

# **MINISTRY DISCERNMENT HANDBOOK**



ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF FREDERICTON

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## **On the Work of Discernment**

Ministry is what Christians do; sometimes we do it well, sometimes not as well. As members of the Body of Christ, we minister by virtue of the fact that we are new creatures in Christ Jesus who are called to proclaim by word and example the Good News that we have been given.

Perhaps the most difficult concept for Christians to grasp is that discernment for ministry has very little to do with ordination. All Christians are called to be in a constant process of discerning what our Lord would have us do with the gifts and talents given us by the Holy Spirit. Many Christians who feel the urging to live out their Baptismal calling believe that they must be called to ordained ministry, because that is where the "real" work of ministry happens. In truth, very little of what ordained deacons, priests, and bishops do is specific to Ordered life. Historically, it was during the Middle Ages that virtually all of what has come to be called "ministry" devolved to the clergy. Fortunately, in recent years, the Church has begun to recapture the model of life in Christ as it appears in Scripture, whereby all members of the Body have responsibility to live life as ministers.

The difficulty with exploring discernment as if it were an either/or proposition as it relates to ordination is the continual propagation of the idea that if one is called to baptismal ministry this call is somehow inferior to ordained ministry. Some individuals are called to be ordained. The call comes from God not just to the individual but to the Church as well. Sometimes the call comes first to the Church and then ratified by the person; other times the person hears the call first and then asks the Church to ratify. In either case, the call to ordination is for the building up of the Church, not for the private use of the individual. I believe one of the most horrendous errors begins with the personal pronoun "my" attached to ministry / priesthood / diaconate / episcopate, or any other form of ministry exercised.

The work of discernment will normally be done when either the Church or an individual believes he or she is being called to ordained ministry. It is the work of the community of faith to either confirm the call to ordered ministry or to confirm the call to baptismal ministry, being as specific about the focus of ministry as possible. May it be our prayer that we who participate in discernment can assist all who desire to know more fully how God has called them and to what specific ministry. As we help others to discern, if we listen carefully, we just might hear something of our own call.

## **The Ministry**

Q. Who are the ministers of the Church?

A. The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.

Q. What is the ministry of the laity?

A. The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.

Q. What is the ministry of a bishop?

A. The ministry of a bishop is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese; to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the whole Church; to proclaim the Word of God; to act in Christ's name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ's ministry.

Q. What is the ministry of a priest or presbyter?

A. The ministry of a priest is to represent Christ and his Church. Particularly as 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.

Q. What is the ministry of a deacon?

A. The ministry of a deacon is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a servant of those in need; and to assist bishops and priests in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

Q. What is the duty of all Christians?

A. The duty of all Christians is to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God.

*From The Catechism, Book of Common Prayer 1978 ECUSA*

## The Baptismal Covenant

*Officiant* Do you believe in God the Father?  
*People* **I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

*Officiant* Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?  
*People* **I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.  
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

*Officiant* Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?  
*People* **I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.**

*Officiant* Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the  
breaking of bread, and in the prayers?  
*People* **I will, with God's help.**

*Officiant* Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into  
sin, repent and return to the Lord?  
*People* **I will, with God's help.**

*Officiant* Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?  
*People* **I will, with God's help.**

*Officiant* Will you seek to serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?  
*People* **I will, with God's help.**

*Officiant* Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of  
every human being?  
*People* **I will, with God's help.**

*Book of Alternative Services, pp. 158 - 159*

## **Introduction**

This handbook draws on the work of many throughout the Anglican Communion, including the Diocese of Pennsylvania and most notably Northwest Texas from whom specific permission for its use has been granted.

The ministry of all Christians is an extension of the ministry of Christ and the way we fulfill our Baptismal Covenant is by faithfully living out God's call to us, so that we might draw all the world to Christ. This is a high calling, but one that is carried out through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit in humble obedience and service.

All Christians are called to lives of service. We love because God first loved us and we express that love by learning to make service our way of life - service to God, to other persons, and to the Church as the community established by God at Pentecost to spread the Good News of the resurrected and living Lord, Jesus Christ. One of the 'jobs' of the Church is to discern, raise up and support members of the community as they discover how God is calling and equipping them to minister to and for the Body of Christ.

This handbook provides an introduction to community discernment and discovery of personal vocations to both lay and ordained ministries within the Diocese of Fredericton.

Four concepts used throughout this handbook should be defined at the outset:

**Christian Community:** a group of baptized people who worship together on a regular basis, in order to "go forth into the world in the power of the Spirit" to do mission. Members are intentional about living up to the promises made in their Baptismal Covenant.

**Vocation:** from *vocare*, to call; literally. God's call to an individual and the person's response. In this handbook, "vocation" is used broadly to refer to that way of life - secular or religious in context - in which the particular gifts God has given each individual may best be used to glorify God, for that person's own spiritual health, and in service to the world.

**Discernment:** a process of discovering God's will for one's life, through a prayerful relationship with God in the context of the Christian community. Discernment involves an ever-deepening self-knowledge, recognizing and assessing personal gifts and weaknesses and relating them to the needs of society and the Christian community, in order to "discern" - to distinguish or recognize - the next steps in the person's pilgrimage through life.

**Formation for Ministry:** growth and deepening of one's spiritual life through personal and corporate prayer; appropriate study, training or other preparation for specific forms of service; and the guidance of others in the Christian community.

In addition, the following definitions may assist to frame discernment discussions:

**Deacon** - The order of ministry primarily focused in the servant mission of the Church in the world with one of its principal aims "to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world."

"Vocational" Deacon - An individual ordained to the traditional diaconate not eligible for future ordination to the priesthood based on prior orders. The ministry of the deacon is not focused on parish or liturgical leadership but on servanthood. Vocational deacons are addressed "Deacon John Doe." Street dress is a clerical collar only during official duties including pastoral visitations and liturgical functions.

"Transitional" Deacon - An individual called to the order and ministry of priesthood ordained to the diaconate temporarily before being ordained priest. Transitional Deacons are addressed "The Rev'd John Doe." Street dress is a clerical collar.

Standards of training - The customary standard of education and training for ordination to the priesthood is graduate level study and a professional degree (Master of Divinity) including supervised field training, clinical pastoral education (CPE), internship, curacy (if possible) and 3-5 year program of post-ordination training (diocesan).

Normal Stream Ordination - Individuals called to ministry follow the "normal" pattern of undergraduate study, discernment, graduate study (Master of Divinity), ACPO, ordination, and post-ordination training.

Unique Stream Ordination - A term referring to an optional process of discernment, preparation and training for ordered ministry open to individuals with a maturity of years (50+) during which life and work experience is taken into account when considering the customary standards of training for ordination. Unique stream preparation for ordination is followed only with specific permission and the direction of the Bishop.

Prior Learning Assessment - The PLA evaluates an individual's admissibility to graduate studies without an undergraduate degree. All students are encouraged to study at the most advanced level possible assuring academic credit for studies undertaken and opening opportunities for further study.

Advisory Committee on Postulants for Ordination - ACPO. The Provincial Committee interviewing candidates for ordination to the priesthood on behalf of Bishops of the Province. Bishops receive a report and recommendation regarding suitability for ordination.

Clinical Pastoral Education - CPE. Offered by CAPPE - Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice and Education <http://www.cappe.org>

## **CHAPTER ONE: Ministry**

Christian ministry is what people do in response to Christ's love. Ministry happens when we know in our hearts that we are loved by God, and we seek to share that love with others through service. As members of the Christian community we are all ministers, participating in Christ's ministry.

