate job of reaffirming this fact, it can never be repeated enough that ordained clergy are not "professional" Christians, and lay people are absolutely not "amateur" Christians. Such a perception fundamentally betrays the true nature of ministry in the Church in which a Christian's calling to ministry comes first and foremost through baptism and *all* Christians are called to specific forms of ministry in the Church and the world. A clergyperson is called to the particular ministry of equipping and encouraging all the baptized in order that they may fulfill their unique ministerial callings. The call to ordained ministry is different than calls to other ministries, but it is absolutely not a higher or "more Christian" calling than being, for example, a teacher, plumber, or senator.

Not everyone possesses the gifts for ordained ministry, just as most ordained ministers do not share all the same gifts and talents as other members of their congregations. And one must recognize that when we mean gifts, the Church is not *only* talking about abstract talents or potentials; being gifted for ordained ministry is not merely a matter of having a passion for the Kingdom of God, or a talent for interpreting Scripture, or the ability to speak well, or the patience and empathy to care for the lost, lonely, sick, and dying – although these are of course of great benefit in ordained ministry. In the context of discerning a call to ordained ministry, "gifts" takes on a more holistic, communal meaning. This includes a certain ability to navigate the frustrating life of the Church in the world. It means the desire *and* ability to dedicate a considerable amount of time and effort to receiving the tools for ministry. It means the ability to commit to a regular schedule of study, preaching, and pastoral care that congregations deserve. It means, in the end, an awareness that God's call to ordained ministry is not a call to just another job – like baptism, it is a call that, once discerned and accepted, means a lifelong commitment and a fundamental change in a person's life that in some ways can never be reversed. Because ordained ministry is not a private revelation or right, but a calling from God through a community *for* a community, a community must help decide if God truly has called you to ordained ministry or if God has called you, through your gifts, to some other form of equally valid and important lay ministry. A Discernment Process and Discernment Committee help to clarify God's call in your life.

The heart of discernment is a series of ongoing conversations in relationship and community. People should by no means enter the discernment process only after they believe themselves to have a clear call to ordained ministry. There are many ways that God calls people to ordained ministry, and that call may be recognized in one's community before it is recognized in oneself. One may also have a general passion for the Kingdom of God in the world, and it is through the discernment process that one can discover where that passion is put to its best use, be it through ordained or some other ministry. The formal discernment process is certainly meant to help those called to ordained ministry discover their call, but it is just as important in helping make clear God's calling if it is not to ordained ministry. Discerning a call to something other than ordained ministry through this process should never be perceived or presented as a failure. The only failure possible in the discernment process occurs when someone enters into a ministry for which he or she is not called, which means that allowing someone to enter ordained ministry who has not been so called is just as much a failure of discernment as is failing to recognize a real call *to* ordained ministry.

Fundamental Guiding Principles of the Discernment Process

1. Discernment occurs in the context of the established and disciplined life of prayer and Scriptural meditation of each discerner and of each discerning community.
2. The purpose of discernment is a progressive discovery of God's will in all the subtlety and graciousness of that will.
3. The process of discernment calls for patient faithfulness, rather than for a particular result or outcome, and fully acknowledges the human particulars and context of the discerner's life (family, physical limitations, gifts and liabilities, temperament, finances, age, etc.)
4. Discernment encompasses the whole of the life-journey of the discerner.
5. Discernment offers the gift of rigorous insight and mature self-awareness as essential for sifting, sorting, and distinguishing between temptations and invitations.
6. Discernment is dynamic – it attends to the movements, growth, and evolution of the discerners.
7. Discernment takes place and is tested within the faith community and calls for patience, candor, and trust.
8. The indicators of appropriate discernment, for both the individual and the community, are peace, affirmation, consensus, a feeling of “right fit,” and courage.

DISCERNMENT PROCESS OUTLINE

Discernment to ordained ministry begins within the real relationships of a worshipping community and aims toward furthering healthy relationships within worshipping communities. For these relationships to have developed, one must show a commitment to life in Christian community over time. These are the reasons for the canonical requirement that a person be a resident and show a commitment through regular attendance and participation in a faith community in the Diocese of South Dakota for *at least* one complete calendar year prior to entering the formal discernment process.

So, assuming a person has committed him- or herself to the communal life of an Episcopal congregation in South Dakota, how does the discernment process begin? Everything starts with a faith community identifying a person as having the gifts, talents, and qualities they would want in an ordained minister. In some cases, this recognition may begin in the community and be brought to the attention of the individual; in others, the individual may first feel a sense of call and have it affirmed by the community.

The **general procedure** is as follows:

1. Either you or your community discover and make known that you may have gifts for ordained ministry; *then,*
 2. Talk to your priest; *then,*
 3. You and your priest will talk with your community leaders and elders (or Vestry/Bishop’s Committee/Mission Council) who will give you feedback. **You must have the support of your worshipping community.** It is vital that both you and the worshipping community understand that support consists in the community affirming that they would be willing to accept you as an ordained minister in that community. This does not mean you necessarily will return to that community, but a **community’s inability to make this affirmation means that they do not discern a call to ordained ministry for you;** *then,*
 4. You and your priest will talk with your Bishop and the Missioner for Leadership Development (MLD); *then,*
 5. You will be expected to attend the annual Discernment Retreat. The discernment process *cannot* proceed until you have attended one of these retreats, and you must make known your intention to attend at least one month prior to the retreat you will attend. It is here that you will work with lay leaders and clergy (including the Bishop) from throughout the Diocese through a series of reflections and conversations to determine what God’s call in your life is.
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| <p>A. If a call to lay ministry is affirmed, <i>then,</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. You will be given tools for further clarification about your call to lay ministry and then work with your priest to define that ministry and begin training and licensing or further exploring what your ministry in the world looks like. A good resource to work through with your priest is <i>Conversations with Scripture and with Each Other: Spiritual Formation for Lay Leaders</i>, M. Thomas Shaw, SSJE. | <p>B. If your call to the diaconate or priesthood is provisionally discerned, <i>then,</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. You will sign a Discernment and Formation Covenant (DFC) between you and the Diocese in which you affirm your understanding and acceptance of the expectations for formal ministerial formation and the responsibility the Diocese has for helping you fulfill those expectations; <i>then,</i>7. You will be given an evaluation to see what knowledge and skills for ordained ministry you already possess and what areas can be |
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improved in order to ensure that you are equipped for success during your formal ministerial education (whether through Niobrara School for Ministry or another accredited theological school); *then,*

