

The Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina



Parish Lay Discernment Committee Manual

Revised February 2019

The Parish Lay Discernment Committee (PLDC) plays a significant role in the discernment process. The PLDC is formed after the Aspirant has begun the formal discernment process with the Rector/Priest-in-charge; has met with the Bishop, and has scheduled a psychological evaluation. After the Aspirant has been encouraged to continue the discernment process, the Rector/Priest-in-charge, with input from the Aspirant, appoints a PLDC of **five to seven laypeople**. Retired clergy in a congregation can be helpful personally to an Aspirant but the PLDC should be laypeople only. It is the experience of many that when a clergy person is present, the dynamic of a group often changes. No member of the diocesan Commission on Ministry or the Standing Committee may serve on the PLDC. The Rector/Priest-in-charge should appoint a convener of the group, as well as a chaplain. When the PLDC begins meeting, someone(s) should act as clerk (recorder).

The roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the PLDC can be found in the document, *Guidelines for PLDC Membership* and can be found in the Commission on Ministry manual (Addendum 6, pg. 41). This document describes the roles of each member of the group. The Aspirant's Rector/Priest-in-charge should review it before the PLDC is formed, for guidance in selecting members.

Before the PLDC begins its work, it is required that the PLDC, the Rector, and the Aspirant meet with a representative of the Commission on Ministry (a PLDC trainer) to learn about the work they are being asked to do. The list of approved trainers can be found at the end of this manual. The training session allows for everyone to understand what the Commission is seeking, how to proceed and to ask any questions about the process. This initial meeting is meant to be supportive of the PLDC and to cover the various aspects of the discernment process. After the training session, the PLDC should be ready to meet with the Aspirant for a **minimum** of six months and as long as it takes to reach a consensus about whether the call is to ordained ministry or to a larger ministry as a layperson.

Care should be taken to include people not fully familiar with the Aspirant (and in cases of small parishes, someone from another parish might be invited) who have the ability to listen and to ask questions in a caring way. It is preferable to have a member of the Vestry on the PLDC and the Vestry should be informed that a PLDC is being formed.

The call to ordination is a call that is both personal and communal. Anyone ordained is ordained for the whole of the Episcopal Church, not just one's congregation or diocese. Although a parish member may be beloved of the congregation that is not necessarily indicative of a call to ordination. The PLDC is asked to enter into an intentional relationship with the Aspirant on behalf of the congregation and the larger church. This requires a commitment of time and energy, a willingness to share of one's self, and an

ability to ask difficult and challenging questions in a caring way. In the course of its work, the members may be challenged to probe their own spiritual lives as well as that of the Aspirant, and this can be a time of great reward and challenge. It is important to remember, however, that the primary purpose of the PLDC lies in helping the Aspirant to clarify a calling.

People asked to participate in such a commitment often wonder why they have been asked: "What do I have to offer? Who am I to judge?" The fact that one has been asked to serve on a PLDC indicates that there is already a sense that he/she has something to offer. What each member brings to the PLDC is his/her own uniqueness and giftedness. Each member is being asked not to judge as much as to listen prayerfully and attentively to the Spirit's guidance. In the end, each member's decision will be based upon all that he/she has seen and heard. The task calls for a willingness to be open, honest, and candid in the context of a caring community, and at the same time to challenge and support the Aspirant. **The PLDC is a recommending group to the Bishop.**

The PLDC's task is to create a caring environment where the Aspirant can be encouraged to test his/her sense of call to ordained ministry; to be willing to ask questions that challenge and affirm the Aspirant's special gifts of ministry, lay or ordained, which God calls forth, and to make a recommendation to the Bishop at the end of the discernment period.

The Rector/Priest-in-charge of the congregation **is not** to be a member of the PLDC. The Rector/Priest-in-charge has already had a time of discernment with the Aspirant and will continue to be pastor and mentor for the Aspirant during this time of discernment.

Although the Rector/Priest-in-charge is not a member of the PLDC, it is important that the convener and Rector/Priest-in-charge be in touch about how the process is going. The specific content of the PLDC's meetings should remain confidential so that the Aspirant and the PLDC members may meet in an atmosphere of honesty and openness.

During the course of working together, a time may come when the Aspirant decides not to proceed, or the PLDC may decide not to recommend the Aspirant for ordained ministry. If this should occur, the Rector/Priest-in-charge should be informed and become directly re-involved, and also notify the Bishop.

Remember, the Parish Lay Discernment Committee is functioning **for** the Bishop.