### **Baptismal Promises Within Community**

Our ministry is derived from the promises made at baptism - the Baptismal Covenant which can be fulfilled only with the support of other baptized Christians. In the liturgy of Holy Baptism, sponsors and members of the congregation are asked:

"Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?" "We will!" we respond. This covenant of support for each other is an essential aspect of all Christian life, binding members of the community together in our shared commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to minister in Christ's name.

Examples of people called to God's ministry are common in Holy Scripture.

Abraham and Sarah are called to leave their familiar home and journey to a new place. The Israelites are called out of Egypt to witness to God's power and faithfulness. Old Testament prophets are called forth to proclaim God's will when the people have lost their way.

The Gospels relate Jesus' own call at baptism and his call, in turn, to others to join in ministry to the poor, the hungry, the sick, and the hopeless. The Book of Acts and the epistles are full of instructions from early church leaders setting forth guidelines and patterns for ministry by members of the young churches.

Scriptural examples all presume a powerful connection between the individual person and the whole People of God. For the Hebrews, personal identity was inseparable from the corporate identity of the people of the Covenant.

Christian identity begins at baptism when the individual becomes a part of the whole Body of Christ. By definition, Christians are part of a community. Even the most solitary monastic is part of a spiritual community extending across space and time.

### **Responding to Baptismal Promises**

The committed Christian is given a new way of seeing the world and, in gratitude for God's saving love, seeks to respond in service to others. There are as many ways of channeling this service as there are Christians; but being a Christian can be difficult in a world scarred by anger, hatred, mistrust and the countless other sources of friction in our lives. We are constantly learning how to do it, how to be examples of Christ's love to those around us.

Opportunities to share God's gracious love abound in our everyday lives, among our families, friends and colleagues. We are empowered by corporate worship and private prayer, congregational fellowship and Christian education, to be Christ's eyes and hands and heart in the world around us.

As people become more aware of God's claim on their lives they begin to seek - or feel God leading them to - something different, something new, something more than they have been doing before. New challenges and possibilities for ministry and service open up as the baptized person becomes more fully the person God created them to be.

This is a natural part of the journey of faith, a natural response to the unfolding of God's love and presence in one's life. This unfolding can be a time of excitement and anxiety, or dissatisfaction with the present and eagerness for some unclear future, of a sense that we don't quite fit in the world anymore. It is not always a comfortable time, and there may be a strong internal pressure to "do something" to relieve the discomfort.

The more conscious one has been of God, the more likely one is to recognize this restlessness as a call from God and to seek an appropriate response.

This call usually brings new visions of ministry as a lay person, both within and beyond the institutional structures of the Church.

Relatively few people are called to service in the ordained ministry. Some will find their niche in the diaconate, as image and catalyst for the servant ministry of the whole Church. Others may be called by the community to prepare for leadership in the priesthood, as preacher of the Word and minister of the Sacrament of Christ's presence. Some priests will be called by dioceses to serve as bishops, as guardians of the faith and administrators of the Church. The vast majority of people are called to lay ministry because the ordained ministry is, in fact, a much more limited ministry. Some people who feel drawn to "give their lives to God" think that because ordained ministry is more visible and recognizably "religious" that it is somehow a "better" or "higher" calling. This is not the case, although it is easy to understand how people have been given that impression.

The Church over the last three decades has begun to reshape its understanding and appreciation for all the orders of ministry, especially the lay vocation.

We need to discern God's call to each of us so the community of the faithful can connect the gifts of the baptized effectively with the varied needs of the church and the world. This handbook attempts to respond to that need, both for the sake of Christ's ministry, and to address the specific situations of at least three categories of seeking Christians:

- a "young" (under 30) person making initial decisions about education and preparation for life's work, who feels drawn to minister full-time within the institutional church, perhaps as an ordained person;
- a mature person who feels drawn through an on-going relationship with God toward increasingly active lay ministry.
- a mature person whose experiences as a lay minister suggest, to self and others, the possibility of seeking ordination, to the vocational diaconate or to the priesthood.

This handbook is meant for individuals in each of these categories, and for the Christian communities supporting them on their journey in Christ. It offers guidance, suggestions for consideration and further reading, descriptions of processes that support discernment, and an invitation to humble prayer that God's will may be made known and God's purposes fulfilled in the lives of all men and women.

## **CHAPTER TWO: The Congregation**

### **The Christian Community**

Contemporary Heir to the Early Church

The Church is the Body of which Christ is the Head and all baptized people are the members. (Colossians 1:18, 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27, Ephesians 4:15-16, Galatians 3:27, etc.) Its mission is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. It is empowered to perform this mission by God the Holy Spirit.

The Church was founded by Jesus Christ and his Apostles, Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. It is a visible, continuing organism: a family of persons born of the same womb in Holy Baptism and nourished at the same table in Holy Communion.

We live in a time of rapid change. Even those who have been reared in the Church and lived in her sacred precincts for many years must continually reexamine familiar traditions and expectations, and tailor and adapt them to meet changing situations, tastes, interests, needs, and understandings. In this way the essentials are maintained and conveyed to those who are newer in the faith and preserved for future generations. The core teaching and values of the faith must be translated by each generation into the language of the current culture, but the faith must not be corrupted and overcome by the doctrine and values of contemporary society.

The Church is one visible body throughout the world and throughout the centuries of time. The smallest distinct unit of the universal church, according to Anglican, Roman Catholic, and the Orthodox tradition, is the diocese, the jurisdiction of one apostolic bishop. The bishop is a successor to the Apostles. He or she is the formal link with the continuing, historic, and world-wide Church of Christ. His, or her, role is that of pater/mater familias, "father/mother of the family", and pontifex, "bridge builder" between the diocese and the national and international church and among the several congregations.

Within the diocesan family there are congregations of people, usually called "parishes." Some parishes have several congregations. It is in these congregations that the sacraments are administered and the Gospel is proclaimed. It is in these congregations that one finds opportunities for friendship and intellectual and emotional support for one's life in Christ. The congregation is a local community of faith and its primary task is to nurture the spiritual lives of all its members. From the members of this community of faith the vision and energy for ministry in the world flow. When grounded in corporate worship and encouragement of individual prayer and spiritual growth, the Christian community becomes a place of reconciliation in a broken world, of faithful stewardship in a materialistic culture.

### **The Anglican Communion - a Sketch**

British Roots

When in 597 the Bishop of Rome, Pope Gregory I, sent a missionary to the Anglo-Saxons in Britain, his emissary, Augustine, was surprised to find an apostolic Christian community already in place there. The Christian faith and the apostolic Church had been planted in the British Isles in the days when Britannia was a colony of the Roman Empire, perhaps as early as the first century. The faith came to flourish among the Celtic people who were the majority of the inhabitants of all the British Isles in those times. With the withdrawal of the

troops and the removal of the bureaucracy of Imperial Rome in the fifth century, contacts with Christians in Italy and the Mediterranean basin were lost. For two centuries the Celtic Christian Church survived and grew and developed a style of piety, liturgy, and polity that was uniquely its own.

It produced great saints who would eventually become famous the world over: e.g. Patrick, Bridgett, Columba, and Aidan. Meanwhile, the heathen Angles, Saxons, and Jutes had invaded the Isles and it was to them that Bishop ("Pope") Gregory sent Augustine.