8. You will be assigned a mentor who will work with you in drafting an Individual Ministerial Formation Plan (IMFP), that will guide your work first in completing the requirements of Iglúwiŋyeya (described below) prior to postulancy and then formal ministerial education; *then,*

9. A continuing discernment committee/group will be formed in your local community. This group will serve at least two functions. First, it will ensure that you continue to clarify your sense of call; in this process you and/or your community may come to the conclusion that you do not have, at the current time, a call into ordained ministry, and the committee will be responsible for relaying that information to the Bishop and Missioner for Leadership Development. Second, this group will do all that it can to support your journey through formal ministerial formation and hold the Diocese accountable to its commitments; *then,*
10. Upon completing the Iglúwiŋyeya curriculum to the satisfaction of your mentor and the MLD, you will apply for postulancy. Part of your work with your mentor, the Bishop, and the MLD will include discerning whether your educational formation will occur best through the Niobrara School for Ministry, an extension seminary program, or a residential seminary; *then,*
11. You will enter into your formal educational component of your formation and discernment. Regardless of what form this takes, you will be expected to maintain regular communication with the Diocese in the form of, for instance, Ember Day letters. During this portion of your formation, regardless of what form your education takes, the MLD will be available to help provide additional resources and consultation to ensure success. This aid is available as much for those in residential seminaries as it is for those in the Niobrara School for Ministry. Upon completing $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of your formal ministerial education, you may apply for candidacy; *then,*
12. Assuming the requirements for ordination as described in Canon VII (for the permanent diaconate) or VIII (for the priesthood) have been fulfilled, you will be ordained to Holy Orders. Those who are pursuing ordination to the priesthood will first be ordained as transitional deacons, and will serve in diaconal ministry for not less than six months, and, assuming they meet the above stated requirements, will then be ordained to the priesthood.

While the above describes the procedure for moving from initial discernment to the ministry to which one is called (lay, ordained diaconal, or ordained priestly), one should *always* keep in mind four things:

First, the process is not mechanical or automatic; you should never have the expectation that simply because you put in the effort you deserve to move to the next step. The discernment process, when done correctly, is guided by the Holy Spirit and as such will not always conform to our expectations for a neat and orderly stepwise progression.

Second, in addition to the process being led by the Spirit, it is also undertaken by and guided by fallible human beings who do not always make correct decisions or hear God's voice. This is as true for individuals discerning their call as it is for those who are helping them through this process, and this is all the more reason why it is vital that discernment take place in community and with as much transparency as possible. The more that communities, rather than isolated individuals, are involved in the process, the more opportunities there are to provide a corrective to human fallibility and point out when the urgings of the Spirit may be overlooked.

Third, discerning that one is not called to ordained ministry and discontinuation from this process, whether this is initiated by the discernor him or herself or by those tasked with facilitating the process of discernment, only means, except in certain exceptional cases, that *at this time* a call to ordained ministry has not been discerned. Excepting those instances where a person has been permanently barred from re-entering the discernment/ordination process, there is the possibility that a call into ministry may be discerned in the future (for the regulations concerning readmission to the ordination process after discontinuation, see Title III.6, III.7, and III.8 of the *Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church*).

Fourth, it must always be remembered that ordination results from a call from God through the community and is no individual's *right*. As with obviously inappropriate reasons for seeking ordination, such as a desire for power, authority, or recognition, an unyielding belief that one has a right to ordination will be regarded as a clear indication that an individual *does not* have a call into ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of South Dakota.

INITIAL STEPS IN DISCERNMENT

Assuming that you have been a resident of a faith community in the Diocese of South Dakota for at least one year, what follows is the first stage of discernment generally undertaken prior to attending an annual discernment retreat:

1. Your faith community may have identified you as having the leadership qualities of ordained ministry (faith communities should reference the below "Aids and Expectations for Congregational Discernment" for what qualities may indicate a person is called to ordained ministry, as well as what indicators warning that a person *does not*, demonstrate these qualities) or you may be experiencing a feeling of being called to ordained ministry.
2. If you wish to pursue a process to discern the validity of the identification or feeling, meet with the priest in charge of your congregation for an initial discussion.
3. The priest will advise the Bishop's Committee/Mission Council/Vestry of your intentions to receive preliminary community involvement, context, and feedback. This group may evaluate you on Christian commitment, personal stability, intellectual curiosity, leadership style, ability to communicate, and personal characteristics.
4. Begin thinking about your Christian journey. After the retreat you will be expected to translate this into a Spiritual Autobiography. This will not only describe your growth in faith up to this point in life, but should also include a description of your involvement in your local congregation, how you are living out your baptismal covenant in the world, the individual and communal indications of a call into ministry, and a summary of the work you have done under the advisement of your local congregation after that identification of your call.
5. Request that your priest (or other leader of your local faith community) speak with the MLD and then (or at the same time) the bishop in order to discuss whether it is appropriate to attend the next discernment weekend.

AIDS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR INITIAL DISCERNMENT

Below are listed guidelines for helping individuals and congregations begin the process of identifying those who may have calls into ordained ministry. However, as described above, the work of discerning the nature of one's ministry is the responsibility of every Christian by nature of his or her baptism and so the basic principles of discernment here provided may just as well be used in helping individuals discover the specific natures of their ministries as Christians (be they in or out of the church).

