

Discernment for Ordination

A CLERGY GUIDE, REVISED FALL 2017

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
(1 Corinthians 12:4-7, NRSV)*



The Anglican Diocese of Edmonton

Examining Chaplains

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The Church is the family of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. All baptized people are called to make Christ known as Saviour and Lord, and to share in the renewing of the world.

BAS Ordinal

Introduction

This clergy guide is intended to clarify the process and elements of the ordination process in the Diocese of Edmonton and to encourage prayerful engagement with the call to holy orders throughout the Diocese. It is compiled and maintained by the Examining Chaplains Committee.

Discernment for ordination is a work of the whole people of God at prayer. From the earliest times of the church we find the holy offices of Bishop, Priest, and Deacon in the life of the Christian community – positions that serve the life of the church directly and shape a particular ‘sign’ and witness of Christ in the world. While not a ‘higher’ calling among the multiplicities of Christian vocations, ordination marks out some chosen individuals for a particular, weighty, life-long, visible, public, and often difficult work. As such, it is right that the church take particular care in helping men and women discern prayerfully for ordination.

This document seeks to outline the processes and procedures for discernment for ordination in the Diocese of Edmonton.

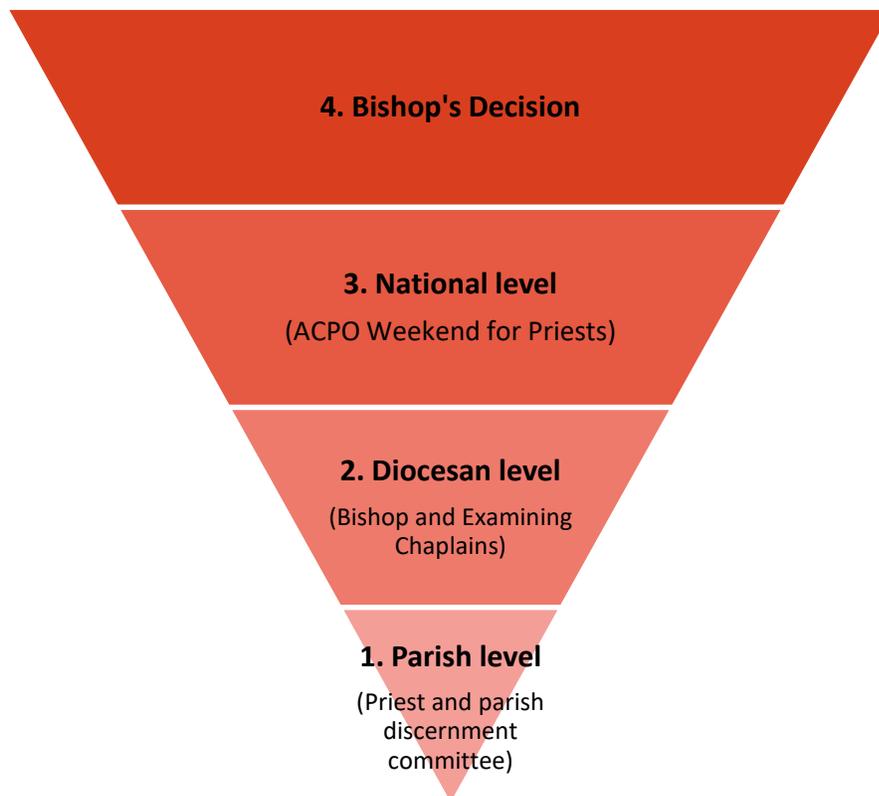
About the discernment of any Christian vocation

Throughout the scriptures, God’s voice speaks to create life anew, and to further the promises of God in creation. The person of Jesus is a particular expression of God’s Word among us – in our own flesh – through whom God invites us to join in the redemption of the world. We see this invitation in the way that Jesus called individuals away from their usual work (Mark 1:16-20) or to live their same life in a new way (John 8:1-11). The way of hearing the voice of God in Christ speaking into our life is often called discernment. It may be an asking of our Lord, “what would you have me do today (or in my life)?” or a more patterned revelation of who God has made us to be in the church’s eyes and the gifts of our family history, experiences, skills, dreams, circumstances, and prayer life. A central biblical image of discernment is perhaps how “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” after the visit of the shepherds (Luke 2:19, NIV). Discerning the voice of God may be direct and clear, as it was for St. Paul, or grow up in us over the span of many years and moments.

