

COMMUNITY DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE PROCESS AND MATERIALS



EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MICHIGAN
2021

Congregations have an essential role in discerning those in their midst with the gifts for ordained ministry. The purpose of the Community Discernment Committee is to assist the rector/vicar/sponsoring priest in an initial assessment of an inquirer's call, suitability, and capability for ordination.

The selection of the Committee:

- A. The Committee is to be established by the rector/vicar/sponsoring priest in consultation with the inquirer.
- B. The CDC is Composed of:
 - 3-4 members who are communicants in good standing, exhibit emotional and spiritual maturity, and are active in the liturgical life and ministry of the congregation/community. (We suggest at least one member be from the vestry as a liaison.)
 - 1-2 member(s) who are Episcopalian(s) from another worshipping community.
 - Wherever possible, the committee should reflect racial, cultural and gender diversity and have an appreciation for the breadth and depth of the Anglican Tradition.
- C. The rector/vicar/sponsoring priest in consultation with the inquirer appoints a convener who schedules the meetings, chairs each session, and directs the drafting and sending of the letter to the home rector/vicar/sponsoring priest and bishop's office at the end of the sessions. (A template for this letter is included near the end of this packet.)
- D. A sample covenant for the committee and a form for recording its membership is included near the end of this packet. This form should be completed and retained in the parish records.

The functions of the Committee:

- I. The Committee meets with the inquirer once or twice a month for about ninety minutes.
 - A. The Theme for each Session are:
 - 1. Orientation and Commissioning (The CDC first meets with member(s) of the COM to go over the process and expectations.)
 - 2. Compelling Faith Part A: Spiritual Autobiography
 - 3. Compelling Faith Part B: Bible Study
 - 4. Self Awareness and Openness to Growth
 - 5. Vocational Awareness and Community Affirmation
 - 6. Leadership in Context
 - 7. Reflections and Blessings

- II. Informal sharing and discussion are necessary ingredients of the discernment process. Since the focus of the committee is to explore the inquirer's call for ministry, at least half of the time allotted for each session should be given to the inquirer to share as appropriate.
- III. The ordination process in the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan is competency based. Throughout the sessions, you will explore the competencies necessary for someone serving in ordained leadership. In the supplemental materials, you will find an introduction to the competencies.
- IV. The Committee must take seriously the importance of confidentiality.
- V. CDC members must make a firm commitment to attend and participate fully in all sessions of the work.
- VI. The members of the Committee should endeavor to pray regularly for the inquirer and for understanding God's direction throughout this process.
- VII. Following the final session, the Committee should prepare a letter to the home rector or other establishing authority indicating, at a minimum, whether the committee believes the inquirer appears to have a calling for ordained ministry that should be considered by the diocese or if it appears that the inquirer would best pursue his/her call through lay ministry. (A template for this letter is included near the end of this packet.) The evaluation letter from the Committee should be submitted to the home rector/vicar/sponsoring priest, the inquirer and the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan.

*Please email all materials to the Bishop's Executive Assistant
Crystal Ramirez cramirez@edomi.org*

THE SESSIONS

Session 1: Orientation

Opening Prayer:

Teach us to seek your wisdom,
as we embrace the folly of your love.

Let us Pray:

Lover of Souls, you sent Jesus Christ to show humankind how to live abundantly and dwell in your heavenly kingdom; be with _____ as he/she/they ponder your will, and pour out your wisdom and grace upon each member of the Community Discernment Committee as we listen obediently for how we might proclaim the mighty power of your love and mercy; in the name of your Son who was born, lived, died, and raised for us – who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns; one God, ever and ever.

Meditation:

It is the contemplative saints who most know the fear and pain as well as the joy and freedom of entering emptiness; they have chosen to confront that which has to be thrust upon the rest of us. They have stretched and yielded themselves to experience cleanly and clearly the hunger and brokenness of their own hearts and of our world. They have willingly sought to deprive themselves of anesthesia. They have claimed their desire to bear the beams of love, regardless of the cost.

...Spaciousness is always a beginning, a possibility, a potential, a capacity for birth. Space exists not in order to be filled but to create. In space, to the extent we can bear the truth of the way things are, we find the ever-beginning presence of love. Take time, then; make the space. Seek it wherever you find it, do it however you can. Seek the truth, not what is comfortable. Seek the real, not the easy.