The Diocesan Commission on Ministry

The Diocesan Commission on Ministry (COM), which participates in and oversees this process, is convinced that its greatest service to the Church and to those contemplating ordination is to make certain that each person ultimately accepted as a postulant for ordination has fully examined all avenues of ministry and Christian service in order to reach a mature decision and well-informed commitment to live within the vows of an ordained person. (BCP pages 517, 531, 543.) Helping an individual to recognize and own or to select a genuine lay ministry is of equal or greater importance than guiding a person to ordination; therefore, the COM recommends close examination of pages 854-856 of the Book of Common Prayer.

STRUCTURE FOR THE PARISH LAY DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

The following outline is designed to assist you in the discernment process with your Aspirant. It consists of six to eight meetings over a period of at least six months.

1. The **convener**, appointed by the Rector/Priest-in-charge, conducts all meetings, helps the group to follow the agenda and group norms, makes sure meeting times are known by all the members, and starts and finishes meetings on time. The Aspirant should not be asked to run meetings. If the **convener** is unable to attend a meeting, she/he should appoint someone else to convene for that meeting. The Aspirant should not fill that role.
2. The **clerk** or **recorder** keeps a record of each session and provides them to the PLDC for further reflection. This job can be rotated among several members of the PLDC. (It is best to have people who feel comfortable with note-taking.) All documents produced and circulated during the PLDC process should be protected with care to ensure confidentiality.
3. It is important for the PLDC **chaplain** to open and close each meeting with prayer. PLDC members may share this role. You may want to use the following Bible passages to guide you in the discernment of gifts: Matthew 5: 1-11; 1 Corinthians 12: 1, 4-14; Ephesians 4: 7, 11-16; Romans 12: 1-8; Acts 4: 1-13. These could be read aloud as the group begins to meet and discussed as a way of becoming clearer concerning spiritual gifts.
4. This is an exploration and journey in which all the members are to be involved. Each member is asked to be open, honest, and supportive in a community that is caring enough to confront the Aspirant with sometimes difficult and challenging questions in order to clarify to what part of God's ministry the Aspirant is called. No member of the PLDC should ask a question that he/she is also not willing to answer. Each member

will be involved in the discussion, prayers, personal note taking, and at the conclusion of the work of the PLDC, will assist in creating the narrative for the final recommendation to the Vestry and Bishop.

5. How the group is working together is a very important part of this process. You are encouraged to use some method at the end of each meeting to keep abreast of how the group sees its work progressing. One way of doing this is simply to ask each person what was **good** and what was **not good** about how the group worked. Ask what **helped** and what **hindered**, what to **continue doing**, what to **omit** and what to **add** to how you work together.

6. Remember, although your work is primarily focused on the Aspirant, this is an opportunity for mutual discernment. It is not unusual for a member of a PLDC to discern a new call or to feel affirmed in how one's gifts are being offered through this experience.

7. Some simple but crucial guidelines for the PLDC: this process is confidential. PLDC members should limit all discussions concerning the process to the meetings themselves. Problems, concerns, etc., should be discussed as a group. If ideas arise between meetings, write them down; try to avoid "parking lot" discussions in which you verbally share your informal thoughts with others.

8. Questions asked of the Aspirant or of one another are to be open and honest which is more difficult than that may sound. This means **giving no advice**, no "why don't you... ? No "Here's what happened to...". This process should not be burdened by the personal agendas of the PLDC members, no matter how loving or helpful they may seem. Only ask real, honest open questions.

Example: Rather than asking, "Have you ever thought that it might be your mother's fault?" (which is a question that is advice in disguise), an open honest question is one that the questioner could not possibly know the answer to. "Did you ever feel like this before?"

9. Ask questions that are brief, open, and to the point. Be accountable to the discussion guidelines. Everyone is allowed to ask, "Can you rephrase the question?"

10. Trust your intuition in asking questions, even if it seems a little odd. **Example: "What color is your present job and what is the color of the vocation you are discerning?"**

11. Sometimes one may not feel ready to answer a particular question, and it is important to let the question rest until such a time that it can be answered. Those kinds of questions have a wonderful way of working on the person long after the initial asking. Remember to come back to important questions if they have not been answered.

12. Your time together should be relaxed, gentle and humane. The PLDC is not an inquisition nor is it a cross-examination. Leave time between questions for reflection and assimilation. **Do not be afraid of silence in the group. Trust it and honor it.** Resist the temptation to fill the silence simply to fill it. Silence in a group may mean that something important is happening. Be present to one another.

13. **Please be mindful that discernment is primarily about listening to the Spirit.** In discernment, we are letting go of the pretense that **we** know what is best for another and we learn to trust the inner stirrings and wisdom of the Spirit in our own lives. You are not looking for the “right” answers. You are seeking to hear what the Spirit is “saying” through your questions, reflections, etc.

14. **The suggested amount of time for each session is 90 minutes.**

Group Norms

“Discernment means distinguishing the voice of God from other voices that speak to us.”