Qualities Sought in Potential Clergy (Deacon or Priest)

A person *may* be called by God into ordained ministry if he or she:

1. Has regularly attended and participated in the life of the local church for a minimum of one year (this is a canonical requirement; what constitutes regular attendance and participation may differ depending upon the local community; if a person has been attending for at least a year, but you are unclear about whether their attendance and participation is "regular," it would help to contact the Bishop for further guidance);
2. Demonstrates commitment to knowing and following Jesus Christ;
3. Shows strong signs of growth toward maturity as a Christian (it may help to look for the Fruits of the Spirit as described by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23 as an indication of growing Christian maturity);
4. Understands and accepts the vows that will be taken at ordination (specifically, that ordained ministry is not a "job" that one can quit if it becomes dissatisfying, but is instead like the commitment made in marriage or baptism. It will help to review pp. 510, 526-51 of the *Book of Common Prayer*);
5. Shows an ability to proclaim and live the gospel in the Church and in the world. This would include the capacity to offer an example of faith and discipleship, to collaborate effectively with others, and to inspire the Church in its mission to the world as community builders and reconcilers;
6. Demonstrates the gifts of being a non-anxious presence in the midst of difficult pastoral situations and the ability to mediate disagreements, especially within the Church;
7. Exhibits a capacity for and willingness to lead public worship (an individual need not be an exceptionally talented public speaker or read portions of the liturgy every week, but this person should have experience reading scripture or leading other parts of the liturgy, and these activities should be performed joyfully and not begrudgingly);
8. Talks clearly about one's vocation to ministry and mission (affirming a love for God, the life of the Church, and the world are necessary for this calling, but not sufficient – all Christians should strive for these things; one must look further for indicators such as a desire to equip other Christians for ministry through preaching and teaching, being drawn to administer the sacraments to the community, etc.);
9. Shows an understanding of the Christian faith and a desire for a deeper understanding, has an openness to mystery and God's new revelation, and a vision of what the community of faith might become (one should look for a desire for deeper engagement and understanding of Scripture and the Book of Common Prayer as well as a firm grasp on the basic tenets of the Christian faith);
10. Shows evidence of a commitment to a spiritual discipline;
11. Is mature and stable enough to sustain the demanding role of an ordained minister and to face change and pressure in a flexible and balanced way. This is largely determined by a person's ability to know when they need help from others and the ability to tend to their own health and well-being;
12. Demonstrates self-awareness and self-acceptance as a basis for developing open and healthy professional, personal, and pastoral relationships as a minister;
13. Has the necessary intellectual capacity, stamina, and quality of mind to undertake a course of formation and preparation (this does not mean that someone must have always performed well in educational endeavors, but he/she must show a capacity for critical reasoning and problem solving, some capacity *and* desire to grow in knowledge, and the ability to communicate what was learned).

Qualities That May Indicate Someone Does Not Currently Have a Call to Ordained Ministry

It may be possible that there are people in your community that exhibit some of the signs described above, or feel themselves called to ministry, but if they exhibit any of the characteristics listed below, the community at the very least should proceed more cautiously and critically in the process of discernment as these characteristics may well indicate that a person *does not* have a call into ministry at this time:

1. Has the individual been a resident in the Diocese of South Dakota for less than a year, or has he or she attended worship and other gatherings extremely infrequently? (the first of these automatically means that the individual canonically cannot enter the formal discernment process)
2. Does the person have a history of causing division, harm, or conflict within the Church, his/her family, or the larger community, of which he/she continues to be unrepentant, either by continuing the behavior or by showing no remorse or regard for past harms? (It is important to note that a past history of causing harm in most cases does not automatically prevent a person from receiving a call into ordained ministry – we believe that we are all sinners who can be transformed by God's grace; the warning sign is that the person shows no indications that he/she has not accepted this offer of transformative grace; furthermore, this is a warning sign that most often will not be observed by the individual in question and *must* be brought forward by the community)
3. Does the individual show little or no desire to grow in the Christian life?
4. Does the individual regularly refuse to actively participate in worship, or does so only begrudgingly?
5. Is the individual unable to clarify why he or she feels called into ministry beyond a general love of God, the Church, or the welfare of the world?
6. Is this a person whom your congregation would not accept as an ordained minister?
7. Does the individual lack characteristics that are necessary for successful pastoral ministry, such as humility, integrity, patience, self-control, empathy, etc.? If these qualities are lacking, does the individual show no desire or attempt to develop them?
8. Does the individual appear to have motives for becoming an ordained minister other than a call from God and a desire to serve God's people? For instance, does it appear the person wants to be ordained in order to receive authority, power, or prestige? (If there is the suspicion that such ulterior motives may be present, then the congregation should be cautious in moving forward; however, if a person has openly admitted to these ulterior motives as the primary reasons he/she is seeking ordination, then that is clear indication that he/she is not currently called to ordained ministry and should not be allowed to go further in the process)
9. Does the individual believe that he or she has a right to be ordained, or does this person consistently become indignant at the suggestion that ordination is not a right?
10. Does the person show little regard for their own physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual well-being? Does he or she show a significant lack of self-awareness? (for instance, a person may consistently engage in insulting, demeaning, or insensitive behavior that he/she is unaware of or consider humorous)
11. Does the person disparage the need for further education, or believe that any additional ministerial formation stands as an unnecessary obstacle to ordination?

Again, many of the above characteristics in an individual point toward the possibility that he or she is not currently called to ordained ministry or prepared to accept such a call. However, it is still the responsibility of the local congregation to make a person aware that he/she is exhibiting these characteristics and provide them the support needed to rectify them. In some instances, once these situations are resolved, a person may continue with the discernment process. In other instances, the resolution of these issues will itself constitute the recognition that one is not called to ordained ministry (as in the case of someone who only desires to be ordained for the power or authority it confers).

Expectations during Initial Stages of Discernment

The following are expected of both an individual and his/her congregation in the initial stages of discernment. It is through these activities and conversations that a community comes to best begin to identify whether an individual has the characteristics that point towards or away from a call to ordained ministry. Furthermore, those who will continue in the discernment process by attending a discernment retreat will need to incorporate evidence of engaging in the following activities and practices in their Spiritual Autobiographies. It is the responsibility of the priest or other leaders in the congregation to ensure that those who are discerning a call to ordained ministry are given opportunities to engage in these activities and practices.

1. Spiritual Formation

It is expected that those put forward by congregations to continue the discernment process will already engage in certain spiritual disciplines well before beginning the discernment process. Nevertheless, once the process has commenced, it is absolutely necessary that those discerning become even more conscious of forming themselves after the mind of Christ. Early efforts are to be made to further develop life habits of daily prayer, meditation, the reading of Scripture, and other spiritual practices. Living a life that has a proper balance between a commitment to God, to family and career, and to recreation and relaxation is the general goal. An exceptional resource for exploring different spiritual disciplines and how they can be integrated into one's life is Richard Foster's *A Celebration of Discipline*.