From "Entering the Emptiness" by Gerald May in *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective*, edited and compiled by Michael Schut (New York: Church Publishing)

Reflection Question: What kind of space do you wish to create on this discernment committee? What are your yearnings from this committee?

After some time for reflection Close with this prayer or some other suitable prayer

Everliving God, whose will it is that all should come to you through your Son Jesus Christ: Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.** *For the Mission of the Church (BCP, p. 816)*

In This Session:

● **Everyone shares:**

- How long have you been part of the parish or faith community? (Or, for external members, how long have you been part of your faith community?)
- Why did you say yes to being on this discernment committee?

- **Member(s) from the Commission of Ministry (COM) will orient and charge the CDC and its members.** This will include going through the materials and session and facilitating a CDC Covenant (an example is in the Supplemental Materials).

Closing: The Lord's Prayer

Next Session: Spiritual Autobiography the Inquirer will prepare to give their Spiritual Autobiography. (See guidelines in the supplemental material.)

Session 2: Compelling Faith Part A

Opening Prayer: Begin with Silence to ground and bring yourselves to the present moment.

Meditation: St. Benedict writes: “Listen carefully to the master’s instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart.” (Rule of St. Benedict Prologue:1)

The Rule of Benedict opens with the word “listen.” Every Christian should be a listener, attending with the “inner ear of the heart.” This means that listening is more than an activity that I do in my head. The “ear of my heart” means listening with all of my being.

Reflection Questions: When did you last listen to a person, a talk, or a reading that seemed to say something profound to you? Where and how would you like to hear God speak?

After some time for reflection Close with this prayer or some other suitable prayer

Let us Pray:

Gracious God, who knows our needs before we ask, Grant us wisdom and grace to your will. Bless us with clear eyes, listening hearts, and discerning minds. Speak to all our hearts so that we may discover Your will for our lives. We ask this in the name of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In This Session:

The inquirer is invited to share their spiritual journey. Beginning with earliest childhood memories and being attentive to particular turning points, the inquirer tells the story of their relationship with God.

Possible Break

Guiding Questions:

After the inquirer gives their spiritual autobiography the other members of the group may ask questions and reflect on:

- What were the roots of this sense of call to ordination and how did this call develop in this person’s faith journey?
- Does the inquirer see any connections with Biblical themes and images?
- Who have been the spiritual guides and mentors for the inquirer?

Closing: Close with one of the Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families beginning on page 136 of the *BCP*. Use the Devotion appropriate for the time of day in which you are meeting.

Next Session: Compelling Faith Part B Inquirer should plan to lead a Bible Study (Supplemental Materials)

Session 3: Compelling Faith Part B

Opening Prayer:

Read aloud this summary of Isaiah found in Luke:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:16-21; Isa. 61:1-3)

Meditate silently on this text for 3 minutes, then close by saying, "Amen."

In This Session:

Lead a Bible Study

Perhaps the most critical task that ordained persons do is to speak passionately and learnedly about the promises of God as they are found in the scriptures.

Accordingly, the first half of this meeting will have the person discerning ordination give a 30-minute Bible Study. Guidelines and resources for Bible Study can be found in the supplemental materials.

Possible Break

CDC Reviews the Competency: Study together the following Competency

Compelling spiritual life and a passion for the Gospel: Our clergy love God with heart, mind, and soul, know Christ and want to make Christ known, and address the great spiritual hunger in the culture at large and in our congregations. They have a vision for the Episcopal Church's ministry and how to guide our people to greater faithfulness and spiritual depth. They have both a deep reverence for the sacraments at the heart of our liturgical life and a sacramental worldview in which outward and visible things reveal inward and spiritual truths. Clergy understand the history of the Christian church and the historical context of the scriptures, enabling them to articulate core principles of our tradition and use them to guide our work in this time.

Characteristics:

- Loves Jesus
- Is faithful, with a strong, regular prayer life
- Is connected to a Christian faith community
- Embodies and engages scripture in daily life
- Understands how care for creation encompasses environmental stewardship
- Understands the history of the church, the historical context of the scriptures, and how the Holy Spirit is speaking to us through these in our time

Ability to communicate the Gospel in ways that people and communities find engaging and relevant to their lives: Our clergy need to speak several “languages,” both human and technological, during worship, in personal conversation, and in social media. They are called to minister in a wide variety of contexts, among all sorts and ages of people, from birth through death. They find ways to meet people where they are, and to engage people’s hearts, minds, and imaginations with the Good News of Christ. They help people find ways to share God’s love in their everyday contexts. They also demonstrate flexibility in how they interact with their communities and in using online and/or virtual tools.