“Discernment is a prayerful, informed, and intentional attempt to sort through these voices to get in touch with God’s Spirit at work in a situation and to develop a sense of direction in which the Spirit is leading.”

1. Take time to become settled in God’s presence.
2. Listen to others with your entire self (senses, feelings, intuition, and rational faculties).
3. Speak for yourself only, expressing your own thoughts and feelings, referring to your own experience. Avoid being hypothetical.
4. Respect each person’s perspective.
5. Only one person speaks at a time.
6. Listen attentively to each person, and be fully present when someone else is speaking.
7. Utilize silence in order to absorb what has been shared.
8. Leave space for anyone who may want to speak a first time before speaking a second time yourself.

These are guidelines, not hard and fast rules. However, remember to honor the confidentiality of the process. Discernment does require a safe, caring environment, in which the Aspirant can freely explore her/his deepest thoughts and feelings in the knowledge that what is said will not be shared with other. Also, discernment is not about persuasion. It is about listening with one’s heart for the guidance of the Spirit.

From *Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations*, Suzanne G. Farnham, Stephanie A. Hull, R. Taylor McLean, Morehouse Publishing, 1996, pp. 55-56.

Introduction: Calling, Ministries, and Discernment

(This is the first PLDC meeting which takes place after the PLDC training session)

(You may find that you will need two meetings to get through these questions. It is important to take your time and not hurry through this process. Rushing the process is not discernment!)

The chaplain begins the meeting with prayer. You may want to begin with some centering/silent time to enable everyone to make the transition from where they have been up to that point and to become present to the task at hand.

(See prayers in BCP pages 832-833 and/or the following prayer.)

Thomas Merton Prayer

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

- Go through the “Structure for the PLDC” #5-14 and the “Group Norms” again so everyone understands the “ground-rules” for your time together. (You may want to do that at each meeting as a reminder.) Spend some time clarifying/discussing the structure so they become part of the group’s thinking and acting.
- Discuss other things the group thinks important: meeting times, necessary absences, confidentiality, how to tell others what you are doing without “feeling secretive” to parishioners and still maintain confidentiality. In general, what do we need to know about each other and the task to work together?

Topics and Questions for Discussion

First, discuss your sense of discernment. What does discernment mean? What does it mean to be called? Everyone should practice describing what “calling” means, even if there are no well-formulated descriptions or definitions that come to mind.

Then, without consulting other sources, write down your responses to the following questions:

1. What is ordination?
2. What is the ministry of a priest or presbyter?
3. What is the ministry of a deacon?
4. What is the ministry of all Christians?
5. What gifts and skills do you have to offer in ministry?

After the group has discussed these answers, turn to the Book of Common Prayer. Read those portions of the Catechism concerning ministry and ordination, found on pages 855-856, 860-861.

Discuss the following questions:

6. How does the catechism compare to the PLDC's previous discussion? Were there differences?
7. What gifts and skills are necessary for the kind of ministry a deacon is called to live?
8. What gifts and skills are necessary for the kind of ministry a priest is called to live?
9. How is the Aspirant already (or not) exercising the ministry of a deacon/priest?
10. How does the Aspirant view the ministry of the Body of Christ? How does the Aspirant differentiate between the ministries of the laity and the ordained?

Assess the meeting:

Take a couple of minutes to review your time together. Ask each person what was **good** and what was **not so good** about how the group worked. Do the "Group Norms" need to be reviewed? Ask what **helped** and what **hindered**, what to **continue doing**, what to **omit** and what to **add** to how you work together. (Recorder should note the comments and the Convener should use these in the next meeting.)

Review Homework Assignment for the next meeting (found on the following page)

End with Prayer

Homework Assignment for the Aspirant: Spiritual Autobiography (To be completed by the next meeting)

SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY GUIDELINES

All Aspirants are asked to write a spiritual autobiography. The following guidelines are offered to explain what is expected.

An autobiography is one's account of one's own life. A SPIRITUAL autobiography adds one's understanding of how GOD has been present in various significant events and in certain significant people.

One way to prepare for writing your spiritual autobiography is to think back over your life in blocks of time, such as childhood, high school, college, marriage, arrival and rearing of children, first job, job or career changes, etc. As you do so, note any ways in which you saw, or NOW see, God's hand. (Often we recognize God's presence in retrospect, more than we do at the moment.)

Don't neglect to mention important events just because they were unpleasant (e.g. illness, divorce, death of a loved one, etc.). Include all significant people, events and places, even if God's presence was not particularly obvious to you.

SUGGESTIONS: BEGIN THIS EXERCISE WITH PRAYER.