2. Study and Reflection

Study and reflection, followed by discussion of the content with a mentor, highlights and helps make connections between the reading and the experience of the person(s) discerning a call to ministry. This also provides good preparation for the theological education component of the ordination process.

A small example of books that might be beneficial in this area are:

- a. The new Church's Teaching Series
- b. Books on lay, diaconal, or priestly ministries, so that the person may gain greater clarity into which form of ministry they may be called (see below for summaries of diaconal and priestly ministry)
- c. The Vision and Mission Statements of the Diocese. Specifically, they shall reflect on what it means to be a sacred circle gathered around Jesus in prayer, loving and serving God and our neighbor in Jesus' name, and how we can restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.
- d. *Experiencing Faith*, Lichfield Curriculum, Pt. 1 (available from the MLD), and other books on discernment, such as *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community*, Suzanne G. Farnham, Joseph P. Gill, R. Taylor McLean, Susan M. Ward, or *Exploring Life and Calling*, Gary Black, Jr.
- e. The Catechism in the *Book of Common Prayer* (p. 845)
- f. Resources that pertain to other licensed ministries, e.g., catechist, preacher, etc.

The Ministry of Deacons

Coming from the Greek *διάκονος* (*diákonos*) the word deacon means "servant" or "envoy." The unique role of the deacon among the ordained is to represent Christ and his redemptive love in the world, and to interpret the needs, concerns and hopes of the world to the Church. Deacons help the baptized to find places of connection with God in their lives beyond Sunday morning. Deacons are not those who alone do the work of the Church in the world; rather, they gather, lead, equip, and

inform the baptized in that work. In all their work, deacons enhance the ministry of the laity; they do not supplant it.

In accordance with Canon III of The Episcopal Church, deacons must be academically trained in the Holy Scriptures, theology, and the tradition of the church. They must also be familiar with *diakonia* and the diaconate, demonstrate human awareness and understanding, exemplify spiritual development and discipline, and undergo extensive practical training and experience.

Because the diaconate is non-stipendiary, those called to this ministry must exhibit the energy necessary for work both in and outside the church. Deacons serve under the authority of the Bishop, and are assigned by the Bishop in the diocese. Deacons will, in most cases, work under the direct supervision of a priest, and the capacity to work comfortably in that relationship is fundamental. Deacons will be expected to have a spiritual discipline and seek regular continuing education opportunities in order to grow in their vocation.

The Ministry of Priests

The word priest comes from the Greek *πρεσβύτερος* (*presbyteros*), meaning “elder.” A priest is ordained to “represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a pastor to the people; to share with the bishop in the overseeing of the Church; to proclaim the Gospel; to administer the sacraments; and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God.” (BCP p. 856) A priest is also trained in pastoral care and the conduct of public worship.

All baptized people are called to make Christ known as Savior and Lord and to share in the renewing of the world. The priest participates in this general ministry by enabling the rest of the people of God to live into that baptismal covenant. To that end, the priest convenes the Eucharistic assembly and in the larger exercise of the office enables the individual members of Christ’s body to discover and live out their particular vocations.

Parochial priests have the responsibility of conducting worship, caring for the church building(s) and maintaining church records. Priests have the duty to ensure all persons in their charge receive instruction in Scripture, in the Outline of Faith (as presented in the Catechism in the BCP), in the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Church, and in the exercise of their ministry as baptized persons. Priests provide instruction in Christian stewardship, and must responsibly dispense discretionary charitable funds. They prepare people for baptism and confirmation or reception.

A locally trained priest is called out of his or her own congregation to serve that congregation in a non-stipendiary manner and under the direction of the superintending presbyter and the authority of the Bishop. The Bishop will assign the new priest a mentor. Priestly ministry in any other location in the diocese may be done with the prior approval of the Bishop. Priests are expected to seek regular continuing education opportunities in order to grow in their vocation, which includes Niobrara School for Ministry’s ministry weekends and summer seminary, or other equivalent education.

It is important to note that locally ordained priests are not “less” priests than stipendiary priests, but they do serve somewhat different needs. Locally ordained priests, while they are still expected to be available to their faith communities, do not have the same expectations placed upon them for full-time ministerial work. One may think of the distinction between locally ordained priests and stipendiary priests as akin to the relationship between volunteer firefighters and full-time, paid firefighters. Both receive training to be able to safely and effectively do their work, but there is often a much higher expectation place on the paid firefighter’s time because he or she is paid.

3. Participation in Ministry Gatherings

An essential part of the formation for ministry is participation in the various ministry gatherings throughout the year. These include:

- a. Participation at a Dakota Experience (required of all lay and ordained leaders in the Diocese).
- b. Niobrara Convocation, Diocesan Convention, and other organized Diocesan events.
- c. Other educational opportunities, such as Niobrara School for Ministry's Summer Seminary and Ministry Weekends. Any outside theological education undertaken during the discernment period will potentially be applied to the educational requirements necessary for the ministry to which the discerner is called.

4. Ministry Participation

While reading and reflection are taking place, the person seeking ordination, in collaboration with a guide from within the congregation (this person may be an ordained minister or a respected lay member), will identify a ministry area(s) in which to work during the ordination process. Suggested areas of ministry are:

- a. Outreach ministries, such as domestic violence shelters, homeless shelters, advocacy programs with the poor;
- b. Youth work both in the church and the community;
- c. Participation in the liturgy, and;
- d. Pastoral care, including visits to hospitals, nursing homes, jails and prisons.

Spiritual Autobiography

During Iglúwinyeya (described below), one component of discerning a call into ministry will be the composition of a "Spiritual Autobiography" in which he/she explains his/her growth in faith, understanding of call, how he/she came to that understanding, and a summary of his/her activity and learning during the initial stage of their discernment. These should not be more than 12 pages long, double spaced, in 11- or 12-point font (in a standard academic, serif font such as Times New Roman, Times, Garamond, or Georgia). While there is no lower page limit, a guideline to aim for is 6 to 10 pages. Those composing their spiritual autobiographies will be significantly aided by reading William Placher's *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Wisdom on Vocation*.