Characteristics:

- Shares their faith, including why they’re in the church, in a compelling and real way
- Articulates a sacramental understanding of their call, specific to the order to which they feel called
- Can talk about what it means to proclaim the Word, and to translate that to draw people to go with them to create the change in the world
- Demonstrates competence with current media tools and possesses a growth mindset and openness to learning new technologies as they emerge

Guiding Questions:

- In what ways did the Bible Study reflect the above competencies?
- What did you find most compelling about the Bible Study?
- What did you like about the Bible Study?
- What would you have done differently?

Closing: Read together the Baptismal Promises (*BCP*, p. 304-305)

Next Session: Self-Awareness and Openness to Growth Inquirer should review the Examen in the supplemental material and prepare to lead the group in this practice

Session 4: Self-Awareness and Openness to Growth

Opening: Inquirer will lead the CDC in the Spiritual Practice of the Examen. (See supplemental material for detailed instructions)

In This Session:

CDC Reviews the Competency: Study together the following Competency

- A. **Spiritual maturity, self-awareness, and authenticity:** The work of the Episcopal clergy is challenging. Effective clergy must be able to persevere in challenging circumstances, recognize their personal growth edges, and be willing to learn new skills and ask for help. They must be able to understand that all social locations are not the same, and that race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and other factors shape our experiences, both of the gospel and the world.

Characteristics:

- Is kind, relational, and empathetic
- Is self-aware, thoughtful and reflective
- Shows willingness to grow and learn alongside others
- Demonstrates resilience, including the ability to persevere in challenging circumstances and even in the face of failure
- Self-regulates and maintains healthy boundaries
- Possesses a strong spiritual center, plus physical and mental stamina
- Seeks out voices of those who differ from them, especially those who are oppressed or marginalized, in literature as well as in person
- Is mindful of their own social location, and cognizant that others will perceive things differently from their social locations, and aware of the ways that racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other collective and structural sins that have shaped our worldview

Guiding Questions:

- Each person shares: What came up for you during the Examen?
- For the inquirer:
 - As you completed the Examen, what is hardest for you to see as part of God's action in your life? What is easiest? Where do you find God in the broken spaces?
 - Talk about a time you've been the person in the minority. What was that like?
 - Reflect on your social location. In what ways are you part of the dominant or privileged group, and in what ways are you not?
 - Discuss a time when you were triggered and reacted. How do you handle stress and triggers in your own life now?

- How do you define resilience? When have you seen it in someone else? In yourself?
- How would you like to grow and develop as a person?

Closing: *(Please end with the final meditation and prayer by Howard Thurman which can be read on a rotating basis sentence by sentence, with each member taking a turn.)*

... to be quiet together for a spell, to sit, to think, to feel our way into each other's joys and sorrows, to surround ourselves with the great sense of collective destiny. Each of us has [their] own cares and burdens, [their] own world of involvements and complexities of stresses and strains, of lights and shadows, of heights and depths, or pain and pleasure, in ways that are commonplace and in ways that are shocking.

None of us can live unto [ourselves], no matter how hard [we try]. We are so deeply involved in each other and in others that often it is difficult to determine where we begin and the other leaves off.

And perhaps in the quietness we may sense the mystery and the wonder and the magic of our relatedness, and in that relatedness become aware each other after the pattern of [our] own sensitivities of the emergence in the midst of the living Spirit of the living God in whom we live and move and have our being. . . .

Whisper in our hearts, O God . . . the assurance that what we seek when we are most ourselves, thou dost seek. That when we stumble, thou dost stumble. When we rejoice, thou dost rejoice. O thou redeemer of the thoughts and the memories and the souls of [everyone], speak unto us that we may live; breathe through us that we may live; think through us that we may live. For without thee, O God, there is nothing, not even we ourselves. This is the simple quivering of our spirit as we wait in the quietness for the moment of thyself within us. Amen.

-- Howard Thurman, *Sermons on the Parables*, 2018, pp. 68-69

Next Session: Vocational Awareness and Community Affirmation Inquirer should be prepared to lead the group in Evening Prayer or Compline

Session 5: Vocational Awareness and Community Affirmation

Opening Prayer: Read the Collect for Ordinations on p. 528 of the *BCP*. (Note that this Collect is used in the ordination of both priests and deacons. The priestly ordination service comes first, which is why the page number for that one is included.) After the Collect, take a moment of silence, then conclude by saying, “Amen.”