Augustine was a bishop and he established his "see" (diocese) in Kent at a place called Canterbury. He had marvelous success in converting the Anglo-Saxons and Jutes and soon the Pope sent more bishops and made Augustine the Archbishop of Canterbury. But, the Anglo-Saxons and Jutes were recent invaders and they were despised by the Christian Celts whose lands they had taken.

Naturally, there was great friction between the old Celtic Church and the newly introduced Roman Church. It is not surprising that each regarded the other's peculiarities of piety, liturgy, and polity to be heretical and dangerous. In 664 A.D. an Angle (English) king, Oswy, called a synod which met at Whitby in a Celtic religious community headed by an abbess named Hilda. This synod was attended by most of the important Christian church leaders of the British Isles, principally the bishops and abbots. It officially reconciled and united the Celtic and Roman churches in the British Isles.

The Synod of Whitby had forged a fascinating alliance. The merger of Celtic and Roman Christianity proved quite fruitful and it tended to energize the church in the British Isles.

However, British Christianity continued to develop in its own peculiar ways and in time even the English began to resent and resist the totally domineering and often corrupt power of the Roman Papacy. In 1534 A.D. another English king, Henry VIII, persuaded Parliament to declare that the King was Head of the Church in England and that the Bishop of Rome (i.e. the Pope) had "no more authority in England than any other foreign bishop." At that time the majority of members of Parliament were clergy, bishops and abbots. So, the Parliament of 1534 and the Synod of 664 were essentially the same kind of body. The king and bishops began the process of successfully uniting the church following the Synod of Whitby. The king and bishops began the process of successfully reforming the church following the Parliament of 1534.

Under the leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Catholic bishops of England, a thorough reform took place in the reign of Henry VIII's son, Edward VI. Then there was a violent Roman reaction in the reign of Mary Tudor. She married the King of Spain and introduced the Spanish Inquisition to England. Queen Mary earned the title "Bloody Mary" because of all the English church leaders that she had executed. Most were burned at the stake, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer. But Mary did not live long and she was succeeded by Elizabeth I who oversaw the restoration of the church reforms and who reigned over one of the longest and most glorious periods of English history. The "Elizabethan Settlement" established the Church of England and Anglicanism as we know it.

English settlers brought this Church to the New World. The Church of England became the established church in colonial Virginia, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, North and South Carolina, and Georgia. The history of Anglicanism in the province of New Brunswick begins with the work of two missionaries of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign

Parts - the Rev'd John Eaglson, in 1768 in the area now known as Westmorland County, and the Rev'd Thomas Wood who visited settlements on the St. John River in July 1769.

For a complete history of the Anglican Church in New Brunswick, see "Citizens with the Saints - A Brief History of Anglicanism in New Brunswick," Diocese of Fredericton by Lyman N. Harding, 1994.

### **The Anglican Communion Today**

The Anglican Church of Canada is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion, a voluntary association of 38 self-governing national or regional churches, most originating from the Church of England. The Archbishop of Canterbury is the titular head of the Anglican Communion, but has no direct authority over the Church outside England itself. Total membership of the Anglican Communion now numbers over 70 million in 164 countries, gathered in some 64,000 congregations in more than 500 dioceses.

### **Living in the Christian Community**

Since the early days, the Anglican Church in Canada has had its primary existence in local congregations, usually housed in substantial buildings serving specific neighborhoods. The ideal church was staffed by at least one full-time stipendiary priest, and each was financially self-sufficient through the offerings of many members and sometimes through endowment bequeathed from earlier generations of members. The more common pattern has been small churches with few resources and an intermittent supply of ordained clergy. In small communities and rural areas, small congregations have been the rule. Of these, a significant number have not always been served by full-time clergy.

Regardless of size and resources, the experience and expectation of "church" for most congregations, in most places, for generations, has been that of a local community which gathers regularly for worship, religious education and some form of service in the world.

Baptism in one of these local Christian communities confers membership not only in the local congregation, but in the whole Church - from deanery, archdeaconry and diocese to province, the national Canadian Church, the international Anglican Communion, and the worldwide fellowship of all who confess Jesus Christ as Lord.

For many people, the local church is the home where, in the words of Robert Frost: "when you go there, they have to take you in," or, like the neighborhood bar in the television series Cheers, "the place where everybody knows your name." It is the gathering of people beyond one's immediate family where one is invited, accepted, nurtured, needed and "at home."

The local congregation is also the guardian and transmitter of the Christian faith, preserving and interpreting God's revelation to each successive generation.

### **A Community Internally Ordered for Ministry**

The Christian community, like any other community, arranges its common life in order to be faithful to its call and to carry out its mission. Provision must be made for its own growth, corporate worship, encounter with Scripture, nurturing of members from birth to death, as well as outreach to the larger world. It needs "to equip the saints for the work of ministry and the building up of Christ's body" (Ephesians. 4:11-13).

How is it that “the saints,” i.e., all those whom the Spirit has moved to follow Christ, are to be equipped? What do they need for the journey as they follow Jesus in the Way? Word and Sacrament equip the saints for mission and ministry. The preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments, especially Baptism and Eucharist, gird the community for its journey, and sustain and energize its life for the sake of its mission.

### **The Role of Lay Persons**

The journey into the world to proclaim the Good News is the responsibility of the whole community, the body of Christ, all the baptized. It is the office of the laity: to bear witness to Christ wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.

The ministry of the laity is thus, in principle, so variegated and multifaceted as to be beyond enumeration. Each of us carry Christ with us - to our homes, offices, schools, factories, stores, playing fields and neighborhoods; and in our local churches.

### **The Role of Ordained Persons**

Ministry and mission are the responsibility of every Christian without exception. For practical reasons, Christians developed historical offices with authority and responsibilities for certain fundamental needs of the Church's life. A small number of Christians are set apart and ordained for these ministries of Word and Sacrament.

Through the ordained offices - defined in Anglican tradition as the threefold Holy Orders of bishop, priest and deacon - the entire Christian community makes provision for the journey. The ordained function as navigators, supply stewards and scouts for the whole community, which has been sent to all the peoples of the world, through all the streets and by-ways, to invite everyone to the Heavenly Banquet.

### **Bishops**

The bishop exercises the ministry of Christ on behalf of the community “particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese.” It is the bishop's responsibility:

- to guard the faith, unity and discipline of the whole Church;
- to proclaim the Word of God;
- to act in Christ's name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and
- to ordain others to continue Christ's ministry.

The locus of the bishop's responsibility is the diocese.

### **Priests**

The priest exercises the ministry of Christ on behalf of the local community, “particularly as pastor to the people.”

The priest's responsibilities are:

- to share with the bishop in the overseeing of the Church;

- to proclaim the Gospel;
- to administer the sacraments; and
- to bless and declare absolution (pardon) in the name of God.

The locus of the priest's responsibility is the parish, mission, cluster, school, prison, or other institutional structure within which the Word is preached, the sacraments administered, and the faithful equipped for their service in the world.

### **Deacons**

The deacon exercises the ministry of Christ to those beyond the company of the baptized, "particularly as a servant to those in need." The deacon's responsibilities are:

- to serve as catalyst, encourager and guide for lay members engaged in outreach ministries; and
- to assist bishops and priests in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

The locus of the deacon's responsibility is that fluid boundary between the institutional church and the structures of the world.

