

## VOCATIONS AND DISCERNMENT

This directive establishes a diocesan framework for identifying, discerning, and supporting vocations within the Diocese of Fredericton. It provides clarity on definitions, expectations, and responsibilities for all parties involved in vocational discernment, particularly with reference to licensed ministry.

### Definition of Terms

**Vocation** is a person's response to God's call to serve, rooted in baptism and expressed in various forms of ministry and service. In the context of this directive, vocation refers particularly to a discerned call to ministry, either as a deacon or priest within the Anglican Church of Canada or a licensed lay ministry in the diocese. Vocation is not limited to ordained ministry. The Church affirms a wide range of vocations, including religious life, lay leadership, and faithful Christian witness in secular professions.

**Discernment** is the spiritual and practical process of recognizing a vocation and the response to that. Discernment involves prayer, theological reflection, input from the Christian community, and structured assessment. It is both individual and communal. Discernment is not synonymous with application or admission to ordained ministry. It is an ongoing process of exploration that may or may not result in postulancy, ordination or licensed ministry.

### Guiding Principles

- **The Church discerns vocations corporately.** No individual discerns alone; the church participates in testing, affirming, and forming those exploring a call to ministry.
- **Discernment requires structure.** Informal interest must be shaped through formal pathways and oversight.
- **Vocations require formation.** Calling must be accompanied by evidence of character, competence, spiritual maturity, and a readiness to serve in a changing Church and world.

### Diocesan Structures for Discernment

Those exploring a vocation to ordained ministry will engage with the following structures:

- **Local Discernment**  
Initial conversations should occur within the local parish context, ideally with the incumbent, family and/or a spiritual director.
- **The Bishop's Office**  
The Director of Mission & Ministry (DMM) oversees diocesan vocational discernment and coordinates next steps. This includes advising applicants, convening discernment panels, and liaising with theological institutions. The DMM accompanies the individual throughout their discernment and formation process, leading to either ordination, lay licensing, or serving in an informal context.
- **Discernment Panels**  
Throughout an applicant's journey, there will be several moments to meet and share their sense of call and vocation with others outside their normal circles. These include

interviews with those already in holy orders, the diocesan vocations discernment committee, the Advisory Committee on Postulants for Ordination (ACPO) and others.

- **Education & Formation Programs**  
The DMM will help place the applicant in an appropriate academic and practical formation program. For some, this may be a residential seminary program; others may be enrolled in a hybrid program.

### **Expectations of Clergy and Parishes**

- It would be anticipated that incumbents, or an archdeacon if no incumbent, would be a first point of contact in an applicant's discernment journey and be active throughout this process.
- Parishes are expected to offer prayerful and practical support, including financial contributions where appropriate.
- All applications will be paired with a supervisor who is required to engage in regular mentoring and provide evaluation as part of a candidate's formation process, in collaboration with the DMM.

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### **Appendices:**

The Diaconate  
The Priesthood  
Licensed Laity

## Appendix 1: The Diaconate

### The Role and Mission of the Diaconate

Deacons are called to be catalysts for servant ministry, inspiring and equipping the Church to engage in God's mission beyond its walls. They are prophetic voices, continually reminding the Church to look outward, toward the marginalized, the suffering, and those in need of justice and compassion.

The call to the diaconate is not about recognizing or validating an individual's existing ministry but about forming visible, living icons of Christ's servanthood. Deacons do not exist to undertake the outreach ministry of the Church themselves, but to lead and empower the whole body of Christ to serve the world in Christ's name.

### Characteristics of a Deacon

Candidates for the diaconate should embody a servant's heart, demonstrating a deep commitment to compassion, justice, and leadership in their daily lives. Their ministry is under the bishop's authority and exercised in collaboration with the clergy and the wider Church. The liturgical role of a deacon is not their primary function but serves as a visible sign of their deeper mission:

- Serving all people, especially the poor, the vulnerable, the sick, and the lonely.
- Interpreting and responding to the world's needs, concerns, and hopes on behalf of the Church.
- Equipping and mobilizing the Church for acts of mercy, justice, and reconciliation.