Remember Jesus' "summary of the Law", that we are to love the Lord our GOD, and our NEIGHBOR as OURSELF. Some of the things noted in your spiritual autobiography might reflect how you see your past and present relationship to (1) God, (2) your neighbor, and (3) yourself:

1. What is my personal relationship with GOD?
2. How well do I relate to my NEIGHBORS?
3. How do I feel about MYSELF?

LENGTH: Don't be overwhelmed by the above, or discouraged. These are only suggestions, intended as possible aids in your self-examination. There is no need to be lengthy or exhaustive, and don't be concerned about saying all the "right" things. If you wish, you may submit another spiritual autobiography later on, revising it or adding further thoughts. Also, the Commission on Ministry may at some time ask you to revise it or to provide further reflections on your spiritual journey. **Please limit your spiritual autobiography to no more than 2,000 words.**

Discernment Component 1: Spiritual Vitality

(You may find that you will need two meetings to get through each component. It is important to take your time and not hurry through this process. Rushing the process is not discernment!)

1. Start on time

2. Open with prayer

3. Check in for a few minutes about how people are doing

4. Review group norms

5. Reading of a contemporary Thought/Theme (relevant to the current component)

“When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.”

– Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life*

6. Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4: 11-13 (NRSV)

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

7. Ask the Aspirant to share with the group his/her spiritual autobiography. How did she/he get to this particular place in life? (Listen reverently and do not interrupt the sharing. You are learning about the Aspirant and it is important to honor that person’s journey.) If you would like clarification about something, you might ask, “could you tell me more about . . .?”

Specifically, ask the Aspirant to share about the following aspects of his/her relationship with God:

- a. Describe your prayer life and practices for the group.
- b. How has your relationship with God changed over time?
- c. Who is Jesus in your life?
- d. Who has been an important role model for you in the faith?
- e. Share how you are still questioning, searching and probing the mysteries of the faith.

f. What are your “goals” for further spiritual growth?

The Discernment Committee is looking for how the Aspirant is growing in the way of Jesus. How well does the Aspirant understand and articulate the basics of the Christian faith? Does the Aspirant give evidence of seeking a deeper relationship with God? In what ways does the Aspirant seek and serve Christ in all persons (BCP, pg. 305)?

8. Assess the meeting:

Take a couple of minutes to review your time together. Ask each person what was **good** and what was **not so good** about how the group worked. Do the “Group Norms” need to be reviewed? Ask what **helped** and what **hindered**, what to **continue doing**, what to **omit** and what to **add** to how you work together. (Recorder should note the comments and the Convener should use these in the next meeting.)

9. Review Homework Assignment (found on the following page)

10. End with Prayer

A. Homework following Component 1: Spiritual Vitality

Each member of the PLDC, including the Aspirant, completes the assessment of *Spiritual Vitality* found in the document entitled *Qualities for a Life-giving Ordained Ministry*. This document was distributed at the PLDC training session and can also be found in the Commission on Ministry Manual (Pg. 12ff). The assessment should be completed individually, not as a group. (Later, at the end of the PLDC meetings, the PLDC will collectively complete the entire assessment.)

Please read carefully the introduction and instructions to the document *Qualities for a Life-giving Ordained Ministry*. Each component, or “area of exploration,” will be assessed after the relevant PLDC meeting(s). The PLDC members will assess the Aspirant, and the Aspirant will assess him/herself.

B. Homework for the Aspirant *only*, in preparation for Component 2: Sense of Self

Think of a time when you allowed others’ decisions to affect your life. Be prepared to talk about any difficulties you may have in expressing your own needs, and make a list of your “growing edges.” How do you define integrity and what do you do to maintain your integrity. How do you daily assess your Sense of Self?

Discernment Component 2: Sense of Self

(You may find that you will need two meetings to get through each component. It is important to take your time and not hurry through this process. Rushing the process is not discernment!)

1. Start on time

2. Open with prayer

3. Check in for a few minutes about how people are doing

4. Review group norms

5. Reading of a contemporary Thought/Theme (relevant to the current component)

“People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered. Love them anyway. If you do good, people may accuse you of selfish motives. Do good anyway. If you are successful, you may win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway. The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway. Honesty and transparency make you vulnerable. Be honest and transparent anyway. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway. People who really want help may attack you if you help them. Help them anyway. Give the world the best you have and you may get hurt. Give the world your best anyway.” --Mother Teresa

6. Scripture Reading: Galatians 1:10 (NRSV)

¹⁰ Am I now seeking human approval, or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

7. Ask the Aspirant to share his/her reflection or “case study” of his/her Sense of Self.

Continue the conversation by asking the following questions:

a. What are your strengths?

b. What are your “growing edges”?

c. How do you learn best?

d. Share how, specifically, you take care of yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

e. Talk about a time in life when you felt like a failure. Have you found grace in that experience?

f. Share how you understand stewardship; personal financial responsibility; tithing; personal stewardship of time and leisure.

