

**The Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee**

**Manual of Resources for  
Parish Ministry Discernment Committee  
for Holy Orders**



From the  
Manual of Resources for Discerning a Call to Ministry  
Lay and Ordained  
Sections 5.2.A, 5.2.B

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**I. Purpose of the Parish Ministry Discernment Committee (PMDC)**

- A. The PMDC helps Nominees identify, discover, and explore the varieties of ministry in the Lord's service to which they might be called, and to discern whether God's call to this person is to a lay or an ordained ministry.
- B. The task of the PMDC is to create a caring but questioning environment in which the Nominee can risk testing his or her potential call to Holy Orders.

**II. Make up of the PMDC**

- A. After the congregation nominates and the Nominee accepts, the vestry and sponsoring Priest or other parish leader, in collaboration with the Nominee, appoints a Parish Ministry Discernment Committee to work with the Nominee in examining his or her possible vocation to ordained ministry.
- B. Where possible, the sponsoring Priest or other parish leader and the Nominee chooses at least six PMDC participants, one or two of whom are from another congregation who do not know the Nominee. Other members should be representative of the diversity of the congregation.
- C. While it is fine to have people on the PMDC who are doing informal discernment to the ordained ministry, it is suggested that no more than one person be on the PMDC who is discerning a call to ordained ministry.

**III. Orientation and Training of the PMDC**

- A. The newly formed PMDC and the sponsoring Priest or other parish leader need to attend the regional PMDC Trainings held by the COM once a year.
- B. For dates of PMDC training, contact the President of the COM.
- C. The sponsoring Priest or other parish leader gives the PMDC members a copy of these guidelines so that they can become familiar with the procedure before the PMDC training date. The sponsoring Priest or other parish leader also gives the Nominee a copy of these guidelines and instructs the Nominee to begin writing an autobiography, which will be distributed at the end of the first PMDC meeting.
- D. Members of the COM will facilitate dialogue on the process of discernment in the Diocese of Milwaukee, the pivotal role of the PMDC, and will share insights and thoughts from the "accumulated wisdom" of many PMDCs who have worked together in the past.
- E. Specific topics will include such administrative issues as the length of each meeting (we suggest 2 to 3 hours), scheduling dates, and choosing a location, as well as the crucial importance of confidentiality – for both the PMDC members and the Nominee – throughout the entire process.
- F. The COM facilitators will discuss the process for each PMDC meeting in detail and will answer questions and entertain discussion.

#### **IV. The Role of the PMDC**

- A. The PMDC both facilitates exploration for the individual and carries the discussion about ministry into the larger community.
- B. Since the call to Holy Orders is the possible call to itinerancy, the PMDC facilitates exploration for family members of the possible outcomes of such a call.
- C. The PMDC is asked to enter into a special relationship with the Nominee on behalf of the home congregation and the larger Church. This requires a commitment of time and energy, a sharing of themselves, and a willingness to ask difficult and challenging questions of one another.
- D. In the course of their work, committee members may enter spiritual depths in their life as a group and individually that will reward and challenge them.
- E. Many people entering this commitment to serve on a PMDC may ask, "What do I have to offer? Who am I to judge?" The basic qualifications are within each of us in our life experiences and in the Christian commitment we offer.
- F. This task calls for a willingness to be open, honest, and candid in the context of a caring community, both to confront and to support the Nominee.
- G. While the principal purpose lies in helping the Nominee clarify a calling, the process will probably result in mutual discernment for all involved.
- H. The Nominee will ask: "Is ordination the form my ministry should take?"
- I. The PMDC, the Vestry, and the sponsoring Priest or other parish leader will ask:
  - 1. "Does this individual sufficiently understand the ministries of all baptized persons and appreciate the opportunities for his or her lay ministry using those gifts given to him/her at baptism?"
  - 2. "Does ordained ministry seem to be the form of ministry to which God is calling this person?"
  - 3. "Can we, in good faith, send this person to become a leader of other congregations?"
- J. In the early stages of the discernment process, the PMDC and Rector or parish leader and Vestry should be in close communication.
- K. As they near the conclusion of their work, or if they choose to terminate the process, the committee will need to communicate once again with the Rector or other parish leader and the Vestry.
- L. During the course of their work together, the time may come when it seems proper to the Nominee not to proceed, or the committee may decide not to recommend the Nominee to the Vestry. In this event, the PMDC should help the Nominee find a suitable form in which to express his or her ministry.
- M. In arriving at a recommendation, the PMDC is assisting the Congregation, the Vestry, the Rector or parish leader, and diocesan officials. The Committee recommends, but the Vestry, COM, Standing Committee, and Bishop has the canonical authority to decide.
- N. The work done by the PMDC, and its report, are among the most important parts of this process. Members sustain a deep contact with the Nominee and frequently become identified and involved with that person.