In This Session:

CDC Reviews the Competency: Study together the following Competency

A. Clarity about the nature of ministry by both the individual and community:

Our Baptismal Covenant calls us all to ministry. Our clergy understand and can articulate the differences between orders – lay, deacon, priest, and bishop. Those in ordained ministry have a strong sense of how their call matches the duties of their order. Because discernment is a community process, the local faith community must openly recognize in each person in the ordination process gifts of leadership, respect for all, integrity, loving care and willingness to serve. As the person moves through the process, those around them (supervising clergy, bishop, seminary instructors, congregations served, etc.) continue to affirm their call to ordination.

Characteristics:

- Shows understanding of baptismal ministry and the orders of ministry
- Articulates a compelling understanding of their call to a particular order
- Is supported by community in that call

B. Willingness and ability to be vocationally flexible: The predominant model of ministry in most Episcopal churches has been that of one minister (the priest) ministering to all the people, standing at the center of the church’s ministry. That model is changing. Our churches are in a variety of contexts in a variety of locations with a variety of needs. Few ordained people are likely to serve in one role or at one type of church or in one city for their entire vocation. In addition, a growing number of congregations require clergy leaders who do not depend on congregational support for their entire livelihood. Our clergy demonstrate flexibility in their vision of professional ministry as they respond to God’s call to them and the church in our world.

Characteristics:

- Flexible
- Clear about how all work (paid and unpaid) is ministry
- Able to identify new models of ministry and ways of financial support

CDC Reviews the Ordination Service: Study together the ordination service

Read together the Ordination Service in the *BCP* for the order to which the inquirer feels called. (If they feel called to both, review both.) Focus in particular on the Examination and Consecration (p. 531-533 for priests and p. 543-545 for deacons).

Guiding Questions:

- Each person shares:
 - Which of these characteristics stand out to you? Why?
 - Tell a story of someone in your life, lay or ordained, who seemed to embody some or all of the characteristics. Discuss in what ways that person's presence and ministry touched their life and the lives of others
- For the inquirer:
 - Explore these qualities in relation to your sense of call. Where is there a fit? To which of these qualities are you especially drawn? Which ones challenge or concern you?
 - What does flexibility mean to you in regard to how you might live out your vocation?
 - Reflect specifically on the order to which you feel called, drawing on the Competency and the Ordination Service

Closing: Evening Prayer or Compline from the *BCP* led by the inquirer

Next Session: Leadership and Context Inquirer prepares a short (10-15 minutes) opening prayer experience that includes music, art, movement, or some other creative element(s)

Session 6: Leadership and Context

Opening Prayer: Inquirer leads a short (10-15 minutes) opening prayer experience that includes music, art, movement, or some other creative element(s)

In This Session:

CDC Reviews the Competency: Study together the following Competency.

Because leadership is such a broad topic, we suggest that you review and discuss each component of this competency separately, pausing for Guiding Questions after each part

- A. **Ability to lead, organize, and equip others in ministry:** Our clergy equip others for meaningful Christian lives and vocations, inviting others into the life of Christian community and ministry. This requires community organizing skills and the ability to identify and mentor new leaders. It also requires an understanding of racism, sexism, classism, able-ism, homophobia, transphobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other sins that have shaped the institutional church and society, as well as the tools to expose and dismantle these sins in practical, Gospel-informed ways.

Characteristics:

- Demonstrates transformational leadership
- Empowers, encourages, coaches, and creates other leaders
- Collaborates and works as part of a team
- Demonstrates understanding of and ability to use community organizing tools
- Is contextually aware and aware that context varies
- Understands the systemic nature of injustice

Guiding Questions:

- CDC shares:
 - What was it like to experience the inquirer's leadership during the opening prayer experience today and in other sessions?
 - What kind of leadership do you see the inquirer exhibiting or developing?
- For the inquirer:
 - What does "transformational leadership" mean to you? Give an example of when you have seen it.
 - Talk about your understanding of the systemic nature of racism, sexism, classism, able-ism, homophobia, transphobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other sins. Where do you need more education? How will you seek out opportunities to learn?