It is the task of a parish priest to help individuals hear the voice of God and to create spaces for true discernment to happen. This may occur in individual conversations or a small group context and there are a variety of resources available to help such a process occur. There is a danger in the church that ordained ministry be viewed as the ‘pinnacle’ of Christian ministry; one way to balance this is to create a culture in the church where individuals are consciously exploring the work of God in their life and aware of the many vocations to which they may be called. For instance, a senior may discern a renewed sense to be a teacher in the church, or to mentor students in their vocational choices; a young person may discern a

passion for inviting the church into the work of social justice; a poet may discern a call to serve the community in liturgical preparation; someone may discern particular skills in evangelism or in the administration of the church; a Christian politician may discern a call to change unjust policies and legislations for a particular people group. The options reside in the creativity of the Spirit and the imaginations of the individual. God uses whatever we offer to PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL - MAKE DISCIPLES - FURTHER THE KINGDOM in the building of Christ's church. The Holy Priesthood, Vocational Diaconate, and the up-Episcopacy, are particular invitations under Christ within this larger matrix.

Typical Discernment Process Overview



Overview of those involved in discernment for ordination

1. Bishop of the Diocese of Edmonton

- Solely responsible for the ordination, licensing, and overseeing of clergy

2. The People of the Diocese

- Invited, in themselves and their congregations, to watch for a potential call to ordained ministry when circumstances, gifts, passions, prayers, and aptitudes begin to align toward this holy work.

3. The individual

- Seeking the will of God and the will of the church alongside their own sense of God's movement in their life.

4. Parish Discernment Committee

- Initiated by the Bishop to provide a report on the parish's experience and sense of call discerned in the individual.

5. Rector

- The priest is the first line of support and discernment for any individual in their pastoral care.