- O. Openness, candor, and support are encouraged, but it is also important to balance those qualities with a positive degree of objectivity. The reasons are evident: The committee may have to say "no" to the Nominee; or the Vestry, COM, or Bishop may not accept the committee's recommendations.
- P. If the Nominee is directed to continue in lay ministry, the PMDC affirms the Nominee's other ministries and its members must deal with their feelings about the outcome.
- Q. It is important for each parish to make this process its own. These guidelines may be modified, within reason, to meet each situation.

## V. Procedure for the PMDC

- A. The procedure described in the following pages is outlined in steps and is designed to assist you in your work with your Nominee and his/her family.
- B. It consists of at least six meetings over a period of up to three-four months. At the end, you will complete the PMDC report, included below.
- C. You will need a convener (appointed by the sponsoring Priest or other parish leader) and a recorder (appointed by the convener), who will report the committee's answers to the questions furnished below in the PMDC Report.
- D. This is an exploration and journey in which all members will be involved. We encourage you to ask your Parish Leader to invite the COM liaison to meet with the PMDC to answer any questions and review the PMDC role within the context of the entire ordination process.
- E. Responsibilities of the convener/chair of the PMDC:
  1. Appoint a recorder. This person will be taking notes/minutes at each meeting so that the committee can go back and look at them when the committee needs to write the report at the end. That person should take attendance at each meeting so that there is an official record of who was at each meeting.
  2. Make sure that the whole committee is present to write the report at the end of the process.
  3. If at any time you need to bring in the Sponsoring Priest or other parish leader or someone from the COM, you would be the one to arrange this. You will be the liaison to the Vestry.
  4. Run the meetings, making sure that you are staying on task, asking/answering all the questions that need to be looked at for that meeting and begin and end in prayer. We encourage you to use the prayers and scripture provided for you in the manual as well as any others that you feel speak to discernment.
- F. Responsibilities of the recorder:
  1. Take notes during each meeting in a way that the committee can use them to write the report at the end of the process.
  2. Take attendance at each meeting and include that in the notes.
  3. The recorder will need to help categorize the notes so that they can be written into report format (see Section VI below).
- G. General suggestions for all meetings
  1. Please open and close your meetings with prayer. You may wish to use the Book of Common Prayer, especially pages 832-833. To place the discernment of gifts in a Biblical context, you might read 1 Corinthians 12:1-3; 2 Corinthians 4:5-14; Ephesians 4:7, 11-16; Romans 12:1-8; or Acts 4:13, 32-33.

2. Take time to enable each member of the committee to put aside the varied agendas of their day and focus on the discernment process. You might consider a time of meditation, a reflection appropriate to the focus of the particular meeting, a time of centering prayer.
3. Build a climate that encourages risk, openness, and mutual respect, and that discourages judgment, competition, or advice. Set some guidelines for dialogue and discussion that will encourage openness, respect, and risk. You will receive some sample guidelines at the Parish Ministry Discernment Committee training in October. Feel free to use those guidelines or use them to create your own. Be sure to discuss the issue of confidentiality at your first meeting.
4. Integrate family members into the discernment process. Family discernment, ability to respond to a possible call to Itinerancy in light of spiritual, physical, financial, career needs of family members, and affirmation and support of family are important factors in discerning whether a call to Holy Orders might be to the Diaconate or to the Priesthood.
5. Evaluation is an important step in this process, and we suggest that you use some method of evaluating at the end of each meeting. One that is easy is simply to tape up two pieces of newsprint and gather information about what was good and what was not so good, or what helped and what hindered. These evaluations should be kept by the recorder, and reviewed from time to time. During this process, the committee should identify any issues that need to be discussed with the family, the COM liaison, the Parish Leader, the vestry or the congregation.
6. Although the recorder will gather answers to the questions explored during PMDC meetings, along with minority opinions, each member of the PMDC will evaluate not only the Nominee, but also the discernment process itself. We suggest that each member keep personal notes for future reference beginning with the first session.

## **VI. Guidelines for PMDC's Written Report**

- A. The following questions are indicative of the areas that the PMDC has reviewed with the applicant and wishes to report to the Rector and Vestry of the parish. Please use as much space as you wish for this report and note by number each response.
  1. Describe the applicant's understanding of Christian ministry, both lay and ordained.
  2. Describe the current ministries of the applicant.
  3. How do you see this applicant growing in the Christian faith?
  4. How would you describe this applicant's capacity to learn and ability to do the demanding work of a theological education?
  5. What would you consider the state of this applicant's emotional health? Is the applicant facing any difficulties in life and taking appropriate steps to deal with them?
  6. Describe the gifts of leadership you have observed in the applicant and how they are shown in parish life.
  7. A theological education program can be quite expensive. Have you discussed with the applicant what plans exist for financing this and are you satisfied that the plans are adequate?
  8. Enumerate the qualities that the applicant possesses which fit him/her to be admitted as a Postulant for Holy Orders.
  9. Add any additional information that you consider relevant for the Rector and Vestry as they make the decision whether to recommend for Postulancy.
  10. If you are not prepared to recommend that the applicant proceed at this time to Postulancy, what alternative do you recommend?
- B. If the applicant is recommended for Postulancy, this report in full or a summary is to be submitted to the Bishop and the COM.