### **Your Gladness - the World's Hunger**

Frederik Buechner describes vocation as "here your great gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Great gladness comes when one's natural gifts and cultivated talents are fully employed in an undertaking of significance.

Identifying that meeting point is a task of discernment. It is a communal task through which the Christian community supports the growth in ministry of each of its members. The congregation can explore how the world's deep hunger and the great gladness of every member come together, and help to make that union possible. Discernment makes God's call specific and recognizable in the lives of each member. This makes a rich variety of ministries available to the world.

Congregations support each member in recognizing and responding to "the world's deep hunger" through preaching, educational programs, community service and cultivation of an awareness of the world beyond the church doors. The glad response arises when the responsibility of all baptized people to minister in the name of Christ is regularly articulated and affirmed. When members of all ages are continually invited and challenged to identify and exercise their individual gifts, the whole community is strengthened for its corporate witness and service.

## CHAPTER Three: Discerning a Personal Call

Formation for ministry begins with baptism - the sacramental rite of initiation into Christ's body, the Church. A newly baptized person enters a lifelong relationship with God. The depth of that relationship depends on one's choices after baptism in response to God's presence and action within one's own life. Through this life-long process, our characters are formed, becoming either closer to or more distant from the person God called into being at our creation.

### **Discernment Is Intentional**

In order to cooperate with God in the process of this formation, each person must become prayerfully open and intentionally receptive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Discernment of Christian vocation begins with the certainty that God calls every baptized person to ministry - that is, to be a witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ in both word and deed, proclaiming the Gospel and serving others, whatever our position and duties at each stage in our life.

Discerning the nature of God's personal call begins with examining one's current response to the promises made at Baptism. Honest self-evaluation of worship and study habits, personal relationships, and major activities is required.

How one spends one's waking hours in relation to the Baptismal Covenant will illuminate one's current relationship with God.

We may think of our talents and gifts first in relation to our secular roles, like items on our resumés. But the totality of who we are was given to us by our Creator for the primary purpose of bringing all persons to God in Christ. This casts a very different light on who we are and what we have to offer.

Each person has a mix of gifts and talents uniquely suited for a particular vocation in his or her specific environment. There need be no waste or misallocation of resources in the divine economy. God provides the community with all it needs. God calls each of us to use our gifts to meet our share of the needs. The discernment process can help individuals and congregations deploy everyone's talents and gifts in response to God's call, to witness to God's love.

One might begin by reflecting on the baptismal promises themselves in relation to one's daily life:

- In what ways do I continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers?
- Do I persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever I fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
- How do I proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
- Do I seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving my neighbor as myself?
- In what ways do I strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

The implications of the Baptismal Covenant can seem overwhelming, because God and the suffering world that God calls us to serve seem to have no limits. No area of human

endeavor falls outside the sound of God's call. Whatever we do, we are to do it as Christians.

Discernment is lifelong, not only a starting point. Discernment of God's will and our response are important parts of self-examination and renewal. This is true every day and, in particular, at every turning point and stressful moment in a personal faith journey. Many people in mid-life find it essential to assess their life and work, to review the shape of their ministries and discern anew the call of God and of the Church.

### **Goals of Discernment**

Vocational discernment requires gathering information, talking with others, reflecting quietly, and listening prayerfully to what God might be saying. It involves seeking clarity about many different aspects of one's life and work, in the context of one's relationship with God and with the Church, including:

- the needs of the world
- the many varieties of ministry
  - lay ministry - in the home and secular workplace, as a volunteer in church-related programs and services, a lay professional employed full or part-time by the church or other religious institution (school, hospital, etc.), a member of a religious order.
  - ordained ministry - in the permanent diaconate (usually nonstipendiary), the non-stipendiary priesthood (e.g., "tent-maker" or "worker priest"), the full-time stipendiary priesthood.
- one's gifts for each type of ministry and the options for using each in parish, diocese, community or workplace
- one's limitations in relation to each gift
- the degree to which different options provide both opportunities for service and encouragement of continued renewal and spiritual growth
- commitments and values to be considered if a new form of ministry is to be undertaken: existing obligations to family members or others; and economic necessities and implications for life-style
- other people who may be affected for good or ill by the development of one's ministry in a particular direction
- people who serve as role models, sources of support, nurture, spiritual direction, counseling, or opposition, and how God and/or the Church is acting through these people to make one's call known

A community discernment process can help to clarify and direct one's understanding of God's will for the next stage of one's life. The community helps to identify and confirm gifts; ascertain whether one is being called to undertake some new form of ministry; and identify or confirm the choice of one of the major categories of lay or ordained ministry, or of variations within that category.

### **Resources in Spiritual Growth and Discernment**

Through discernment, the vision of the next stage of one's ministry begins to take shape.

Private prayer is the starting point for clarifying God's will and recognizing appropriate next steps. Various behavioral science processes for analyzing gifts, aptitudes and personal potential can also be helpful. However, for Christian ministry, such techniques supplement

but do not replace discernment through personal prayer and active membership in a community of faith.

Reading is a helpful tool in discernment. It provides a guide and resource for prayerful reflection and an introduction to the lives of countless Christians whose journeys are examples for us. The following are essential resources.

- The Holy Bible is the fundamental document of Christian faith, containing "all things necessary for salvation."
- The Book of Common Prayer and the Book of Alternative Services, especially the Catechism and the liturgies of Holy Baptism; Ordination of Deacon and Priest; Litany for Ordination; Celebration of a New Ministry; and the appointed Scripture readings in all of these liturgies.
- Readings in the history of the church, theology, the lives of the saints and devotional works.
- The Constitution, Canons and other quasi-legislation, especially those sections relating to ministry and ordination.

Study of these topics, whether through personal reading, adult education programs, or a formal academic course, will enrich the discernment process. Of equal importance is conversation, dialogue and prayerful consultation with other members of the community of faith. Such discussion can be either structured or informal.

Engagement with other people in the congregation is essential for those feeling drawn to explore lay or ordained ministry possibilities within the church structure. Guidance and endorsement from the community help to validate personal decisions and support their implementation. Lay ministries based in a congregation involve mutual responsibilities and accountability. The decision to endorse someone for ordination is always a corporate one, made by the Church, with the final decision to ordain being made by the Bishop.

Above all, the process of discernment must begin, continue and end in prayer - in a conscious, deliberate, day-after-day effort to know God, to be open to new possibilities, to become centered and quiet, to listen for the "still small voice" with which God speaks in our hearts.

### **Is the Call from God?**

The first objective in evaluating a call to a new form of ministry is to determine whether it is indeed coming from God.

- What is the line of communication - personal prayer; spiritual direction; a community of faith such as a prayer or Bible study group; or simply the sincere advice of friends and relatives?
- Is the perceived call consistent with Scripture and the Baptismal Covenant?
- Is it a reasonable next step in one's spiritual development and the formation of one's life and character as a disciple of Christ?
- How would it affect responsibilities toward family members or others?

With individuals exploring certain types of institution-based lay ministry, and for all ordained ministry, the individual's sense of God's personal call must coincide with the call of the Church. Formation for ordained ministry is never a solo flight. A pre-ordination discernment process helps the whole community discover whether the perceived call to the

diaconate or the priesthood is coming from the Church, evidenced by consensus among many different people at various levels of advice and authority.