- B. **Innovative leadership:** Our clergy take risks and try new things in ministry. They demonstrate creativity, the capacity to discern new paths, and the willingness to make mistakes and learn from them. Innovative leaders see opportunities where others see decline; possibilities where others see insurmountable challenges. They also demonstrate a spiritually-informed understanding of the tools they use for transformation, so that they do not replicate the injustices of historical and contemporary society.

Characteristics:

- Shows spiritual grounding
- Demonstrates emotional maturity and self-awareness in the face of failure and/or difficult people and circumstances
- Is entrepreneurial, smart, and creative

Guiding Questions:

- Talk about your process in coming up with the creative worship for this session. Where did you get the idea? How did you develop it and make it your own?
- Talk about the tension between being entrepreneurial and being pastoral, and between being part of an institution while also working outside the walls.
- Talk about a time that you failed. Please avoid a stereotypical response that shows a time you “failed” by being too dedicated or too effective, and try to think about a time when you truly felt you had failed. How did you care for yourself through the experience? What did you learn?

- C. **The ability to lead congregations through change:** As the cultural context for our ministries changes, the majority of our congregations face significant challenges in responding to God’s call to mission beyond our walls. Our clergy are called to reshape, renew and reform our communities. As with our spiritual ancestors, a process of transformation is required for all of us on the journey.

Characteristics:

- Is inspirational, flexible, and able to lead people
- Is comfortable in the world
- Understands church history and its relationship to our current times

Guiding Questions:

- What does it mean to you to be “comfortable in the world”?
- What do you think are the biggest challenges facing the church today? Do you know of any scriptures or stories from church history that could help us navigate those challenges?
- Which challenges do you feel most called to address? Which ones scare you the most?

- What do you think makes someone inspirational?
- What qualities or characteristics do you have that will help you be a leader in the church?

Closing: Read together Thanksgiving #7: For the Diversity of Races and Cultures (*BCP*, p. 840)

Next Session: Reflections and Blessings

We encourage the inquirer and CDC to plan how to give thanks and end their work together in ways that are authentic and heartfelt.

Session 7 Reflections and Blessings

Opening Prayer: Pray together The Baptismal Covenant, BCP pages 292ff.

Reflection Question: After our work together on the CDC what stands out to you in the Baptismal Covenant? And why?

In this Session: In this final session, the members of the CDC are invited to share with the inquirer what they have seen and heard over the last 6 sessions.

Guiding Questions:

- How does God's call manifest itself in the inquirer's history, gifts, and yearnings?
- Does the inquirer's life and ministry seem to articulate a call to ordination or to further discernment?
- In what ways could you imagine the inquirer as an ordained person in your community? As your priest/deacon/pastor?
- Does this seem to be the "right moment" for the inquirer to explore ordination or are there life realities, which would signal a more opportune time?
- What room for growth in the competencies would you advise the inquirer to explore?

Closing: *A Prayer of Thomas Merton*

God, we have no idea where we are going. We do not see the road ahead of us. We cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do we really know ourselves, and the fact that we think we are following your will does not mean that we are actually doing so. But we believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And we hope that we have that desire in all that we are doing. We hope that we will never do anything apart from that desire. And we know that if we do this you will lead us by the right road, though we may know nothing about it. Therefore we will trust you always though we may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. We will not fear for you are ever with us, and you will never leave us to face our perils alone.

At the completion of these sessions, the Community Discernment Committee is asked to prepare a brief letter (up to two pages) as to whether the inquirer should be considered to continue in the ordination process or pursue other avenues of lay ministry within the church. This letter is to be submitted to the sponsoring cleric and sent to the Bishop (Address: 4800 Woodward Ave. Detroit, MI 48201 or email to the Bishop's Executive Assistant Crystal Ramirez cramirez@edomi.org). A Sample Letter is in the Supplemental Materials.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Introduction to the Competencies

Ordained leaders called by God and ordained by the Bishop bring to the church the following ministry competencies:

- **COMPELLING FAITH**
- **SELF-AWARENESS AND OPENNESS TO GROWTH**
- **VOCATIONAL AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY AFFIRMATION**
- **LEADERSHIP AND CONTEXT**

To ensure that ordinands have these competencies, and that the church has cultivated and discerned them in those called to holy orders, this document outlines a competency-based approach to selecting, evaluating, and supporting people in the ordination process. This document guides congregational leaders as they lead a process of mutual discernment with those members of their parishes who feel called to explore ordained ministry.