The Discernment Committee is seeking to determine how aware the Aspirant is of his/her feelings? How well does she/he express strong positive and negative feelings? When dealing with his/her feelings, do physical gestures and movements (body language) match the words spoken? To what extent is she/he aware of and comfortable with his/her own sexuality? Are there any indications that she/he aspires to the ordained ministry as a way of solving his/her personal problems? Does the Aspirant have a level of maturity and an ability to adapt which is commensurate with his/her age level?

8. Assess the meeting:

Take a couple of minutes to review your time together. Ask each person what was **good** and what was **not so good** about how the group worked. Do the “Group Norms” need to be reviewed? Ask what **helped** and what **hindered**, what to **continue doing**, what to **omit** and what to **add** to how you work together. (Recorder should note the comments and the Convener should use these in the next meeting.)

9. Review Homework Assignment (found on the following page)

10. End with Prayer

A. Homework following Component 2: Sense of Self

Each member of the PLDC, including the Aspirant, completes the assessment of *Sense of Self* found in the document entitled *Qualities for a Life-giving Ordained Ministry*. The assessment should be completed individually, not as a group. (Later, at the end of the PLDC meetings, the PLDC will collectively complete the entire assessment.)

Please read carefully the introduction and instructions to the document *Qualities for a Life-giving Ordained Ministry*. Each component, or “area of exploration,” will be assessed after the relevant PLDC meeting. The PLDC members will assess the aspirant, and the aspirant will assess him/herself.

B. Homework for the Aspirant *only*, in preparation for Component 3: Relational Maturity

Share with us a time when there was conflict in a significant relationship. How did you handle it? What about your response disappointed you? What kind of support did you seek? What role does forgiveness play for you in your daily life?

Discernment Component 3: Relational Maturity

The aspirant's spouse or partner (if applicable) is invited to this meeting.

(You may find that you will need two meetings to get through each component. It is important to take your time and not hurry through this process. Rushing the process is not discernment!)

1. Start on time

2. Open with prayer

3. Check in for a few minutes about how people are doing

4. Review group norms

5. Reading of a contemporary Thought/Theme (relevant to the current component)

"We don't get harmony when everybody sings the same note. Only notes that are different can harmonize. The same is true with people."

– Steve Goodier

"Conflict can and should be handled constructively; when it is, relationships benefit. Conflict avoidance is **not** the hallmark of a good relationship. On the contrary, it is a symptom of serious problems and of poor communication."

– Harriet B. Braiker, *Who's Pulling Your Strings? How to Break the Cycle of Manipulation and Regain Control of Your Life*

6. Scripture Reading: Romans 12:17-21 (NRSV)

Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them, and if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

7. Ask the Aspirant to share his/her reflection or "case study" of his/her Relational Maturity. Continue the conversation by asking the following questions:

a. What conflicts have you had in your life and how have you handled them?

b. What do you find difficult in your relationships with others?

c. How do you react to people in positions of power and authority?

d. How do you react to being in a position of power and authority?

e. How do you react to being in a powerless situation?

The Discernment Committee is seeking to determine ways in which the Aspirant is able to interact with others, but to also maintain appropriate boundaries, practice self-care in relationships and handle emotional responses, both in him/herself, and also in others. How does he/she function in interpersonal relationships? How is the Aspirant able to distinguish between empathy and sympathy? How has the Aspirant experienced someone who has fully listened and understood the Aspirant's emotional state? How does the Aspirant experience change and growth? How have the Aspirant's personal relationships deepened her/his relationship with God and the church?

8. Assess the meeting:

Take a couple of minutes to review your time together. Ask each person what was **good** and what was **not so good** about how the group worked. Do the "Group Norms" need to be reviewed? Ask what **helped** and what **hindered**, what to **continue doing**, what to **omit** and what to **add** to how you work together. (Recorder should note the comments and the Convener should use these in the next meeting.)

9. Review Homework Assignment (found on the following page)

10. End with Prayer

A. Homework following Component 3: Relational Maturity

Each member of the PLDC, including the Aspirant, completes the assessment of *Relational Maturity* found in the document entitled *Qualities for a Life-giving Ordained Ministry*. The assessment should be completed individually, not as a group. (Later, at the end of the PLDC meetings, the PLDC will collectively complete the entire assessment.)

Please read carefully the introduction and instructions to the document *Qualities for a Life-giving Ordained Ministry*. Each component, or “area of exploration,” will be assessed after the relevant PLDC meeting. The PLDC members will assess the Aspirant, and the Aspirant will assess him/herself.