DISCERNMENT RETREAT

Participation in an annual discernment retreat will be the first step in officially discerning a (provisional) call to the diaconate, priesthood, or some form of specialized lay ministry. If through this weekend it is discerned that an individual is called to ordained ministry, he or she will then formally enter the ordination process. If the call discerned is to lay ministry, that individual will be given resources to further explore the nature of that ministry and develop that call in his or her community.

Discernment retreats will usually be held one weekend a year and will include those in the initial stages of discernment, those who may be entering the ordination process that year, and select clergy and laity from around the diocese. This weekend will include times for reflection and conversation done in the context of fellowship, prayer, and worship. Furthermore, the ordination process and formation expectations will be clearly presented. These activities will culminate with a conversation with each individual in which it is determined whether he or she should at that time continue formation for lay, diaconal, or priestly ministry. It is also possible that the result of the discernment retreat is that a person should return to his/her home parish and continue general discernment.

The discernment retreat is the opportunity for certain other necessary preliminaries for those who do enter the formal ordination process. First, they will enter into a covenant with the Diocese in which they explicitly affirm that they understand the requirements and responsibilities both of the ordination process and the expectations of ordained ministers, and that consistent failure to fulfill these responsibilities will result in the suspension or discontinuation of one's ordination process. Similarly, the Diocese, particularly those responsible for ministerial formation and the ordination process, will commit to do all that is possible to equip people for success through the ordination and ministerial education processes.

There will also be an evaluation meant to determine what preparation those entering the ordination process bring with them. This will *not* be a test to determine whether people can enter the ordination process or not. Instead, this evaluation is meant to give the diocese a benchmark of what support can be given to those in the ordination process as they move from the discernment weekend to Iglúwiŋyeya (described below).

Attending a discernment retreat does not guarantee entrance into the ordination process, but it will be impossible to enter the ordination process without attending a discernment retreat. It is true that because they are offered only once every year, it takes considerable planning and personal initiative to ensure that one has fulfilled the preliminary discernment expectations at least one month prior to the discernment retreat in the year that one desires to enter the discernment process. However, such planning should be considered part of the discernment process itself. Once in the ordination process, whether one attends a residential seminary or the Niobrara School for Ministry, considerably more will be expected in terms of pre-established commitments and time management. The life of ordained ministry will then expect even more. College students who desire to enter seminary after graduation should make every effort to attend a discernment weekend no later than their junior year.

NOTE: Discernment retreats are the primary location where a provisional call into ordained ministry will be recognized, but anyone with a desire to know more about general discernment, formal discernment, and the ordination process is welcome and encouraged to attend. Those in the very earliest stages of discernment will generally return to their local communities and do more in-depth discernment with their priests, but having greater familiarity with the process and expectations for ordination will only help with that work. Discernment retreats will also be helpful for people who plan to be involved in local discernment committees. It is still expected that if you plan to attend a discernment weekend, you let the MLD know at least a month prior to the event.

IGLÚWIŊYEYA: PREPARING FOR SUCCESS

After the Retreat

If someone has provisionally been accepted into the ordination process, he/she should expect to receive his/her mentor within two weeks and will have input as to who this mentor is. In some instances, a mentor may be assigned at the retreat itself. Those who come to retreats will likely already have a sense of whether they should go to a residential seminary, pursue study through an extension program, or undertake the Niobrara School for Ministry's course of study. Still, one of the first roles a mentor plays is in helping an aspirant clarify which path to ministerial education works best for his/her personal circumstances, and, for those desiring to attend a residential seminary, to equip the student for a productive conversation with the Bishop about which seminaries to explore.

For those who undertake their course of study through the Niobrara School, their mentors will guide and direct them through the curriculum. In either case, the initial work a mentor does remains the same, and that work is to prepare each individual to succeed in his/her coming theological education.

The Inherent Difficulty of Theological Education

In whatever form it takes, education for ministry is challenging – and so it should be. When you step in front of a congregation vested with the authority to preach, teach, and administer the sacraments, and when you put on a collar and go out into your community, your congregation and larger community rightfully have certain expectations of you. Your responsibilities as an ordained clergyperson demand that you can lead the people of your congregation into deeper relationships with God and equip them for the ministries to which they have been called by nature of their baptism. While ordained ministry is a calling and therefore *more* than just another job, it is certainly not *less* than any other job. Regardless of whether one sees ordained ministry as a profession or as a skilled trade, there is minimum body of knowledge that must be acquired and set of skills in which one must demonstrate competence in order to responsibly engage in that work. Doctors must have a strong grasp of human anatomy and be able to correctly diagnose and treat illnesses before they can practice, and electricians must have an understanding of circuits as well show that they can safely wire a building before they can begin their trade.

In both of the above examples, it is obvious why these expectations exist: a physician's or electrician's botched job truly can imperil the physical safety or well-being of those around them. Incompetence in engineering leads to bridge collapses, bad wiring jobs cause buildings to burn down, under-qualified lawyers let innocent people go to prison, and unskilled surgeons kill patients. While it may be a commonly held belief that the stakes are not so high for ordained ministry, this assumption is completely untrue. Not only does the undertrained clergyperson have the real potential to put the physical safety of his or her congregants at risk, the stakes are even higher since *all* clergy are responsible for the spiritual welfare of those in their care. These higher stakes make it all that much more important that there be a minimum core of knowledge and practical skills that all ordained ministers are expected to possess.

In addition to the higher stakes inherent in the practice of ministry, the exercise of responsible ministerial duty requires a range of skills and knowledge that goes beyond most other professions or technical trades. To interpret the Bible and understand our history as a Church, one must have some awareness of cultures foreign both in time and place, as well as the ability to practice some degree of literary criticism. To engage the world theologically, one must develop a capacity for philosophical and abstract-conceptual thinking. To lead worship and preach effectively, one must be able to translate these other areas of knowledge and be practiced in public speaking and even a kind of theatricality. To make matters more complex, theological

education not only expects that a person can read critically and constructively and write effectively, but it has developed its own distinctive vocabulary that can sometimes make it seem like a foreign language.