None of society's processes for fitting people to work are wholly satisfactory, and the church's processes are no exception. The route to affirmation of formal lay ministries, or to ordination, can be filled with obstacles and disappointments. False starts are common. A path that seemed clear at first may come to an abrupt end. Finding an alternative may involve a period of painful reflection and re-envisioning our life in Christ, which may involve grieving the loss of what we hoped might have been.

If we offer ourselves for a particular form of ministry and the offer is not accepted, we may feel rejected, hurt or angry. The distress may be severe enough to temporarily disable us or to cause us to lash back at the human beings who seem to be responsible for it. Yet we need to listen for God's direction. This can be an opportunity for profound spiritual growth, especially if we approach it with patience and humility, and seek competent spiritual direction. Then we can examine our options for ministry with the safe assumption that whatever we undertake prayerfully can fulfill God's expectation of us.

There is reassurance in the passage attributed to St. Gregory in *The Cloud of Unknowing*:  
*"All holy desires grow by delay, and if they are diminished by delays, they were never holy desires."*

And in the words of Gamaliel in Acts 5:38-39:

*"If this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail, but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them - you may even be found fighting against God!"*

### **Answering the Call**

The personal response to one's own call emerges from a developing relationship with God, from a growing awareness of Christ at work in the world, and an understanding of the nature of the Church as a community of conversion and renewal. One does not simply "belong" to the Church, nor fulfill one's "duty" by merely attending church each Sunday.

We are the body of Christ, the Church, and as such, we are all ministers.

Every one of us has a God-given part to play and without our participation, the whole Body may be weakened. Each is an ambassador for the Kingdom of God.

Each shares in the priesthood of all believers, witnessing to the sacramental nature of creation and contributing to the sanctification of the world.

All activities which carry out God's will in the world, either in our secular work or through the Church, are ministries. It is our responsibility to discern the gifts God has given us, and to seek or create opportunities to use those gifts.

Everyone in the congregation can be encouraged and supported as ministers through:

- sermons, adult education programs, prayer and Bible study groups;
- guest speakers, diocesan training programs, and provincial and national workshops;
- regular sharing and celebration of the varieties of ministries in which members of the congregation are already engaged.

Creating an atmosphere in which responsibility for mission, ministry and service is cultivated is one aspect of supporting individual growth. The congregation can also provide formal and informal structures to support members in periods of vocational searching and at specific decision-points in their Christian journeys. At its best, life in the Christian community leads us to encounter our "responsibility," that is, our response to the living God who is at the center of the community's life.

Every congregation contains people at different stages of this encounter with God. God's will for each of our lives extends well beyond explicitly "religious" activities, embracing personal relationships as well as choices about vocation. Making choices about vocation - "what I want to do when I grow up" - is a critical task not only for youth. Vocational questions recur throughout life, voluntarily and in response to external events -job loss, changing family situation, illness, accident or even inheriting a fortune. Part of the task of the congregation is to support all of its members in answering the question, "what does God want me to do next in my life?"

### **Calling Forth Future Leaders**

The Church is an ancient institution whose future stretches to the end of the ages. A healthy congregation, which takes seriously its missions of outreach and evangelism, will generate its own replacements and send members into full-time ministries outside the congregation.

In practice, these processes can be intentional or casual. In either case, faithful Christians expect God to be at work in the congregation to nurture the people who will carry on community leadership from one generation to the next.

Every congregation must find its own ways to support members in discerning the ministries to which God may be calling them. These will be determined partly by culture, history, size and resources - human and material.

Supportive structures range from informal networks to formal committees with specific responsibilities.

#### **Informal Networks and Personal Guidance**

Most congregations have particularly insightful people who not only know about the needs of the congregation or community, but notice which people are particularly gifted to fill those needs. Some examples will suggest the many ways in which members can support each other's emerging vocations:

- a long-time member points out that the Smiths are sought out and respected by teenagers in the congregation, and, therefore, might make wonderful youth advisors.
- Jane is encouraged to volunteer as a lay hospital visitor by parishioners who welcomed her visits to them in the hospital "just to drop off the altar flowers."
- Members of the property committee notice that Joe has a lot of time on his hands after retiring as a general contractor. They tell him about several parish shut-ins and elderly neighborhood residents who need occasional help maintaining homes, yards and apartments. Soon Joe's van sports a new sign, "St. Mary's Mobile Handyman." Members of the youth group help him on weekends.
- A deacon finds that an elderly shut-in has an extraordinary capacity for intercessory prayer. Linking him by telephone with the Wednesday prayer group brought a new breadth and depth to the congregation's prayers for others.
- May and Bill were an acolyte team in junior high, and the mainstays of the youth group in high school. Both were thrilled to be invited to the class for lay eucharistic ministers and

were faithful in carrying out their assignments. One of the older members showed them an announcement in a church paper about a vocations day, and offered to drive when Mary and Bill expressed interest.

Scenarios like this take place in virtually every congregation, but apart from the individuals involved, few people notice. To encourage and expand such individual support, clergy and lay leaders need to highlight these occurrences through:

- sermons which incorporate stories about such calls to ministry, naming names and inviting others to share their own stories;
- adult and teen programs on opportunities for service and gifts for ministry;
- occasional gatherings of the parish "wise people" or "elders" for prayer, reflection on ministry opportunities, and opportunities for mentoring younger members.

#### Spiritual Growth and Direction

A growing number of people are finding support and guidance for their personal prayer lives and vocational choices through "companionship spiritual direction." This may be one-on-one, or in a group, parish-based or elsewhere. Clergy can provide assistance in finding a compatible spiritual director. Some congregations offer quiet days or arrange retreats at nearby retreat centers.

Week-day services are available in many congregations, providing opportunities for corporate worship as part of one's daily devotions. For centuries, a disciplined routine of prayer and worship has been a tried and true way to deepen intimacy with God and for the kind of spiritual development that promotes vocational discernment. The daily offices and daily devotions can be used by individuals, families or small groups.

#### Lay Theological Education

The University of the South, in Sewanee, Tennessee, has developed useful continuing theological education for lay people including the Education for Ministry (EFM) program. To find out more about these programs, visit the EFM web site <[www.sewanee.edu/EFM/EFMhome.html](http://www.sewanee.edu/EFM/EFMhome.html)>. Atlantic School of Theology offers programs of distance education resulting in a certificate of theological study for lay persons. Other theological schools offer various programs of study both resident and distance via the internet.

#### Other Educational Programs

The Diocese of Fredericton offers programs for lay spiritual development, layreader educational events, Develop, Nurture and Serve (DNS) weekends are ways to engage in Christian learning and continuing spiritual growth.

#### Parish Discernment Committees

Parish Discernment Committees are parish-based opportunities for those who believe they are called to ministry in a way beyond what is being experienced currently. This is a structured congregational resource for ministry discernment for adults. Those with an interest in exploring the possibility of entering Holy Orders should first speak to the parish incumbent about the possibilities. A discernment committee serves as a personal reflection group to help individual members test answers to the question: "What is God calling me to do or be at this stage in my journey as a Christian?"

## **CHAPTER FOUR: the Ministry of the Baptized**

### **The Nature of Lay Ministry**

The primary ministry of the baptized is continuing the work of Christ in the world. Ministry is a way of living in the world, aware that God acts in and through every Christian to bring to fruition God's plan for all creation. It is the way we live when we realize that Christ encounters us in every one we meet - family, friend and stranger.