The competencies discussed in this document are developmental. From initial identification of a call, through Postulancy, Candidacy, and life in ordained ministry, they provide a framework for growth, not a set of boxes to be checked. The way that someone approaching Postulancy embodies the characteristics will necessarily be different from the way someone approaching Candidacy, or with 10 years of parish ministry, approaches them.

Further, these competencies will emerge in diverse ways, depending on the age, gender, ethnicity, race, experience, or history within the Episcopal Church that a given person in the discernment process may have. They are meant to guide mutual discernment and growth so that the ordination process is empowering and builds up the leaders of the church, whether or not the process culminates in sacred orders.

Accompanying **each** of these competencies is a list of **characteristics**, a **spiritual practice**, and **guiding questions** that can help organize the process of mutual discernment. These practices are meant to be illustrative and not exhaustive. Depending on where someone is in the discernment process, other practices might accompany and augment (but not replace) the spiritual practices that appear below.

Finally, preceding these practices is an introductory section entitled, **Spiritual Autobiography**. Telling one's faith story is not simply a way to introduce oneself. Mutual discernment needs to happen between people who know each other well, and the telling of a spiritual autobiography helps establish the beginning point for all of the required competencies.

Indeed, the telling of one's spiritual autobiography is a spiritual practice that informs *each of the competencies in their own right*. As such, it is a synthetic and integrative activity that will serve as a touchpoint throughout the discernment process.

This document is organized so that Congregational Discernment Committees can move methodically through each of the competencies. Each section can take up one or more meetings of a discernment committee, depending on how much time each committee would like to devote to a given section.

Guidelines for a Spiritual Autobiography (Session 2)

Discerning one's call within the Body of Christ requires that we become comfortable being transparent and courageously vulnerable in telling our story. Therefore the first step any discernment to give the one exploring a call the opportunity to tell their spiritual autobiography.

What is a Spiritual Autobiography? A spiritual autobiography is the story of our personal journey with God. Throughout the Scriptures, God reveals Godself powerfully and personally in the particularity of individual lives. These moments of God's self-revelation and a believer's God-consciousness enable ordained persons to discern, with the help of other Christians, their place within Christ's body (Ephesians 4:11-16). Having an understanding of one's spiritual autobiography also helps leaders (lay and ordained) respond sensitively, compassionately, and resiliently to those persons and events they encounter in their ministry. By listening to the presence and voice of God in our own lives, we increase our ability to help others feel God's presence and hear God's voice in theirs.

God is always with us, even in those moments when we are afraid God isn't -- in the face of suffering, trials, temptations, and testing. Those moments where God's seeming absence speak just as powerfully in a spiritual autobiography as those moments when we experience God's presence in worship, prayer, service, or conversation.

What should a Spiritual Autobiography "Say"? A spiritual autobiography should discuss not only those moments when we have felt the joy of God's presence but also those moments when we have felt the sorrow of God's absence. It should also give an indication of the experience of God in community, since one of the most important roles that a clergy person must play is to be able to lift up the presence and call of God in community. Finally, a spiritual autobiography should try to find a healthy balance between transparency and appropriate self-disclosure. Ordained persons need to be able to share their own story freely in a way that creates safe space for others to do the same.

Please use the following questions as a guide for reflection:

- What kinds of Christian community have I experienced as a child, youth and adult?
- When has God felt most real to me?
- When has God felt most absent?
- When/where/with whom have I encountered God in a pivotal, life-changing, transformative, or powerful way (such as at worship, at prayer, in conversation, in community, on retreat, while reading, etc.)
- Have I had seasons of doubt, disillusionment, or disobedience? What did these moments feel like? Where was God in these moments? What have I learned about God as a result of them?
- Who do I know, or have known, who seemed to know God intimately? How does my story overlap with theirs? How is my story different?

Guidelines for Bible Study (Session 3)

Among other sources, please see the following resource:

<https://episcopalchurch.org/bible-study>. This resource is also excellent for providing brief descriptions about the background and context of a given Bible passage.

To explore the passage deeply on a spiritual level and not simply as an academic exercise, consider the following guiding questions:

- Why does this passage matter to you?
- What is at stake in this piece of Scripture, and why is it important?
- What do you find most compelling about this passage?
- What message is God speaking to the church through this passage?
- What astounds or astonishes you about God in this passage?
- What is the context for this passage of Scripture and how does that affect how you read it?
- What questions does this passage pose of us?