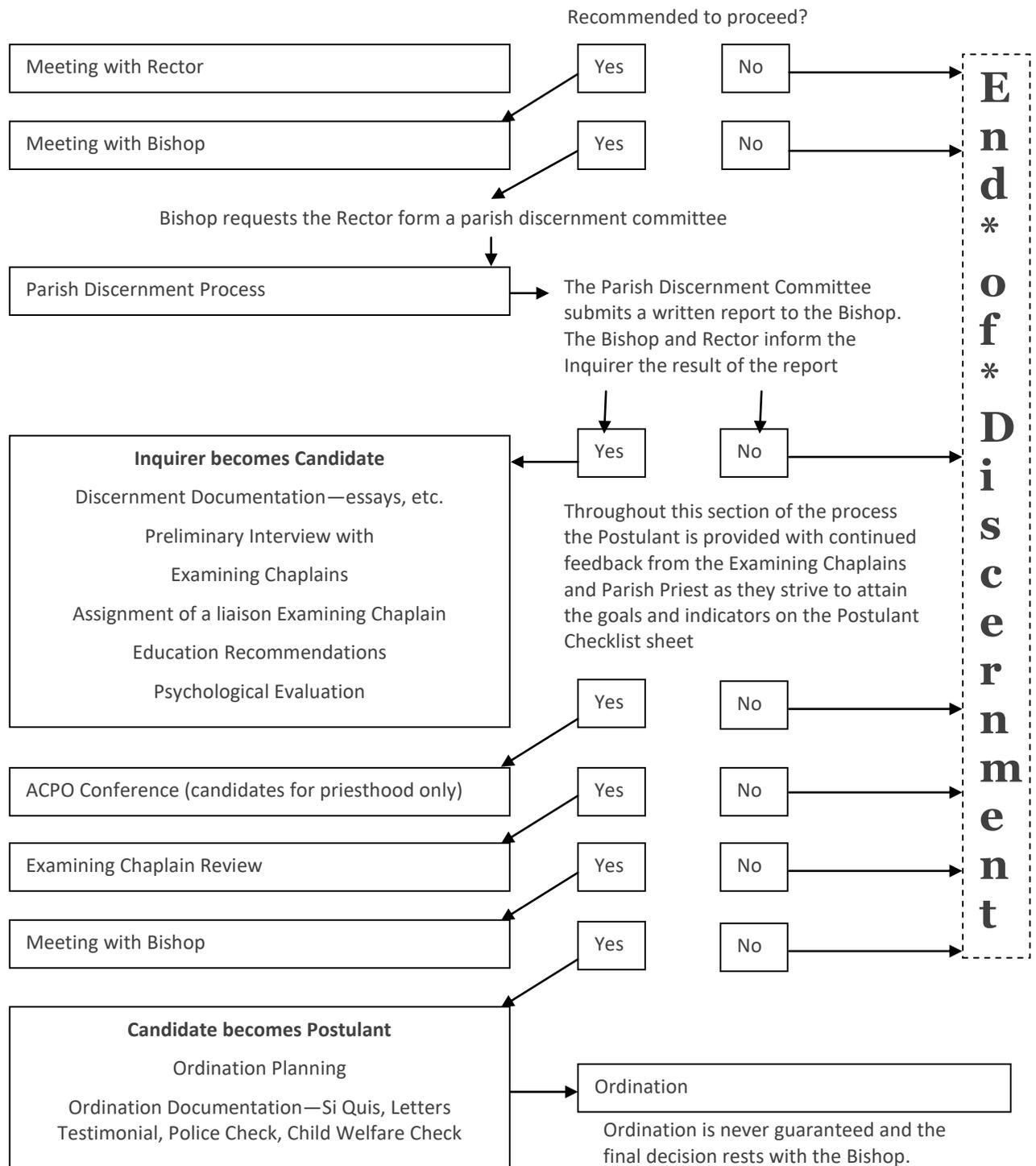
6. The Examining Chaplains Committee

- A recommending body to the Bishop to aid in the selection and support of individuals in official discernment for ordained ministry. *Note: The Examining Chaplains Committee does not begin to function with an individual until after the first meetings with Priest, Bishop, and after the Parish Discernment Committee recommends the individual for further process.*

7. ACPO (Advisory Committee on Postulants for Ordination)

- A weekend event to which we may send a limited number of candidates each year. (Priests only)

Discernment Process Leading to Holy Orders



* In some cases a new discernment process has been started after the first discernment process concluded. In these cases, there has been significant time and effort demonstrated to work on any issues and concerns, and it is a requirement that the process is restarted from the first step.

N.B. At no time should it be said or implied that simply showing interest, or being in process for ordination, means that the individual WILL be ordained now or later.

Ordination is the will of the church and Bishop alone.

Discernment itself implies that the final result is presently unknown, not a 'fait accompli'.

We wish to avoid undue emotional stress should individuals discover this too late in the process.

Steps in the Process

PARISH STEPS

1. Initial Inquiry

Option A: A congregation or priest begins to wonder if a certain individual might be well suited and drawn by the Spirit for a life in ordained service to the church. The individual is respected in the community, known for their faithfulness to Christ in life and doctrine, grounded in the scriptures, active in the work and life of the church with room to grow. *Competencies* describes that a person suited for ordained ministry must (p7):

- *have a personal faith and spiritual life that is adequate to lead others;*
- *understand who we are as the people of God, our stories, our history and what it means to be an Anglican within the wider Christian family;*
- *be able to translate that rich tradition into the real life of the actual communities and contexts where we minister;*
- *Have the capacities to provide effective leadership in the communities we are called to serve;*
- *be able to teach, mentor and support the development of the ministry of the whole people of God.*

Option B: An individual comes forward with a secret desire and prayer to offer themselves in service of Christ and his Church. This becomes known to another member of the church, to the priest or to the Bishop, and it is immediately discerned that this individual has potential to serve well in this capacity. (ie. It is not a flighty thought or ill-fitting with the individual's character, pattern, or skill)

2. First meeting with parish priest (or in some cases the Bishop directly)

- a. In any such conversation, the priest should rely deeply on his/her sense in prayer and thought, guarding against personal bias or initial opinion.
- b. The goals of this conversation for the priest are:
 - i. *What do they know about the ordained ministry?* What is the individual's level of understanding of the work of a priest or deacon? They may simply need more information or have mis-information about what ordination is about.
 - ii. *What are they thinking and discerning?* Is this a passing thought? Has this been discerned over a lifetime? What kind of role are they envisioning?