One of the greatest challenges of lay ministry is its invisibility to the unknowing observer. The lay minister wears no uniform or identification that sets him or her apart, confers status or authority, or automatically signals that these good works are done in the name of Christ. Every Christian must discover her or his own way of letting Christ be known through activities often not regarded as "religious." This risk to be vulnerable in the name of Christ will often involve stress, conflict and confusion.

There are many ways to channel Christ's redeeming love into our troubled world. Not only are we called to be caring, generous, tolerant and forgiving persons ourselves, but we are also called to redeem the mistakes, inadequacies and omissions of each other.

Most workplaces provide ample opportunity for such generous and redeeming ministry of presence. Most workplaces also offer conflicts and ethical dilemmas which cry out for reconciliation and prayerful discernment. It is not easy to live righteously in the eyes of God in the midst of the distractions, temptations and evil of the world. To do so requires recollection and mindfulness, patience and charity, and the ability to acknowledge faults, seek forgiveness and try again, and again, and again. It requires trusting that God will empower us each time we seek guidance and open ourselves to receive it.

### **The Laity's Role in the Church's Mission**

The ministry of the laity is exercised in two arenas: within the Church, and within the world. The primary arena is the world. With lives centered in the community of faith, lay ministers are sent out to our families and friends, our communities, our jobs and our places of leisure - to represent Christ; "to bear witness to him wherever we may be."

### **Lay Ministry Beyond Church Doors**

In an ideal world, every lay person would go about daily life as a Biblically knowledgeable representative of the Christian community,

- able to proclaim the Good News,
- living as a faithful steward of God-given gifts,
- reflecting Christ's compassion to those who are afflicted,
- seeking ways to reach out to the oppressed,
- and working diligently for justice and peace.

In reality, we know there is much anger, hatred, ignorance, mistrust and sin in our lives. We are constantly re-learning how to open ourselves to the action of God's Spirit, that we may be channels of God's love.

A supportive congregation will be involved in guiding and sustaining the ministries of its members in their daily lives - their life in Christ - whatever their occupation or profession.

As William Law wrote in his 18th century English spiritual classic, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*:

*"As a good Christian should consider every place as holy because God is there, so one should look upon every part of one's life as a matter of holiness because it is to be offered to God. ... For as all persons, and all things in the world truly belong unto God ... so all things are to be used, and all persons are to act in their several states and employments for the glory of God. Those in worldly business, therefore, must not look upon themselves as at liberty to live to themselves, to sacrifice to their own humors and tempers, because their employment is of a worldly nature ... It is as much the duty of those in worldly business to live wholly unto God as it is the duty of those who are devoted to Divine service ..."*

People are ordained for specific roles in the institution, but lay ministry takes countless other forms that stretch beyond the routine of daily life:

- acting to feed and shelter the homeless,
- challenging the comfortable and affluent whose hearts may be hardened against others by working on behalf of the handicapped, fear of failing or by servitude to possessions or status,
- supporting victims of racial, sexual and economic oppression,
- sharing one's faith with a friend,
- practicing non-violence,
- advocating and practicing responsible stewardship of environmental resources,
- and acting ethically in the workplace.

All of these, done for Christ's sake, are ways in which the laity proclaim Christ in word and deed, and summon the world to respond.

#### Lay Ministry within the Gathered Church

The other arena of lay ministry is within the Church itself, where all are called "to take their place in the life, worship and governance of the Church." Many lay people volunteer in various congregational capacities, sharing with other members and clergy in the work of sustaining the community's life, nurturing its members young and old, and ministering to those in need.

A strong congregation actively engages children and young people in its life and work. Through involvement in worship, parish life activities, education and outreach, children experience what it means to belong to the Body of Christ and to take their part as ministers in God's service in the world.

Christian's who experience God's converting power in their lives will participate more and more actively in corporate worship and fellowship, and in the programs and outreach projects of the congregation which best match individual gifts and interests.

## **Lay Ministry, Lost and Rediscovered**

The relationship of lay and ordained ministry has varied considerably from place to place and from time to time. So too has the church's understanding of the kind of preparation necessary for membership, for service and for leadership.

Some early church communities required a two or three year catechumenate - a period of instruction and training - prior to baptism.

With such extensive preparation for everyone, the subsequent ordination of a few to diaconal or priestly ministry was almost incidental. All were disciples following in "the Way," all were ministers of the Gospel. The community identified persons with the particular pastoral, teaching or leadership skills needed and commissioned them for various ministries. Some involved ordination and most did not.

Like every other institution, the Western Church developed a framework and life of its own. It became increasingly complex and specialized, especially after it emerged from generations of persecution to become the established religion of the waning Roman Empire.

Modeling its own governance after that of the state, prince-bishops commanded cadres of monks, nuns and clergy. These "official" religious not only tended to the spiritual life of the nation but also performed many of the functions today carried out by schools, hospitals, social work agencies, courts, and even prisons.

Property was amassed to support this work, and as secular governments crumbled under waves of migration in the Middle Ages, the trans-national Church was one of the few surviving institutions of "civilization."

The clergy and members of religious communities (e.g., monks and nuns) came to be identified as "the Church." They were the people who provided ministry to and for everyone else. The laity were chiefly consumers of religious services. Their time, energies and commitments were focused on making a living, raising a family, and surviving famine, disease and war. The separation of "ministry" from "secular" life took different forms in twelfth century England, fifteenth century France, or eighteenth century North America, but the basic pattern remained the same. Clergy preached, taught, baptized, married and buried, absolved and blessed, administered the Holy Communion, and conducted the affairs of "the Church." Lay people went about their lives "in the world." That, at least, is the image we have inherited.

In the twentieth century, the notion that "ministry" is something performed only by clergy has been increasingly challenged. Biblical scholarship and historical studies have broadened our understanding of life in the early church.

Ministry "in the world" has always required the voice and labor of faithful laity - teaching the young, feeding the hungry, tending the sick, visiting those in prison, and addressing the structures of injustice which perpetuate poverty, oppression and destruction of the created order. Renewed awareness of this helps overcome the tendency to limit "ministry" to what happens inside the church. The reemphasis on the Baptismal Covenant and the ministry of the laity reflects and reinforces this awareness.

The Anglican Church is becoming more intentional about equipping all its members for ministries in the world. This is symbolized within our worship through increasing use of

layreaders and lay eucharistic ministries. Services of institution and celebration for church school teachers, altar guilds, vestries and other internal ministries likewise symbolize the importance of lay people in the Body of Christ.

In corporate worship, the congregation is present for each other in the different times and seasons of life. Members stand with each other in sickness and health, in joy and bereavement, in good times and bad. They wrestle together with issues that society raises and seek the light of the Gospel in each new situation. Empowered by Christ, they reach beyond their own borders to those who have no helper.

Re-emphasizing the ministry of the laity frees the ordained to concentrate on nurturing the spiritual source of the congregation's energy. Clergy inspire, instruct and challenge the laity as disciples of Christ, called to extend the power of the Gospel throughout the world by their daily lives and labors.

Five major elements characterize the life of most congregations, sustain energy, and support members' ministries in the world: worship, Christian education, pastoral ministry, outreach and evangelism, and stewardship and administration. Active lay ministry will include participation in one or several of these areas.