Deacons are bridge-builders—connecting the Church to the world and the world to the Church. They are called to embody Christ's presence where the Church is often absent, leading by example and challenging the faith community to engage actively in the work of the Gospel.

### Formation and Preparation

The path to ordination as a deacon includes a structured process of discernment, training, and spiritual formation, ensuring that candidates are well-equipped for their roles. This includes:

- Theological education and practical training are delivered through formal theological training and a practical formation plan under the direction of the Director of Mission & Ministry in collaboration with the Incumbent.
- Seminars, retreats, and hands-on ministry experiences to develop spiritual depth and practical skills for leadership.
- A thorough discernment and vetting process, including medical and psychological assessments, financial responsibility checks, interviews with the diocesan discernment committee and meetings with others in the Community of Deacons.

In this diocese, deacons are usually non-stipendiary<sup>1</sup> and continue in their secular vocations; this dual calling—serving both in the world and within the Church—creates a unique and powerful ministry. However, it also presents challenges. Maintaining a balance between work, ministry, and personal life requires deep spiritual discipline, ongoing pastoral support, and a strong commitment to personal prayer, Scripture study, and the sustaining presence of the Christian community.

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<sup>1</sup> See Episcopal Directive 8.3

### **A Church Strengthened by Deacons**

The renewed emphasis on the diaconate calls for the Church to be more fully engaged in mission, justice, and mercy. Deacons strengthen the Church by calling it into action, reminding every baptized Christian of their shared vocation to bring Christ's love to the world. As servant-leaders, deacons do not simply point to the world's needs; they equip and encourage the Church to respond with faithfulness, courage, and love.

## Appendix 2: The Priesthood

### The Nature of Priesthood

In the Church's earliest days, leadership and sacramental life were shared among all the baptized. As Christian communities grew, responsibilities were entrusted to specific individuals, with bishops appointing priests to provide sacramental and pastoral care to local congregations.

Priests are ordained to serve the Church by leading worship, teaching, offering pastoral care, and equipping the people of God for ministry in the world. Through ordination, priests receive authority from the bishop to act as shepherds and spiritual leaders, ensuring that the gathered community remains rooted in the Word of God and the sacraments.

### The Role of a Priest

At ordination, each priest is called to serve as a *pastor, priest, and teacher*, actively participating in the governance and mission of the Church.

- As a Pastor, the priest embodies Christ's compassion, offering spiritual guidance, pastoral care, and support to individuals and families in times of joy and crisis. Priests help foster a culture of care within the Church, equipping others to serve in ministries of healing and reconciliation. They must also recognize their limitations and work with trained counsellors and professionals when needed.
- As a Priest, the ordained minister presides over the sacramental life of the Church, celebrating the Eucharist, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. This role is more than performing sacred rites—it is about being open to God's grace, modelling a life of holiness, and drawing the community deeper into the mystery of faith. A priest's ministry is fundamentally about pointing beyond themselves to Christ.
- As a Teacher, the priest proclaims the Gospel through preaching, teaching, and example. In a world filled with competing voices, the priest is called to communicate the transformative power of Christ in ways that are relevant, clear, and faithful to the tradition of the Church.
- As a Leader in the Church, the priest is a servant to their parish and an active participant in the broader life of the diocese and the global Church. This includes participating in governance, mentoring future leaders, and helping the Church discern its mission in an ever-changing world.

### A Life of Commitment

Priesthood is not simply a profession—it is a calling, a way of life. Priests commit to a disciplined life of prayer, study, and service, seeking to remain continually open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This means:

- Living under the pastoral authority of the bishop and within the shared leadership of the Church.
- Maintaining a deep and ongoing engagement with Scripture, theology, and contemporary issues.
- Cultivating a life of prayer that sustains personal faith and strengthens the priest's ability to lead others.

Priests serve as visible signs of God's presence, pointing beyond the struggles of the present moment to the hope and redemption found in Christ. They remind the Church that being a follower of Jesus is not a part-time commitment but a full and transformative way of life.