No amount of preparation can or should be expected to make one's theological studies "easy" in any meaningful way. Wrestling with the profound mysteries of God and God's life in the world should demand some degree of struggle. However, it is possible to make what seems to many people to be an overwhelming and impenetrable difficulty less stressful and more manageable, and therefore better equip our people for success in their theological education.

Iglúwinyeya **[ig-LOO-ee-yah]**

Iglúwinyeya, which can also be spelled *igluwinyeya* or *igluwinyea*, is a Lakota word that means "to prepare oneself," "to get oneself ready," or "preparing oneself." In careful and slow speech it is pronounced **ig-LOO-ee-yay-yah**, but in everyday, conversational speech it can be pronounced **ig-LOO-ee-yay-ah** or even **ig-LOO-ee-yah**. This word can be used in Lakota to talk about the daily routine a person undergoes to get ready for the day, but it can also apply to more formal or special occasions. This word can even be used in cases of intellectual or spiritual preparation. A Lakota word has been chosen to describe this time of getting ready for ministerial formation as a way of remembering that L/Dakota thought and culture has played a significant role in forming the distinctive spiritual tradition of the Episcopal Church in South Dakota.

When students begin theological education, their teachers and even the texts they read will make certain expectations about what skills and knowledge these students bring to their studies, and often these sources can or will do little to let those who do not possess such skills and knowledge catch up. Some students are able to acquire this background at the same time that they are trying to learn the material before them, but it often comes at the cost of a diminished capacity to learn or quality of life. For others, this prospect proves overwhelming, leading them to believe they are unable to undertake the education necessary for their calling, when in fact it is not capacity to learn, but only a set of background skills and knowledge, that are lacking.

The Diocese is responsible for ensuring that all those engaging in theological education and ministerial formation are given the greatest possible chance for success. Knowing what was above described about the nature of theological education and how different students have responded to that environment, the Diocese has the responsibility to ensure that students have the background and skills that are assumed in the course of theological education. This course of study will further provide a sense of community and continuity between those who go to residential seminaries and those who remain in South Dakota to pursue their formal theological education.

This background can be broken into three areas: competence in written communication, study skills and academic integrity, and the vocabulary of theological and religious studies. With these areas in mind, those in the ordination process will be expected to meet these learning outcomes prior to being able to enter into formal theological education:

- I. Students will demonstrate competency in written communication for theological and ministerial studies when their writing is free of those explicit grammatical and stylistic mistakes that impede the communication of their ideas. Furthermore, they will need to demonstrate some familiarity with how to logically expound an idea or argument and are able to distinguish between levels of formality in written communication.
- II. Students will demonstrate competency in study skills when they can understand and apply methods for critical and engaged reading, have been exposed to a variety of effective note taking techniques and begun to discover which are most effective for their learning styles, and can make use of select techniques for improving retention and recall of information. Students will

- demonstrate competence in the expectations for academic integrity when they can accurately describe various forms of plagiarism, are aware of its severity, and can demonstrate the ability to properly credit other thinkers when making use of their work or ideas.
- III. Students will demonstrate competency in theology and religious studies terminology when they can show awareness of the definitions and proper usage of the 100 or so of the most frequent vocabulary items, a list of which will be provided, can make use of a theological dictionary to look up unfamiliar terms, and have knowledge of the building blocks of much for much of this technical terminology so that they can make educated guesses about the meanings of unfamiliar words as they appear.

The purpose of the evaluation taken during the discernment retreat is to identify what skills and knowledge students already have in relationship to these learning outcomes and what areas need strengthening. If there are areas that are identified as needing improvement, you will work with your mentor in consultation with the MLD to develop a course of study that meets those specific needs.

Once your mentor believes that a student has successfully completed his or her individual course of study and can meet the learning outcomes described above, the mentor and student will consult with the MLD to determine an appropriate means of evaluation. There is no one form of evaluation that every student must undergo in order to demonstrate competency. Some will benefit from a written evaluation, others may submit work done under the guidance of their mentor, others may have a conversation with the MLD, and others may meet these requirements with a passing grade in a pre-approved university or community college course.

One must always keep in mind that the degree to which one needs to strengthen these skills to reach the learning outcomes does not indicate one's intelligence or capacity to succeed in theological education, but has more to do with one's chosen field of study/career and proximity in time to that study. A student who is currently in college or a recent college graduate and studied religion or philosophy will probably need to do less of this preparatory work than someone who graduated 15 years ago with a degree in accounting, or someone who has spent most of his or her career in a more technical field.

It cannot be reiterated enough that the ability to pass this requirement before starting formal theological education is not meant to be an unnecessary bureaucratic hoop to jump through, but is oriented toward ensuring that those who engage in formal theological education are as equipped to succeed at possible. Even if it takes longer to accomplish these outcomes than one would have expected, this time spent in preparation will more than likely save you time in your overall course of study and make the experience more enjoyable.

***Iglúwinyeya* Suggested Materials**

1. Collegiate English Dictionary (Merriam-Webster's *or* Oxford American Dictionary)
 2. *Essential Theological Terms*, Gustavo Gutierrez
 3. *Oxford Concise Dictionary of the Christian Church*, A.E. Livingstone
 4. Handouts on Study Skills
 5. Handouts on Critical Reading
 6. Handouts on Effective Communication
 7. Handouts on Academic Integrity
 8. *The Seminary Student Writes*, Core, *or* *The Little, Brown Handbook*, Fowler (buying the most current edition is prohibitively expensive, however the 10th-12th are available used on Amazon for extremely low prices)
 9. *Garner's Modern English Usage*, Garner (older, but still acceptable, editions called *Garner's Modern American Usage*), *or* *Elements of Style*, Strunk and White
- + *What to Expect in Seminary*, Cetuk
+ *Doing Theological Research*, Pazmiño

THE LOCAL DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

We are all Christian ministers by virtue of our baptism. We are all called to share in Christ's eternal Priesthood. Every baptized Christian is called upon to bring the presence of Christ into the home, workplace, and community. It cannot be reiterated enough that this Diocese highly values lay ministry and sees lay ministry as the *primary* and *principle* ministry in the Church.