B. Homework for the Aspirant *only*, in preparation for Component 4: Capacity to Lead

Discuss your leadership roles, both in the community and in your congregation. Include both current and past situations. How was your authority and power received? What were your struggles?

Discuss relationships with people in your life who have had authority over you. Describe a situation that has been tense and/or difficult. Describe a situation that has been respectful and/or mutual.

Discernment Component 4: Capacity to Lead

(You may find that you will need two meetings to get through each component. It is important to take your time and not hurry through this process. Rushing the process is not discernment!)

1. Start on time

2. Open with prayer

3. Check in for a few minutes about how people are doing

4. Review group norms

5. Reading of a contemporary Thought/Theme (relevant to the current component)

“It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory when nice things occur. You take the front line when there is danger. Then people will appreciate your leadership.” Nelson Mandela

“Leadership is not about personality, possessions, or charisma, but all about who you are as a person. I used to believe that leadership was about style but now I know that leadership is about substance, namely character.” James C. Hunter, *The Servant*

6. Scripture Reading: Luke 22: 24-27 (NRSV)

A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”

7. Ask the Aspirant to share his/her reflection or “case study” of his/her Capacity to Lead. Continue the conversation by asking the following questions:

a. Ask the Aspirant to describe what kind of ministry he/she is currently doing in the congregation or has done in former congregations.

b. Ask the Aspirant if he/she has served in any leadership roles in current or past congregations? Current or past dioceses? Current or previous communities in which he/she has lived?

c. Ask the Aspirant to describe his/her relationship with people in his/her life who have authority over him/her. Describe a situation that has been tense and/or difficult. Describe a situation that has been respectful and/or mutual.

d. What leadership skills do you already have and what leadership skills would you like to develop?

e. As you consider ordination, how do you understand the power and authority that come with that office? Tell us about what it might be like to claim and use that authority appropriately. Tell us how that authority could be claimed and used in an inappropriate way?

f. As you consider ordination, how do you understand the power and authority that others will have over you? How do you understand your relationship to your Bishop? To the canons of The Episcopal Church? To the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer?

The Discernment Committee is seeking to determine the Aspirant's capacity for leadership. Does he/she show initiative, self-confidence, enthusiasm? Can he/she motivate others? Is he/she aware of and at ease with a variety of leadership styles and able to use them as the situation indicates? How does he/she function in interpersonal relationships? How comfortable is he/she with being a person in whom authority rests? To what extent is he/she ready to claim and use that authority appropriately? What is this person's experience with and attitudes towards racial and ethnic minorities? Can you envision this person as your priest or your deacon?

8. Assess the meeting:

Take a couple of minutes to review your time together. Ask each person what was **good** and what was **not so good** about how the group worked. Do the "Group Norms" need to be reviewed? Ask what **helped** and what **hindered**, what to **continue doing**, what to **omit** and what to **add** to how you work together. (Recorder should note the comments and the Convener should use these in the next meeting.)

9. Review Homework Assignment (found on the following page)

10. End with Prayer

A. Homework following Component 4: Capacity to Lead

Each member of the PLDC, including the Aspirant, completes the assessment of *Capacity to Lead* found in the document entitled *Qualities for a Life-giving Ordained Ministry*. The assessment should be completed individually, not as a group. (Later, at the end of the PLDC meetings, the PLDC will collectively complete the entire assessment.)

Please read carefully the introduction and instructions to the document *Qualities for a Life-giving Ordained Ministry*. Each component, or “area of exploration,” will be assessed after the relevant PLDC meeting. The PLDC members will assess the Aspirant, and the Aspirant will assess him/herself.

B. Homework for the aspirant *only*, in preparation for the next meeting

Review your interview with a deacon and a priest, which occurred during your initial discernment process with your rector. Reflect on how your understanding of ordained ministry has changed since those interviews. Be prepared to reflect on the interviews with the PLDC.

Also spend time reflecting on your self-assessment of *Qualities for a Life-giving Ordained Ministry*. Consider giving the PLDC a copy of your self-assessment at the next meeting.

Meeting of PLDC and Aspirant for Reflection and Review

1. Start on time
2. Open with prayer
3. Check in for a few minutes about how people are doing
4. Review group norms
5. Reading of a contemporary Thought/Theme (relevant to the current component)

“What is a personal calling? It is God's blessing, it is the path that God chose for you here on Earth. Whenever we do something that fills us with enthusiasm, we are following our legend. However, we don't all have the courage to confront our own dream.” Paulo Coelho

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

“God did not direct His call to Isaiah — Isaiah overheard God saying, “. . . who will go for us?” The call of God is not just for a select few but for everyone. Whether I hear God's call or not depends on the condition of my ears, and exactly what I hear depends upon my spiritual attitude.” Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

6. Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 4: 1, 5-12 (NRSV)

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart....For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way. But not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

7. Ask the Aspirant to reflect (not report) on his/her interviews with a deacon and a priest. What was stirred up as the Aspirant remembered and reflected upon the

interview? Continue the conversation by asking the following questions:

- a. Explore what the economic, personal and emotional impact would be for you and your household should you be ordained.
- b. Explain the effect of ordination on your household's income during your training and preparation for ordination, during your working life, and after your retirement.
- c. Discuss the nature of the role of deacon and priest and the stresses that ordination will put on you and your household; think about your age and its positives and its negatives for ordination.
- d. Share with the group how your understanding of ordained ministry has changed since those interviews.