Finally, take some time to think about the method for study you will follow:

- How will you structure the study so that everyone (extroverts and introverts) get a chance to contribute?
- How will you share what you have developed in the course of your preparation?

Guidelines for the Examen (Session 4)

One important way to develop self-awareness is through praying the “Examen,” a method of prayer developed by Ignatius of Loyola. What follows is a brief description of this method as a daily practice, which can be used to reflect on our personal history and guiding purpose in life:

1. *Become aware of God’s presence.* Find a comfortable place where you can secure ten or fifteen quiet minutes. Close your eyes and relax your body.
2. *Review the events and experiences of the day* with gratitude to understand how God is acting in your life. Move through the day as if you were watching it on video.
3. *Pay attention* to the feelings that your experiences evoke. Ask what God is saying through these feelings.
4. *Choose one feature of the day, reflect upon it, and pray from it.* How are you discovering God in the midst of your daily life? Are you drawing closer to God or further away?
5. *Look toward tomorrow.* Ask God to give you light for tomorrow’s challenges.

Prompts for Reflection as one prays:

- What struggles have you had and what have you learned from them?
- Where is it most difficult to see God’s presence?
- Where is it easiest to see God’s presence?
- Have you ever been the person in the minority?
- What did your family of origin value most and why?
- What opportunities have you had because of something that was given to you?
- Who has mentored you?
- What is your deepest desire?
- What is your deepest fear?
- Who has been your friend?
- What have you learned from those who love you, and those you love?
- What have you learned in the course of conflict or difficulty?
- When have you forgiven someone or looked past their faults and limitations?
- When have you had to realize your own powerlessness to change events?

The Community Discernment Committee Membership

This CDC is for _____ (name of inquirer) from
_____ (home congregation).

Lay Convener:

Name _____ Email _____

Phone _____

Members: (2-3) Lay People from Congregation (1-2) Lay Episcopalians from outside congregation

Name _____ Email _____

Phone _____

Name _____ Email _____

Phone _____

Name _____ Email _____

Phone _____

Name _____ Email _____

Phone _____

Name _____ Email _____

Phone _____

Signature of Cleric

Date

Sample Covenant of Community Discernment Committees

It's often important to generate and/or lay out guidelines for how the CDC will be together and work.

Questions to Consider are:

What do I need in order to feel safe to share?

How do we want to be together as a group of discerners?

This is a sample of what can be included in a CDC Covenant.

We Covenant Together That We will...

- Pray for one another
- Listen to and show respect for the opinions of others
- Speak for ourselves - using "I" statements
- Stay with the Group Discussions
- Keep Confidentiality
- Use Technology Responsibly (Keep phones on Silent)
- Arrive and End on Time

Sample Community Discernment Committee Recommendation Letter

Date:

From: (Name of Church) Community Discernment Committee

To: The Dr. Rt. Rev. Bonnie Perry

Subject: Discernment Recommendation for (Name of Inquirer)

(Up front there should be a clear recommendation for OR against admission into the diocesan Ordination Exploration Process.) ex: As requested, the undersigned members of the (Name of Church) Home Parish Discernment Committee met with (Name of Inquirer) in five informal meetings. After careful and prayerful deliberations we submit the following letter of evaluation regarding (Name of Inquirer).

(Following portions should provide supporting rationale for recommendation in first paragraph.) ex: During the course of our meetings and deliberations we have come to believe that (Name of Inquirer) has a strong calling for ministry in the Episcopal Church and urge that the diocese help him/her explore where that calling will lead him/her. Some specific areas of interest that led to our recommendation include: *(Comment on areas of significance that emerged during the committee's deliberations with the inquirer. Below are some areas that might be considered)*

- a. Expression and Communication of their Compelling Faith**
- b. Capacity for Self-Awareness and Openness to Growth**
- c. Understanding of their Vocational Awareness and Community Affirmation**
- d. Demonstrated Leadership in Context**

(Concluding paragraph that summarizes the committee's decision.) ex: While (Name of Inquirer) has many admirable qualities that support his/her entry into the exploration process the one that impresses us most is the confident relationship he/she has with God. (Name of Inquirer) strongly feels that he/she is being called to ordained ministry. We believe the diocese should do all it can to assist him/her in exploring that call.

Respectfully submitted:

Signed by all members of the committee.