## **Preparation and Formation**

Becoming a priest is a journey of discernment, spiritual formation, and education. The process can typically last five to six years for those who have completed undergraduate studies and includes:

- Parish and diocesan discernment, where candidates explore their calling with the guidance of clergy and the faith community.
- Formal theological education, usually three years of seminary training or an equivalent program.
- A period of formation as a transitional deacon, typically lasting up to a year, providing hands-on ministry experience before priestly ordination.

Ideally, this preparation ensures new priests are well-equipped to lead congregations with wisdom, faithfulness, and a heart for mission.

## Appendix 3: Licensed Laity

### The Nature of Lay Ministry

From the earliest days of the Church, the Holy Spirit has gifted all the baptized for ministry. While some are called to ordained roles, many others are called to serve as lay leaders, witnessing to Christ in their daily lives and offering their gifts in a range of ministries both within and outside the Church.

The Church recognizes some laypersons as having a particular calling to ministry, affirmed through a process of discernment, training, and commissioning. These individuals are not ordained but are publicly authorized by the bishop to carry out specific ministries on behalf of the Church.

They embody the conviction that the mission of God belongs to the whole people of God and that lay ministry is not a stepping-stone to ordination, but a full and vibrant vocation in itself.

### The Role of Licensed Laity

Licensed laity serve in various contexts, depending on their gifts and the needs of the community. Their ministry may include:

- Evangelism and Faith Sharing: As evangelists, they are called to proclaim the Gospel, helping others discover and grow in faith. This includes one-on-one conversations, public outreach, community engagement, and creative ministries beyond the church walls.
- Discipleship and Teaching: Serving as Bible teachers or small group facilitators, they help to nurture faith formation in others. They are rooted in Scripture and committed to deepening their own theological understanding.
- Worship Leadership: While not presiding at sacraments, they often lead public prayer, Morning and Evening Prayer offices, and assist in the liturgical life of the Church under the direction of the clergy.
- Pastoral Presence: They may offer pastoral care within the parish or community, visiting homes, hospitals, or care facilities, constantly attentive to listening, praying, and offering Christ's compassion.
- Missional Engagement: They can be found on the frontlines of outreach ministry, whether through food banks, youth initiatives, justice efforts, or community partnerships—living the Gospel through tangible acts of love.

### A Life of Witness

Lay ministry flows from baptism and is grounded in the daily witness of Christian life. Those called to the licensed laity commit to a life of intentional discipleship, which includes:

- Deepening their spiritual life through regular prayer, worship, and reflection.
- Ongoing learning and theological engagement, particularly around Scripture, mission, and spiritual leadership.
- Serving collaboratively with clergy and other lay leaders to build up the Body of Christ.
- Living a life of integrity, humility, and openness to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Licensed laity are ambassadors of Christ in the everyday—bridge builders between the Church and the world, witnesses to God's love in places the clergy may not always go.

## **Preparation and Formation**

Becoming a licensed layperson involves a process of discernment, training, and affirmation by the Church. This process is typically shaped in collaboration with diocesan leaders and includes:

- Discernment within the parish and diocese, where the individual's call is tested and affirmed through prayer, conversation, and ministry experience.
- Foundational formation in areas such as Anglican theology, Scripture, worship, evangelism, and pastoral care—often through part-time study or diocesan training programs.
- Mentorship and supervision by clergy or experienced lay leaders to ensure support, feedback, and accountability in ministry.
- Licensing and ongoing support through the bishop's office, which may include annual reviews, continued education, and renewal of license.

This pathway honours the distinct calling of licensed lay ministers and seeks to equip them for faithful, effective, and sustainable service.

## **A Vital Ministry in a Changing Church**

As the Church responds to new challenges and opportunities, the ministry of licensed laity becomes increasingly vital. They are a sign of the Spirit's movement. Reminding us that mission is not confined to pulpits and parish halls but is lived out in workplaces, neighbourhoods, and everyday encounters.

They serve not to replace clergy, but to complement them, bringing the whole Church into fuller participation in God's mission.