This Diocese does not hold to the view that ordination is a means of recognizing a mature Christian life or a successful lay ministry. In fact, the Diocese believes that "rewarding" successful lay ministers with ordination can actually be harmful because it can give the impression that lay ministry is invalid and must be validated through ordination. Success in lay ministry may be one component in identifying a potential call to ordination, but it cannot be the only factor. Likewise, academic accomplishment, a life of caring and compassion, a history of personal struggle and courage, and a strong personal sense of being called, are all valuable assets, but they do not of themselves mean a call to ordination. Part of the discernment process is determining when these parts of a person's life provide evidence of a call into ordained ministry and when they indicate a call to a specific lay ministry. Another vital part of the discernment process is finding ways to celebrate and validate those called to lay ministry *other than* putting these people forward for ordination.

We as a Church community believe that God calls out certain women and men for ordained leadership roles. This leadership must be composed of individuals well-chosen, highly trained and committed to serving God and the Church. The call to Holy Orders comes to the individual from God both internally through a personal recognition and externally through the Church, both at the level of the local congregation and the Diocese. Therefore, discerning a call is a matter neither of an individual with no regard for the judgement of the community nor of the community imposing its will with no regard for the wishes of the individual. Rather, discerning a call should always be a matter of an individual in and with a community.

After someone has attended a discernment retreat, he or she will return to his or her Church community with an affirmation of a call to explore more fully lay ministry, with an initial acceptance into the ordination process, or with a need to gain greater clarity as to whether it is lay or ordained ministry into which he or she is called. In all these situations, it is necessary to form a local Discernment Committee.

Local Discernment Committee Responsibilities:

- I. To provide a support network for the person seeking ordination during the entire ordination process;
- II. To continue to reflect on the person's spiritual and ministry formation, their relationship with Jesus Christ, and their involvement in the local congregation;
- III. To submit an evaluative report to the Vestry, Bishop's Committee or Mission Council which, if affirming of the person and his or her call to ordained ministry, becomes part of the application for postulancy. Once this report and the letter of support from the Vestry/Bishop's Committee/Mission Council have been received and the student has satisfactorily achieved the learning standards for the *Iglúwinyeya* curriculum, the application for postulancy can be sent to the person.
- IV. To submit an evaluative report to the Commission on Ministry, Priest in Charge, and Bishop if the person is affirmed for Lay Ministry.

Serving on a discernment committee provides everyone involved with the opportunity to continue listening for what call God has placed in their lives. While assisting a person in discerning a call to ministry, members of the local discernment committee are also called to reflect on their own baptismal ministry (this would be a good time to study and meditate on the liturgies for baptism and the reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant in the Book of Common Prayer). Ministry is not just about ordination, but also about exercising the gifts and talents given to us by God in specific ways for the good of the Church and for the communities in which we live.

Those coming before the local discernment committee will have spent several months coming to an understanding of what discernment means in their lives and will probably have read one or more of the following books. It will therefore prove helpful for members of the discernment committee to familiarize themselves with some or all of this material so that they may more fruitfully be in conversation with those who are discerning a call:

1. *Experiencing Faith*, Lichfield Curriculum, Part 1
2. *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community* (Suzanne G. Farnham, Joseph P. Gill, R. Taylor McLean, Susan M. Ward)
3. *Exploring Life and Calling*, Gary Black, Jr.

If a local discernment committee has been formed for a person who has entered into the ordination process, it is still vitally important the committee remember that this is a provisional status. If the local discernment committee does not feel that the person should continue the ordination process, the committee has an obligation to make this known to the diocese. At that point, it is likely that the ordination process will be suspended or discontinued. To discern that a person should no longer be in the ordination process, but continue as if they should, will be detrimental to the person seeking ordination, the congregation, and ultimately the Church at large. On the other hand, if the local discernment committee believes that the person should proceed into the ordination process, the committee is obliged to offer support and prayer for the person as he or she continues to discern their ministry.

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. Has this person remained a communicant in good standing? What does this person do in the congregation?
2. Has this person been active in this community for at least one year?
3. Does the person attend church regularly and have a disciplined prayer life?
4. What leadership role does this person play in the life of the church?
5. Is there anything about the person that would prohibit or hinder an effective ministry?
6. Does the person have the full support of their family?
7. Does the person have an understanding of their sense of vocation and of their gifts, abilities, and traits?
8. Can this person establish good relationships with many different types of people?

In addition to these questions, the questions and guidelines from pp. 7-8 of this section of the Handbook (Aids and Expectations for Initial Discernment) should continue to guide the local Discernment Committee.

EXPECTATIONS FOR A PERSON IN THE ORDINATION PROCESS

Below is an outline of the *minimum* expectations for a person who is involved in the ordination process. By signing the covenant at the discernment retreat, each person acknowledges that he/she understands the following expectations and are prepared to accept the responsibilities that these expectations entail. Likewise, the Diocese agrees to do everything possible to equip students to successfully fulfill these expectations. This covenant relationship is truly meant to foster bi-directional accountability: The Diocese will hold those in the ordination process accountable to the responsibilities to which they have agreed, and those individuals and their local congregations should make the Diocese aware if they feel that they are not receiving adequate support.

