STEPS IN THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS TOWARD ORDINATION

The process is guided by the sponsoring priest (head of congregation*) in consultation with the Commission on Ministry, as needed. The process requires in-depth, open dialogue, with the sponsoring priest prior to and during the entire discernment and application process. In this document, the person in discernment will be referred to as the “Seeker.”

DISCERNMENT
Participation in a Discovery Retreat weekend is highly recommended to those in discernment, though no longer required.

Steps in the discernment process leading to ordination.

1. Seeker initiates meeting with Head of Congregation to share their perceived called. If the Seeker attends a Discovery Retreat, this meeting may be before attending the Retreat, but must occur after the Retreat to ensure that all parties are in agreement in which direction to progress with the discernment process. If the seeker does not attend a Retreat, proceed to the next step.

2. If there is agreement to proceed, the Head of the Congregation requests the appropriate application from Ana Gonzales:
   - Canon 6 - Application for Holy Orders to the Diaconate
   - Canon 8 - Application for Holy Orders to Priesthood
   - Canon 10 – Reception of Clergy from Other Churches
   *Note: Applications will be sent only to the Head of Congregation*

3. Once received, the Head of Congregation forwards the application to the seeker. This is to ensure that the Head of Congregation is the focal point for all communications with the Commission on Ministry and that the Head of Congregation, as the sponsor, remains the key focal point throughout the process. *(APPLICATIONS ARE NOT SENT DIRECTLY TO THE SEEKER.)*

4. The Head of Congregation forms a local discernment committee or requests assistance to form a regional discernment committee. Discernment committees are typically 5-6 people.
   - If a regional discernment committee is preferred, 2-3 members from the Seeker’s congregation should be identified to serve. One of these should be a Vestry/Bishop’s Committee member. One of these should be appointed to serve as Facilitator. The other 2-3 members should be recruited from area Episcopal churches. *A list of trained discernment committee ministers is available from Ana Gonzales.*
   If there are problems finding committee members in your area, please contact the Rev. Francene Young for assistance.
If a local committee is preferred, the Head of Congregation and the Seeker work together to identify 5-6 members from within their congregation who are willing to serve. If none have served on a discernment committee in the last 2-3 years, contact Ana Gonzales or Rev. Francene Young to arrange training.

5. In preparation for the discernment committee and the application, the Seeker will be required to write a 5-page spiritual autobiography. Instructions for writing the spiritual autobiography are in the application packet.

6. Once the committee is trained and the spiritual autobiography is completed, the discernment committee will begin meeting.
   - There are 6 scheduled sessions. Each session is approximately 2 hours.
   - A manual is provided to each committee member and the Seeker. The manual provides an agenda and details for each session.
   - The result is a mutually agreed upon discernment committee report. A template for the report is provided in the manual.

7. The discernment committee report is given to the Head of Congregation who then provides a verbal presentation to the Vestry/Bishop’s Committee. The discernment committee report is also submitted with the application for Holy Orders.

8. If the Vestry/Bishop’s Committee agrees to proceed and support the Seeker, they complete and submit the Vestry/Bishop’s Committee Nomination and Commitment form (included in the application).

*Please note:* The final decision about whether a person should be ordained is made at the diocesan level. Completion of the discernment process at the local level is simply the first step of the process.

**APPLICATION and DEADLINE**

All required portions of the application are due in the Austin office by **SEPTEMBER 1st** for those seeking to be ordained or wishing to be received into the Episcopal church from another denomination.

9. The Executive for Ministry reviews all applications. If approved, the Seeker (now applicant) will be notified to complete the following as required by National Church canons:
   - a medical exam,
   - a psychological exam, and
   - consent to a full background check.
MEETING WITH COMMISSION ON MINISTRY/COMMITTEE FOR THE DIACONATE

10. If completed, the applicant, will be scheduled to meet with members of the Commission on Ministry or the Committee for the Diaconate. The Head of Congregation and spouse, if married, will be expected attend this meeting.

11. The Executive for Ministry, with input from the Commission/Committee makes the final decision to accept the applicant as a Postulant or re-direct the applicant for further discernment or other ministries.

SEMINARY

12. The Executive for Ministry in conversation with the Postulant (formerly applicant) makes the final decision on which seminary to attend for formal full-time formation. Postulants for Bi-vocational priest or Deacon will attend the Iona School for Ministry.

*Head of Congregation. In the absence of a Rector/Vicar, the head of congregation will be the Interim Rector/Vicar, Priest in Charge, Locum Tenens or the Senior Warden.