The PLDC is seeking evidence that the Aspirant is responding to God concerning ordained ministry. Is the Aspirant confusing a response to Christian service with a response to ordination? Are the Aspirant's primary interests congruent with the basic function of an ordained ministry? Are the Aspirant's innate abilities commensurate with the demands of the ordained ministry?

8. Assess the meeting:

Take a couple of minutes to review your time together. Ask each person what was **good** and what was **not so good** about how the group worked. Do the "Group Norms" need to be reviewed? Ask what **helped** and what **hindered**, what to **continue doing**, what to **omit** and what to **add** to how you work together. (Recorder should note the comments and the Convener should use these in the next meeting.)

9. Review next steps

10. End with Prayer

Preparing the Evaluation (homework for each PLDC member)

- This work happens individually. Rather than at a regular meeting, each member of the PLDC and the Aspirant are invited to use this time to prayerfully recollect and reflect on the vocation of the Aspirant.
- Find a comfortable and quiet place where you won't be interrupted. Spend some time quietly being present to God. Ask God to guide your recollections and reflections.
- Read the notes recorded from every session and spend some time reflecting on that session and its revelations in the greater light of the sessions taken as a whole. Jot down any insights, images, thoughts, concerns, etc. that arise as you remember and reflect on each session in turn. If a phrase or a passage of scripture comes to mind, find it in your Bible and spend some time asking how the passage might be related to the discernment work at hand. At all times, seek to do this work with an attitude of complete openness to God's possibilities for the Aspirant.
- Once you have finished your work of recollection and reflection, stop for a moment and pay attention to your inner state. You may want to set the work aside for a time before continuing your preparation work. When you are ready, turn to the questions that will guide the group through the process of writing the Discernment Narrative, which can be found on the following page.
- Take your time with each question. After you have written your response to each one, stop to notice your inner state. Is there a sense of peace and "rightness" about what you have written? Is it complete/whole or does something more need to be written?
- When you have completed your responses to the questions, set your work aside. Think of each person in the PLDC and give thanks for their gift to you and to the group.
- **When you gather for the final meeting, bring along your responses and your notebook.**

THE DISCERNMENT NARRATIVE (All members of the PLDC do this individually)

We suggest that you begin this session with a time of silence and prayer. The following prayer for the Church is found in the ordination liturgies of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

All members of the PLDC answer each of the following questions individually, which will provide the structure for the Discernment Narrative. Use the assessment of Qualities for a Life-giving Ordained Ministry to inform your responses.

1. How do the ministries, gifts, skills, and requirements of a deacon/priest “line up” with what the Aspirant is already doing in his/her life? **Bespecific (Sense of Self)**
2. How would ordination affect the Aspirant’s closest relationships? (Economically, professionally, emotionally, and otherwise.) **Be specific (Relational Maturity)**
3. What issues of power, authority, obedience, and accountability may be present for the Aspirant as we consider the possibility of ordination? How well does the Aspirant know her/himself? **Be specific (Capacity to Lead)**
4. What issues of health and self-care (physical, intellectual, spiritual, emotional, etc.) may be present for the Aspirant as we consider the possibility of ordination? **Be specific (Sense of Self; Relational Maturity)**
5. Describe the Aspirant’s spiritual life and relationship with Jesus; its maturity, depth, change over time, discipline (its form, content, and “personality”.) **Be specific (Spiritual Vitality)**
6. Describe the Aspirant’s current and potential relationship with the requirements of the canons and the ordination vows. **Be specific (Capacity to Lead)**
7. The Church’s needs and expectations are for leaders who bear special qualities of

Christian commitment, leadership, vision, and responsiveness to the needs, concerns and hopes of the world. Indicate whether such qualities are emerging in the PLDC's sense of the Aspirant's vocation. **Be specific**
(Capacity to Lead)

8. What spiritual, intellectual, and moral qualities for ministry have emerged in the Aspirant as the group has engaged this part of the discernment process? **Be specific**
(Spiritual Vitality)
9. Are there other things you would like to report?
10. **For those in discernment about the diaconate, the Bishop and COM ask that the PLDC please give a description of the Aspirant's present ministry and what he/she is passionate about.**

FINAL MEETING - WORKING THROUGH THE QUESTIONS TOGETHER & COMPOSING THE FINAL DISCERNMENT NARRATIVE

(Although the Aspirant is not present for this session, it is strongly recommended for the chair to review the final narrative and then to schedule a time for the aspirant to meet with the PLDC so that the whole group may have time to share how the process has been, to thank one another for what each has offered to the times together and to pray together.)