- iii. *What do I think?* Does all the 'data' add up to a potential call to ordained ministry? Can I imagine this person in three months or three years being ready to serve the church in life-long ordination?
- iv. *What shape of vocation is this individual called to?* (See sections on Priesthood and Vocational Diaconate.)
- c. If the parish priest clearly discerns no immediate call to ordination, it is right that the priest continue discerning and directing the individual towards a Christian vocation more deeply suited to their gifts.
- d. If the parish priest discerns real *potential* for an ordained life in the person, the individual is directed to schedule a meeting with the Bishop.

3. First Meeting with the Bishop

- a. This is a key moment of discernment with the Chief Pastor of the diocese to determine if a potential call exists and if further process for ordination will be pursued.
- b. If the Bishop discerns a potential call, the parish priest is directed to form a Parish Discernment Committee to begin to discern for a call to the Priesthood or the Vocational Diaconate.
- c. If the Bishop is hesitant to pursue a process of discernment at this time, the parish priest is directed to discern and direct the individual towards a Christian vocation more deeply suited to them at the moment.

A Successful PDC

- 1) Choose the right space, time, and mix of people.
- 2) Pray, listen, and study together in discernment.
- 3) Follow the plan provided by the Bishop so that each part of the process will work together.

4. Parish Discernment Committee (PDC)

- a. The PDC is constituted by the parish priest at the direction of the Bishop. It should be composed of an appropriate mix of men, women, different ages, and cultures to the parish, and number no more than 4 or 5 people alongside the priest. A mix of new members and longer-term members of the church is encouraged since the PDC allows a learning and fellowship opportunity alongside the work of discernment. As elected parish representatives, it is appropriate, when possible, to include members of vestry in the committee's number.
- b. The individual should be asked to provide the PDC with,
 - i. A brief written overview of their spiritual journey, including the story of how they have come to an interest in the ordained life. (~ 1 page)
 - ii. An outline of their past and present work for faith in their life and in the church.
- c. These will be new sorts of conversations for some members of the PDC and some explanation of discernment and discernment for ordination from the priest will be helpful.

PDC Checklist:

- Private, safe and comfortable space booked?
- Documents received?
- Group prayer plan?
- Does everyone understand what you are asking them to do and how they fit in the overall process?

IN THE REPORT...

- Include an overview of your process / mtgs.
- Tenor of conversation?
- Do you recommend to a) vocational diaconate or b) priesthood
- For what specific reasons do you recommend this person or not?
- Have you reflected back to the individual any constructive critical feedback or encouragement that will help them in their journey?
- Anything else relevant?
- Names of members

- d. The PDC meets over a series of occasions and is charged to follow the ECC-designed **study guide “PRAYING TOGETHER”** and provide a one-page report back to the Bishop. The PDC is under the support and direction of the parish priest.
- e. **Stipulations:**
 - i. **The PDC should meet in a space that is comfortable, safe, and private in order to foster deeper discussion.**
 - ii. **The PDC should also be approached as a deeply prayerful experience and a spiritually edifying process for all involved. As such, do begin meetings and end in prayer and keep a prayerful tone through all discussions.**
 - iii. **The study guide “PRAYING TOGETHER” and discernment process laid out in this document *must* be followed as outlined so as to ensure a standardized and fair process for each individual. Any concerns and feedback about the process, for future planning, should be directed to the Bishop or the coordinator of Examining Chaplains.**
- f. Following the series of meetings, the PDC will make a recommendation either for Priesthood or for the Vocational Diaconate. It should be noted that at times the individual’s sense of call may differ from the discernment of the PDC! This should simply be noted and passed on in the report.
- g. If the PDC feels unable to recommend this individual toward ordination at this time, it is not a ‘slight’ on the individual, but an opportunity for further discernment with the parish priest about the deeper and more fitting purposes of God in the individual. This is why it is so important to teach about the wider discernment to Christian vocation among the baptized and to fit ordination within this matrix.
- h. **The PDC report** (authored by the Rector with feedback from the group) allows communication of the group’s discernment back to the Bishop and the Examining Chaplains Committee and should include:
 - i. A brief overview of the PDC’s process and pattern of meetings.
 - ii. The tenor of the PDC’s conversation
 - iii. A recommendation towards or away from further ordination process. Do name specifically why you make this recommendation.
 - iv. Any critical realities in the individual’s life that will affect or influence their life in ordained ministry.
 - v. Any other pastoral comments thought helpful to the Bishop and examining chaplains. **Any specific confidential or private issues should be communicated directly to the Bishop.*
- i. Further details of what the PDC should be looking for are included in the PDC study guide.