1. Be familiar with this *Handbook*.
2. Understand and commit the time and funds necessary for ordination.
 - a. Each person's ministry journey is unique, and many factors bear on each step. There is no concrete timeline, however a residential seminary is meant to take three years and the Niobrara School for Ministry (NSM) Course of Study has been set-up on a four-year schedule. Less time in NSM would only be possible if some training had already been previously completed and competency in those areas can be demonstrated.
 - b. Time Line: Generally, 3-5 years with no significant delays, and no longer than 7 years without having to reestablish competency in material studied prior to that period.
 - c. Time involves reading, study, reflection, writing, attendance at ministry classes and Summer Seminary (NSM), spiritual direction and discipline, home church ministry, and meetings with your mentor. The specific amount of time required to complete these assignments will differ from person to person. A full time student in seminary should anticipate between 24 and 48 hours of study per week outside of the classroom. Those working with a mentor in Niobrara School for Ministry or attending another school part-time should still anticipate between six and twelve hours of study each week if they want to remain on schedule.
 - d. Seminary expenses include tuition, books, cost of relocation, and regular living expenses. One can anticipate that without any financial assistance, attending residential seminary means an investment of between \$30,000 and \$50,000 per year. Most students do receive scholarships and grants to offset these costs, but it may still be necessary to invest between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per year out-of-pocket or in the form of student loans. Niobrara School expenses will include travel, registration fees, lodging, meals, and cost of books. Some scholarship aid is available for NSM students, and you should seek other sources for financial aid. The congregation or mission that calls you forth should also make every attempt to provide some financial support.
 - e. You are responsible for paying for the physical exam required - through your insurance if possible. The exam may be completed as part of your yearly physical.
 - f. In most cases, deacons and locally trained priests are non-stipendiary. There should be no expectation of income from this ministry beyond expense reimbursement.
 - g. With rare exceptions, deacons and locally trained priests will serve in the community that called them forth. Completing a seminary degree guarantees neither ordination nor job placement. There is likewise no guarantee of placement in the Diocese of South Dakota for seminary-trained ordinands.
3. You are expected to be an active part of a worshipping Episcopal community which can help you discern your call, support you, and honestly recommend (or not recommend) you for ordination. Those who attend a residential seminary are expected to keep their home congregation in South

Dakota aware of their progress. Those in the Niobrara School for Ministry are expected to remain, whenever possible, involved in the congregation in which they started the discernment process.

4. Discernment should be ongoing and designed to help you reach the decision to continue in the ordination process, delay at any step or stage, or remain in lay ministry.
5. There is such a thing as a failure of discernment, but that is *absolutely* not the same thing as not being ordained. Because discovering and living into one's Christian vocation is the primary purpose of discernment, the only time that a discernment can be said to have "failed" is if you end up ministering in a capacity that you have not been called to.
6. At all stages, you can stop or postpone the process. Also at all stages, you can be removed from the process at the Bishop's discretion, although there are very few scenarios in which a person will be removed without any prior warning or indications.
7. There is an expectation that, *as a leader*, you will be proactive in your process, communicating and cooperating with others involved, seeking forms of financial aid, anticipating and planning for necessary steps, *initiating certain steps and contacts*, asking questions or for clarification when needed, and otherwise participating fully in the process.
8. Application Forms for each stage of the process, plus the forms required for your psychological and physical exams, are made available by the Diocesan Office when appropriately requested by the applicant. **The Diocesan Office will give you the names of the approved examiners for the required psychological exams.** The diocese pays for this exam.
9. You will be assigned a mentor to help you plan your theological education and spiritual formation, and who will support, direct, and advise along the way. You may have input in the choice of your mentor, and if you are in the Niobrara School for Ministry you may set your pace of study, although this information should be included in your IMFP.
10. For those doing their primary theological formation through the Niobrara School for Ministry, it is required that you develop an IMFP in conversation with your mentor and that this IMFP be submitted to the MLD, as well as any modifications of this agreement that occur during your course of study.
11. You are expected to develop a Rule of Life with your mentor during *Iglúwinyeya*, regardless of the type of ministerial education you embark upon, and it is recommended that you get a Spiritual Director to work with you if you are attending a residential seminary (even if this is not required by your seminary). Early efforts are to be made toward forming your mind after the mind of Christ, developing life habits of daily prayer, meditation, and the reading of Scripture, and other spiritual practices. Living a life that has a proper balance between a commitment to God, to family and career, and to recreation and relaxation is the general goal.
12. Everyone at the *Iglúwinyeya* stage of the formation process and then all those who do their formation through the Niobrara School for Ministry are expected to have contact with their mentor at least once a month.
13. Whenever possible, formation shall take place in community, including other people preparing for ministry or ordination. For those undertaking most of their education in the state of South Dakota, this includes diocesan training and educational events.
14. You are expected to complete approximately 2/3 or 3/4 of your theological education before applying for Candidacy.
15. Everyone in the ordination process is required to keep the Diocese informed about their academic and financial circumstances.
 - a. Those who attend residential seminaries are required to have their seminaries send the Missioner for Leadership Development an official transcript at the end of every semester.

They are likewise expected to send certificates of completion *and* complete copies of evaluations for CPE and Field Education.

- b. Those in the Niobrara School for Ministry are expected to maintain a record of their theological education and formation and to undergo periodic evaluations.
 - c. Everyone, both in NSM and seminary, is expected to submit an annual report on their financial circumstances according to a form available through the Diocese.
16. Throughout your process prior to ordination, the Missioner for Leadership Development will administer tests to those in the Niobrara School for Ministry to test preparation and understanding per the Standards of Learning, just as those who attend residential seminaries will be given examinations in order to demonstrate competency in material learned. You must have your mentor's recommendation before requesting to take an exam. All examinations must be taken and satisfactory understanding must be demonstrated prior to setting an ordination date.
 17. Once you are ordained, you are expected to make use of continuing education opportunities.
 18. You are expected to communicate with the Bishop (written note, email, or scheduled phone call or face-to-face) four times a year, in Ember weeks, throughout the ordination process. One working towards the diaconate should reflect, in these reports, on one's academic, diaconal, personal, spiritual, and practical development. One working toward the priesthood should reflect on one's academic experience and personal and spiritual development. As you describe your experiences, tell how they affected you and what growth you experienced. You may also include other material or significant family experiences that will provide the Bishop with a picture of your life and work. These "conversations" with the Bishop are kept confidential. No one sees or hears them except you and the Bishop.
 19. Background checks and the results of your psychological and physical exams are also kept confidential by the Bishop.
 20. For those in NSM, the person seeking ordination - in collaboration with the mentor - will identify an area(s) of ministry in which to work during the ordination process.
 21. You are expected to have some familiarity with the National Constitution & Canons, Diocesan Constitution & Canons, and Diocesan Policy Manual. These are all available on the diocesan or national church websites.
 22. Attend Niobrara Convocations and Diocesan Conventions (during the course of study and after ordination for those in NSM and when in residence for those in seminary).