Begin your session with Thomas Merton's prayer, used in the first session:

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

Begin by collectively filling out the assessment found in *Qualities for a Lifegiving Ordained Ministry*. This will be submitted with the discernment narrative.

Then work through each question listed in the discernment narrative. The Convener might find it helpful to use newsprint as a way of capturing the consensus or divergence of the group as you move through each of the questions in turn.

Following this meeting, it is the Convener's job to draw all the responses together into one narrative, which should then be signed by all the members of the PLDC and the Aspirant.

The Discernment Narrative should be sent to the Bishop's Office. A copy of the Discernment Narrative will be given to the Aspirant within two weeks of the group's final meeting and a copy should be sent to the Rector/Priest-in-charge.

Since the PLDC will disband after the writing of the Discernment Narrative, it is important that the group is intentional about this ending. You may want to have a meal together, perhaps a Eucharist. There should be ample time allowed for each member of the group to say "thank you" to each other member of the group for the gift they were in this process.

Please remember that the Convener is responsible for consolidating the individual responses into one narrative from the whole committee.

All the members of the PLDC and the Aspirant need to sign the Narrative (signature form can be found on the following page).

Please send narrative to: Office of the Bishop, Diocese of Western North Carolina, 900-B CentrePark Drive, Asheville, NC 28805

The Convener should collect all of the notes/minutes from your sessions and shred them to protect the confidentiality of all involved.

Resources: *Bound With Cords Of Love*, The Rev. Ann Kidder, 2002, the Diocese of Maine; *Guidelines for the Parish Lay Committee* - Diocese of Atlanta; Diocese of Western North Carolina; *The Clearness Committee* by Parker Palmer.



The Parish Lay Discernment Committee of _____, located
in _____, NC, makes the following recommendation concerning the Aspirant,
_____:

_____ Recommended for Ordained Ministry

_____ Recommended for Lay Ministry

If the Aspirant wishes, the Rector/Priest-in-charge will provide a Clearness Committee for further discernment about lay ministry.

Rector Signs Here

Date

Signed (All members of the PLDC)

Date _____

Signed (Aspirant)

Date

Approved Trainers for Parish Lay Discernment Committees

After the Rector/Priest-in-charge and the Aspirant have met with the Bishop and the Bishop has invited the Aspirant to continue in the process, the Rector/Priest-in-charge and the Aspirant should review the Guidelines for PLDC Membership (COM Manual, Addendum 6, pg. 41) and following those guidelines, select members of the congregation to serve on the Parish Lay Discernment Committee (PLDC). The PLDC is comprised of lay only, no clergy. It is helpful for one vestry member to be on the PLDC. Once the PLDC is formed, the Rector/Priest-in-charge may call any of the trainers listed here to come and train the PLDC. The Aspirant, Rector/Priest-in-charge and ALL members of the PLDC need to be present for the training. Allow two hours to go over the manual and answer any questions. Please know ordination is not a reward or a sign that someone is more holy! We are all ordained at our baptism; ordination is a particular way to use one's gifts and talents.

The Rector/Priest-in-charge needs to provide a copy of the *Guidelines for the PLDC* for every committee member plus the Aspirant. It is expected that the Rector/Priest-in-charge, the Aspirant, and all PLDC members have reviewed the guidelines prior to the training. Everyone needs to bring the *Guidelines for the PLDC* with them to the training. The Rector needs to make three copies of the full COM Manual (also available from the Diocesan website) so that the Rector, the Aspirant and the Convener (chair) of the PLDC have these.

The following are the approved trainers for the Diocese of Western North Carolina. Because the congregation will pay the Trainer a fee PLUS their mileage (at the current IRS rate of reimbursement), the Rector/Priest-in-charge may wish to select the trainer closest to your parish. If a trainer is not available it is suggested that the Rector/Priest-in-charge consider contacting another trainer rather than delay.

The fee for the Trainer is \$150 plus standard IRS reimbursable rate per mile. The Trainer will send the congregation an invoice with the mileage (which can be estimated via MapQuest) prior to their training date. The congregation shall mail the fee plus mileage to the diocesan office prior to the training date. When the Trainer completes the training, he/she will contact the Bishop's office and the date they give for the completion of the PLDC training will be the start date for the PLDC.

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