- j. If the PDC recommends an individual for further ordination process, and following the Bishop's review, the individual will continue the process as an Inquirer toward ordination and comes under the purview of the Examining Chaplains Committee.
- k. It is right that the individual take up a serious pattern of prayer and spiritual direction if they have not already.

DIOCESAN STEPS

Examining Chaplains Committee (ECC)

- a. The Inquirer provides a CV to the Bishop and addresses the "7 Questions for Discernment" which will be provided by Coordinator of the ECC. These are reviewed by the Bishop and the whole ECC. These help the ECC (who may not know the individual) to learn about the person and be a true aid in their discernment.
- b. A selection of three members from the ECC contact the Inquirer and organize a standardized meeting for discernment towards either the vocational diaconate or the priesthood. This is not a job interview, but another level of prayerful discernment and vocational process in the church. A report is provided back to the main ECC which is able to make further recommendations to the Bishop. The ECC may make recommendations for further time for discernment, additional study/formation, an extended waiting process, or that the Inquirer become a Postulant for ordination.
- c. During the Postulancy phase, the ECC will
 - i. Assign one of the Examining Chaplains to walk alongside the Postulant through this season of continued discernment and formation – to answer any questions, offer guidance, and keep the ECC advised of the individual's situation and progress.
 - ii. Suggest resources for study, seminary, or recommend additional education, experience, supervision, mentoring, or training;
 - iii. Arrange a psychological assessment paid for by the diocese;
 - iv. Continued assessment during this phase may include a recommendation to discontinue the process, and perhaps refer the individual back to the parish priest for alternative vocational discernment and/or pastoral direction;
 - v. Help prepare the application to ACPO (National) for Postulants discerning the Priesthood.
- d. Following due process and fulfilment of requirements, the ECC makes recommendation to the Bishop that the Postulant become a Candidate for Ordination, preparing for a date of ordination. This phase will include ordination planning, the reading of the Si Quis in the Candidate's home parish, the

acquisition of Letters Testimonial, and finally a pre-ordination retreat just prior to Ordination.

NATIONAL STEPS (candidates for priesthood only)

The Advisory Committee on Postulants for Ordination, ACPO, is responsible for a national discernment process advisory to the Bishops. At annual (some bi-annual) discernment conferences, held in four provinces across Canada, ACPO evaluates all persons seeking acceptance as postulants for ordination to the priesthood in the Anglican Church of Canada and provides a prescriptive evaluative report for Bishops and those assessed. A typical ACPO report advises a Bishop about the 'personal strengths and weaknesses of candidates, the nature of their personal faith, their present understanding and potential for Christian ministry, and their understanding of vocation.'

ACPO is one of the four arenas (parish, diocese, training institution/theological college, ACPO) of the discernment process used by Bishops. Each arena has a specific responsibility in the discernment process. It is the primary responsibility of ACPO to assess for the wider church on issues related to character, charisms, and call to ordered ministry. Responsibilities for ACPO also include:

- evaluating candidates in the areas of spirituality and church life, pastoral and social concern, and personal characteristics, using the national Checklist of Indicators
- identifying areas in which the candidate needs to grow
- offering advice regarding the pursuit of other forms of ministry

ACPO is organized on a Provincial basis and is held accountable to the House of Bishops through Provincial structures.