Within the context of prayer and study, vocational searching often leads to questions about the various "orders" of ministry and the individual's proper place within that matrix. God calls most Christians to minister as lay people. A thorough process of discernment, however, includes examining all forms of ministry, including ordained ministry. The next chapters look more closely at the diaconate and the priesthood, at the processes by which the Church selects those to be ordained, and the formation processes which prepare them for ordination. They will be especially valuable reading for persons who are not interested in ordained ministry, for at least two reasons:

- an informed appreciation of their different roles enables all the Church's ministers to function cooperatively and effectively in their several callings;
- clergy and laity are mutually accountable for the mission of the Church; the more laity understand about the training and expectations for ordained ministry the better they can share in the Church's task of discerning who is called to those roles.

## CHAPTER FIVE: the Diaconate

*N, every Christian is called to follow Jesus Christ, serving God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit. God now calls you to a special ministry of servanthood directly under your bishop. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely.*

*As a deacon, in the Church, you are to study the holy scriptures, to seek nourishment from them, and to model your life upon them. You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live, and work, and worship. You are to assist the bishop and priests in public worship and in the ministration of God's Word and Sacraments, and you are to carry out other duties assigned to you from time to time. At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself.*

*Book of Alternative Services p. 655*

### **The Meaning and Function of the Diaconate**

Deacons exist to call the whole community into its servant ministry. They are prophetic leaders who are called to challenge the Church always to look beyond itself.

Applicants to the diaconate need to have the character of a servant, and this character should be visible in the applicant's life and ministry. Ordination to the diaconate is not a way to recognize or validate existing ministries, but a means of forming living icons who illuminate Christ as the model of servanthood to all the baptized. Deacons are not ordained to do the outreach ministry of the Church, but to lead others into servant ministry in the world.

Deacons are under the authority of the bishop and of the supervising priest with whom they work. The liturgical functions of a deacon are not their primary ministry, but are symbolic and expressive of their central ministry:

- Serving all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely.
- Interpreting to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.

Deacons will be leaders who have a visible ministry to the dispossessed, are willing to undertake the role of prophet, and will strengthen the servant ministry of the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Fredericton.

### **Deacon Formation**

Individuals ordained to the diaconate participate in a process of formation and discernment and their application to the life and ministry of a deacon. This includes:

- A prescribed course of training institutionally delivered or by way of reading for orders as outlined and monitored by the vocational chaplains on behalf of the Bishop.
- Attendance at seminars and training opportunities as directed.
- Required reading, preparation of written assignments and field work experiences.

Those ordained to the diaconate will complete the diocesan discernment process and proceed through the Holy Orders process according to diocesan standards. This process includes medical and psychological exams, credit check, and interviews with the

Commission on the Diaconate. Some cost should be expected in order to fulfill these requirements.

Deacons are almost always non-stipendiary so they will continue in their secular vocation after ordination. This life of having one foot in the world and one foot in the Church provides the rich environment for the ministry of a deacon, but can be a means of stress. The regular support, guidance and pastoral direction of the bishop is essential to the life of a deacon. Balancing work, ministry, and family also requires a commitment to one's relationship with God (i.e., the reading and study of Holy Scripture and a consistent prayer life).

## **CHAPTER SIX: the Priesthood**

*As a priest it will be your task to proclaim by word and deed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to fashion your life in accordance with its precepts. You are to love and serve the people among whom you work, caring alike for young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor. You are to preach, to declare God's forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God's blessing, to share in the administration of Holy Baptism and in the celebration of the mysteries of Christ's Body and Blood, and to perform the other ministrations entrusted to you.*

*In all that you do, you are to nourish Christ's people from the riches of his grace, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come.*

*Book of Alternative Services p. 646*

### **The Nature of Priesthood**

In the earliest days of the Church, the sacraments and administration of the community were clearly seen to be shared responsibilities among all the baptized. As the church and its local communities grew, responsibilities were divided, and bishops, acting in the name of the entire community, assigned to priests the functions of sacramental and pastoral care for particular congregations.

This special role, with authority conferred by the bishop through ordination, gives the priest the primary responsibility for the teaching and worship of the community. The priest leads the congregation's liturgical life, presides at community functions such as the celebration of the Eucharist, interprets and responds to Scripture through preaching. The priestly orders exist for the good of the community, for its gathering and regular order.

### **The Role of Priest**

At ordination, each priest is called to work as a pastor, priest and teacher, and to take a share in the councils of the Church. As Pastor, the priest seeks to bring God's healing and love to others, both by personal resources and by identifying other means of support. Providing pastoral care through spiritual counseling and crisis support, the priest also needs to know his or her own limits, and be able to refer those needing in-depth counseling to others with appropriate training. As a special responsibility, the priest coordinates the many expressions of pastoral care within a congregation.

As a priest, called forth by God and the Church, there is more to learn than merely the performance of specific tasks. How to receive and be open to God's grace, how to be directed by God as an instrument of reconciliation, and most especially, how to communicate these practices to others, is part of the very essence of the priesthood. The priest must remain connected to God in order to honor the trust placed by the congregation.

As a teacher, the priest teaches by word and example. Given the visibility of the priest in church and in the larger community, examples are numerous. The priest must be comfortable in a variety of settings, and must model what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

To share in the councils of the Church means to take a role in the governance of the institutional church. This means the priest participates in local, diocesan, and national

committees, task forces, and the like. More than merely serving one's self, the priest also encourages and develops others' gifts of leadership.

#### A Life of Commitment

A priest makes a commitment to a disciplined life of obedience, study and prayer as the essential foundation for ministry with others. This means being intentionally guided by the pastoral direction of their bishop, diligence in the reading and study of scripture, and a perseverance in prayer. In all things, offering labors to God, through the mediation of Jesus, in the power of the Spirit.

Priesthood is not a job, it is a way of being, a way of life; deliberately and explicitly set apart for the life of the community and service to God. The priest undertakes this public consecration as a sign, an example for every member of the community, that being a Christian is a full-time commitment. It is a way of living in the world that points continually beyond creation, sin and death, to the Source of all life.

#### **Preparation and Training**

Normally, this is a five or six year process for those who have completed undergraduate education. This includes an initial discernment process in the parish, followed by diocesan screening, three years of theological education, and up to a year as a transitional deacon. The following chapter describes what is often known as the "ordination process," as currently operating in the Diocese of Fredericton.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: the Community Discerns a Call to Ordination**

Being a Christian is not a private affair. Response to God's call to ministry often begins in a time of solitude and private prayer. Some forms of ministry remain private, solitary or hidden, but most ministry takes place in a community context.

The exercise of ordained ministry — in the diaconate, the priesthood and the episcopate — is by nature a formal public vocation, undertaken to meet specific pastoral and leadership needs within the community of the Church. Therefore, discerning and defining a call to such ministry is always a community task.

### **Exploring a Call to Ordination**

Reflecting on the attributes of one who may aspire to the calling of deacon or priest, Bishop Alien Bartlett of the Diocese of Pennsylvania has identified the following characteristics of leadership: The Church is looking for persons who are:

- rooted in faith in Jesus Christ and nourished by Holy Scripture and corporate and individual worship;
- motivated by imperatives stemming from some of the primary purposes of the Church, such as:
  - proclaiming the Gospel to all people
  - restoring all people to unity with God and each other in Christ
  - promoting justice, peace and love in the Church and the world
  - building up the Church as the body of Christ
- gifted with enough physical stamina, emotional health and intellectual ability to meet the demands of contemporary ministry;
- identified by members of the congregation as effective leaders, spiritual persons and ones worthy of emulation;
- self-differentiated;
- reasonably secure in their present work;
- experienced in dealing with some of the pain and tragedy of life, and willing to accept help in handling it;
- challenged by the prospect of an ordained ministry that reaches out from the congregation to those beyond so as to build bridges between the Church and the wider community.