Applicants to ACPO are required:

1. to fill out a comprehensive Information Form supplied by the diocese
2. to write a brief autobiography and two essays which develop an understanding of ministry in general and ordained ministry in particular
3. to supply name, address and telephone numbers of three referees who will complete a reference questionnaire sent out by the Provincial Secretary
4. if married or engaged, to provide a letter from their spouse or fiancé(e) in support of the application to ACPO and the applicant's call to the ordained ministry
5. to attend a weekend assessment conference which runs from Friday noon until Sunday noon (These should not be prepared until a candidate is nominated for ACPO)

Assessors are chosen by the ACPO Secretary from a list of nominees supplied by the diocesan Bishops or their designates.

The Conference is an exercise in discernment of vocation to the ordained ministry. It is almost always a very stressful time for the applicants and the assessors. With the support of the Chaplain who leads in worship planning and gives pastoral care, an atmosphere of genuine care can often be maintained throughout the weekend.

From: The ACC ACPO Handbook, Revised 2001 (<http://www.anglican.ca/faith/files/2009/11/APCO-Handbook.pdf>)

Ordination

1. An ordination is scheduled at the discernment of the Bishop

- a. A number of ordination documents are produced or required
 - i. Si Quis
 1. A notification read to the home parish of the Candidate for Holy Orders indicating the Bishop's intention to ordain the person and to enquire whether any impediment may be alleged against the Candidate.
 - ii. Letters Testimonial
 1. A letter confirming the support of the parish from which the Candidate comes.
 - iii. Police and Child Welfare Check
- b. The Candidate then engages in a time of preparation for ordination including a pre-ordination retreat and service planning.



"In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely."

BAS p655

The Vocational Diaconate in the Diocese of Edmonton

Definition

Deacons are persons who are called by God into a prophetic ministry¹, authorized by the church, and ordained by a bishop to a lifetime ministry of Word and Service to both the community and the congregation in a ministry that connects the two.

Vision

This ministry is not primarily about Sunday morning worship. Rather it is ministry at the margins, always with a view to changing a system and challenging the church as well as the world to ask the important questions. The liturgical role of vocational deacons is important but very minimal. Their presence at liturgies is more sign than function.

Criteria for Discernment of Vocation

A person exploring ordination to the Vocational Diaconate should demonstrate the following evidence of core values:

- An active Christian faith, including an active prayer life consisting of Daily Offices, regular attendance at the Eucharist, and a ministry of intercession for his/her field of ministry.
- An articulate call to the Diaconate with specific reference to prophetic servanthood, with demonstrated experience of service particularly related to the marginalized, the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely, and with a particular commitment to ecological or social justice ministry. The person will demonstrate that this ministry is presently being exercised at work or as a volunteer.
- Love of and commitment to the Body of Christ as expressed in the Anglican Church of Canada.
- An integration of faith, action, theological reflection, and a balanced personal life.
- Self-awareness including knowledge of their own strengths and weaknesses, and a willingness to grow and change. Ability to be honest and open with others especially when mediating conflict.

¹ In this context a 'prophetic ministry' involves witnessing to the power of the Holy Spirit calling the church and the world to transformation. In biblical terms, a prophet is 'one who speaks forth'.

- An understanding of holy orders and a willingness to live under the authority of the Bishop and function as a co-operative member of a parish clergy team. Commitment to being a team player, leadership ability, ability to work in groups, and respect for the opinions of others. The ability to gather a support group, and work with other deacons engaged in specialized ministries.
- An ability to relate to all people regardless of race, class, culture, age, disability, gender, orientation.
- A commitment to being a life-long learner with training in the particular area of ministry and willingness to engage in on-going training and education.
- An active plan for self-care, taking into account self, family, and friendships.

Pre-requisites, Education, and Training Guidelines

Pre-requisites: Adequate training, at a post-secondary and practical level, for the specific ministry identified as being at the core of the work anticipated as a Vocational Deacon.

Education/Training: Normally a two year program of study through an accredited Anglican seminary, including courses in the following:

- Christian Theology
- Spiritual Formation
- Scripture: Old and New Testaments
- Moral Theology and Ethics
- Social Justice and Social Issues
- Church History
- Diocesan Diaconal formation

Written Submissions Required:

- C.V. (3 pages maximum)
- “7 Questions for Discernment” as provided by the Examining Chaplains

Checklist

- Vibrant prayer life – i.e. Offices are said regularly; weekly attendance at Eucharist; daily prayer includes your area of ministry and your parish.
- Spiritual Direction takes place in a regular pattern.
- Involved in an existing and regular ministry.
- Network of support is in place: fellow parishioners, friends, etc. A willingness to connect with and support the diocesan community of vocational deacons.
- Team mindset and intention.

Priesthood in the Diocese of Edmonton

Definition

Priests are persons who are called by God to a ministry of Word and Sacrament. A priest is called specifically “to preach, to declare God’s forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God’s blessing, to preside at the administration of holy baptism and at the celebration of Christ’s body and blood in the Eucharist.” (BAS, p646)

Vision

The ministry of a priest is both challenging and rewarding. As a priest, a person is called to be a channel of God’s grace both sacramentally and pastorally. A priest has to be discerning as to when to spend time comforting people and churches in times of sorrow and difficulty, and when to spend time challenging them to deeper levels of faith and discipleship. In all things a priest is called “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” (BAS, p646).

Criteria for Discernment of Vocation

A person called to the ministry of a priest in the Anglican Church of Canada will have the following qualities:¹

- Displays a mature understanding of the call to ministry, service, and study.
- Demonstrates a commitment to loving service in the church as rooted in a sustained and growing love of God in Christ.
- Cultivates a disciplined life of prayer rooted in the Anglican tradition of common prayer, which is responsive to both the demands of personal formation and the expectations of public ministry.
- Shows evidence of personal and spiritual growth and self-awareness.
- Exercises appropriate care of self, accountability to others, and has an awareness of sources of support available when needed.
- Shows a commitment to live the Christian faith within the Anglican Church of Canada.
- Demonstrates a healthy and loyal but not uncritical relationship to the diocese, province and national church.
- Reflects with insight on personal strengths and weaknesses, gifts and vulnerabilities.
- Discerns God’s presence and activity in her or his own life and in the lives of others.
- Bears witness to her or his own experience of God’s love and grace in acts of evangelism.

"You are called to work as a *pastor, priest, and teacher*, together with your bishop and fellow presbyters, and to take your share in the councils of the Church."

BAS p646

¹ See: *Competencies for Ordination to the Priesthood: The Anglican Church of Canada*

Education

Education is normally a three year program of study through an accredited Anglican seminary to obtain a Master of Divinity degree, as well as an internship and other practical ministry opportunities.

Written Submissions Required

- C.V. (Three Pages Maximum)
- “7 Questions for Discernment” as provided by the Examining Chaplains
- Essays in preparation for ACPO

Key Resources

- Anglican Church of Canada *Book of Alternative services*,
<https://c2892002f453b41e8581-48246336d122ce2b0bccb7a98e224e96.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/BAS.pdf>
- Anglican Church of Canada *Competencies for the Ministry of Priests* booklet, 2013
(<http://www.anglican.ca/faith/ministry/education/competencies-priesthood/>)
- Anglican Communion “Ministry Grids” Outlining key competencies for ministry before and throughout ordained life.
(<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/theology/educationstudies/ministry-grids.aspx>) *March 8, 2016*

Contact Information

General questions about vocation, the parish discernment committee, or an individual in your parish should be directed to,

The Bishop of Edmonton, Rt. Rev. Jane Alexander

Questions about an individual's progress or the Examining Chaplains Committee should be directed to,

The Coordinator of the Examining Chaplains Committee

Communication does not typically occur between the parish priest and a candidate's examining chaplain.

The Examining Chaplains Committee meets as needed throughout the year, approximately every two to three months.

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