The Church is not looking for persons who are:

- seeking an escape from an unsatisfactory job, home or life situation;
- seeking to rescue or control other people;
- very recently confirmed or received;
- coming out of a recent (less than a year) intense experience, such as achieving sobriety, loss of someone close, divorce, religious conversion, major psychological or physical illness;
- looking for refuge and tranquillity and a place where everyone is in love and harmony;
- "Lone Rangers" whose focus is on "my" ministry, as distinct from the ministry of the whole People of God;
- dependent on institutional structures for a sense of identity.

The rest of this chapter describes the roles played in the ordination discernment process by parish incumbents, the Parish Discernment Committee, the parish corporation, the Bishop, members of the Bishop's staff, and the vocational chaplains. All are involved in discerning whether individuals are called to ordination.

### **Role of the Clergy**

The incumbent (rector or priest-in-charge) of the parish has a critical role in guiding persons to respond to God's call, especially in the beginning of the discernment process. The role of the priest is of particular importance in relation to those God may be calling to the ordained ministry. The incumbent is the primary model of that ministry within the congregation, and is in a good position to recognize persons whose gifts might be well-employed as deacons or priests. Clergy can draw on personal experience to provide support and guidance through the ordination process itself. Care must be exercised, however, because clergy may project their own vocations onto those in the discernment process, or even give the impression that everyone "serious" about Christian ministry should be ordained. Conversely, a discouraged or burnt-out priest may not effectively assess the likely call of another.

If a parishioner approaches a member of the clergy to inquire about ordination, the following issues need to be explored in sensitive pastoral dialogue:

- How long has the inquirer been known to this congregation and clergy? Is this out of the blue or consistent with the inquirer's ministry within the Church and/or community to date? Is the inquirer faithful in corporate worship and serious about developing a private prayer life?
- What positions has the inquirer held in the congregation? Has the inquirer demonstrated leadership abilities? How do other people respond to the inquirer's present ministries and leadership style?
- Have there been major personal or professional upheavals in the inquirer's life in the last couple of years? How far has the inquirer progressed in integrating these into his or her spiritual and emotional life? Has the inquirer made appropriate use of spiritual direction, counseling or therapy in responding to personal crises? How would a major vocational change affect the inquirer's personal and family life?
- What is the inquirer's formal educational background? Does the inquirer demonstrate a hunger for in-depth theological education? How familiar is the inquirer with the academic norms and training requirements of diaconal training or a theological school program?
- How extensive is the inquirer's knowledge of the Anglican Church? Does the inquirer have a realistic understanding of the roles of lay, diaconal and priestly ministries in the life of the community?

If, after preliminary discussion of these issues, a member of the clergy and inquirer conclude that God may be calling the inquirer to ordained ministry, the incumbent initiates the forming of a Parish Discernment Committee.

### **Role of the Community Discernment Committee (PDC)**

Note: In unique circumstances, the "Parish" Discernment Committee may be constituted based in another Christian community as recommended by the Bishop or Vocational Chaplains.

The Parish Discernment Committee assists the individual, the incumbent and, in the case of a parish, the parish corporation in discerning the nature of the person's call to ministry, and

especially in clarifying whether lay, diaconal or priestly ministry would offer the best channel for using personal gifts in the service of God and the Church.

A PDC should include three to five people (including at least one warden and one member of vestry in the case of a parish) selected and appointed by the incumbent for the ability to appreciate the gifts of others and seek the guidance of the Spirit. Should PDC members and the inquirer feel that diaconal or priestly ministry might be a reasonable option at this time based on work or a previous discernment process, they should proceed with the formal diocesan process leading to a decision and the recommendation to the parish corporation.

Please consult the guidelines for the PDC available from the Bishop's Office or the diocesan web site.

Assistance is also available from the vocational chaplains for initiating a PDC and guiding it through the process.

### **Role of the Parish Corporation (Rector, Wardens and Vestry)**

The corporation of an applicant's parish shares with the incumbent the responsibility for determining whether to recommend admission to the diocesan process leading to ordination to the diaconate or the priesthood. The corporation must develop a reasonable knowledge of the inquirer in order to make an informed decision on behalf of the individual and the Church. It must draw on the experiences of those in the congregation who have ministered most closely with that person or served on the discernment committee and its recommendations and report.

In the event the PDC recommends, and the corporation agrees, that the exploration of a call to ordained ministry should continue, the corporation makes a formal parish commendation and nomination for Holy Orders to the Bishop. The form of commendation and nomination includes the signatures of the incumbent and a minimum of two-thirds of the members of the corporation. After meeting with the inquirer the Bishop may grant aspirant status including recommending beginning the diocesan discernment process.

A summary of how the corporation arrived at the commendation should be included, outlining the process and resources used in the parish discernment effort (interviews, Bible study, discussion), the degree of personal involvement by members of the corporation, and recommendations from other groups within the parish. Pertinent documents may be attached.

Should the commendation and nomination be for a ministry of vocational deacon, the inquirer and the incumbent must prepare a case for diaconal ministry in the parish. This case is approved by the corporation and submitted to the Bishop with the Parish Commendation and Nomination early during the status of aspirant with the required form of Authorization and Release.

Persons admitted to the discernment leading to ordination process may necessarily be drawn away from the life of the home parish by educational programs and training responsibilities, but should keep their home parish informed about their progress.

## **Role of the Diocese - the Bishop**

Ordination is a sacrament, the administration of which - the laying on of hands - is reserved to bishops. A bishop ordains deacons and, along with presbyters, ordains priests. A minimum of three bishops together ordain a priest as bishop.

The Bishop must consent to ordination to the diaconate or the priesthood and is a key person at every step in the process. It is the Bishop who makes decisions about admission to status as aspirant, postulant and candidate. The Bishop, in consultation with the vocational chaplains, makes the final decision about ordination to the diaconate or the priesthood.

As chief pastor to all the clergy in the diocese, the Bishop also develops a personal relationship with those in the ordination process. The Bishop approves plans for theological education, advises on financial needs, and keeps in touch through regular correspondence from those preparing for ordination which is the responsibility of the individuals in the process. Those engaged in theological training programs are expected to forward unofficial transcripts of marks following each term of study.

## **Role of the Vocational Chaplains**

The vocational chaplains assist the Bishop in discerning and responding to the Diocese's need for ordained ministers. The chaplains especially report to the Bishop on the discernment process following an interview prior to the Bishop granting postulancy status of those who offer themselves for ministries in Holy Orders and assure that educational requirements have been met prior to ordination. The vocational chaplains guide, monitor and support the discernment process and generally assist the Bishop in making decisions about recommended training, formation and finally candidacy.

Each individual in the diocesan discernment process is normally assigned a vocational chaplain with whom regular communication and questions concerning elements of the process can be clarified. Regular communication and correspondence with the Bishop is encouraged through the Bishop's Executive Assistant, chair of the vocational chaplains.

## **Decisions on Status**

Decisions on postulancy for priesthood involve several factors, including the ability of the Diocese to support training. Postulants in full-time programs of training for stipendiary priesthood can normally expect some financial support from the Diocese. Decisions on candidacy depend specifically on the availability of ministry positions within the diocese. Individuals are always ordained when and if a specific ministry appointment is available.