## VII. Resources for PMDC

- A. See Sections 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, or 4.5 of Manual of Resources for Discerning a Call to Ministry Lay and Ordained.
- B. The PMDC may wish to consult a theological library for books and chapters of books on ordained ministry that can be read by individuals and reported on to the whole committee. The priest can provide guidance and appropriate references.
- C. Books particularly recommended:
  - 1. *Listening Hearts*, by Susanne Farnham, et al.
  - 2. *Many Servants*, by Ormonde Plater.
  - 3. A Resource on Cultural Sensitivity in the Ordination Process, available from the Episcopal Church Center.
- D. Committee members should familiarize themselves with how a “call” to ordained ministry is interpreted in the Anglican tradition.
- E. The committee can explore its understanding of the meaning and significance of being “loyal to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of Christ as this Church has received them.” (BCP, p.526).
- F. Of value is a careful reading and discussion of the Preface to the Ordination Rites (BCP, p.510). Committee members can also read and study together the Ordination of a Priest (BCP, p.525 ff.), with particular attention to the Examination (p.531 ff.); and the Ordination of a Deacon BCP. 537 ff.), particularly the Examination BCP 543 ff.).
- G. The functions of priest and deacon can also be interpreted with reference to scriptural passages from which readings are selected for use during both ordination rites (BCP, pp.528-529; 540-541).
- H. Possible scripture readings for the ordination of a priest are:
  - 1. Isaiah 6:1-8 or Number 11:16-17, 24-25
  - 2. Psalm 43 or 132:8-19
  - 3. 1 Peter 5:1-4, Ephesians 4:7, 11-16, or Philippians 4:4-9
  - 4. Matthew 9:35-38, or John 10:11-18, or John 6:35-38
- I. Possible readings for the ordination of a deacon are:
  - 1. Jeremiah 1:1-9, or Sirach 39.1-8
  - 2. Psalm 84 or 119:33-40
  - 3. 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, or I Timothy 3:8-13, or Acts 6:2-7
  - 4. Luke 12:35-38, or Luke 22:24-27

**I. Meeting 1: Introductions**

- A. Present: Sponsoring Priest or other parish leader, Nominee, Nominee's Significant Other, Discernment Committee.
- B. After welcoming all the participants and introducing the convener, the sponsoring Priest or other parish leader departs. The convener will chair this and all subsequent PMDC meetings, and will name the recorder (preferably the convener has made this assignment before this first meeting). In this meeting, everyone is an equal participant; the Nominee is not the focus. Confidentiality is defined and emphasized at the beginning.
- C. The convener will establish the format for the meeting:
  1. All members will introduce themselves, stating briefly their names and other information such as occupation, years in the parish, family members, and a humorous fact that no one knows about them.
  2. Going around a second time, all members will talk about:
    - a. important influences in their faith journeys (e.g., family, friends, authors, teachers, experiences);
    - b. a high point and a low point in their journey;
    - c. their definition of Christian ministry;
    - d. their thoughts and feelings about being on the PMDC --
      - 1) what can I offer?
      - 2) what do I expect to receive?
- D. If it has not already been done, schedule the next five meeting times, identifying the topic for each, and reviewing together the questions that will direct and focus the discussions.
- E. The Nominee hands out copies of the autobiography, not to exceed 10 typewritten pages, to be read by each participant before the second meeting with a focus on:
  1. What pressures has this person experienced?
  2. What pressures is this person currently experiencing?
  3. How does he or she respond to pressure?
  4. Describe the primary involvement for this person: at work, home, church, and community.
  5. Describe this person's current ministries in those areas.
  6. How does he or she tie together the secular and sacred realms of life?
  7. Notes on the autobiographical statement:
    - a. The autobiography is designed to help Nominees explore their life histories in the context of their spiritual journeys and their sense of call to ordained ministry. Nominees write about their development in the areas of family, personal relationships, school, career, and social and leisure activities. Ideally, Nominees will produce succinct, substantive overviews of their lives, which will aid the PMDC, and eventually the COM, to explore their sense of a call in greater depth. The autobiography should not exceed ten typewritten pages, and may, indeed, be shorter.
    - b. The Nominees' challenge is to describe their faith pilgrimages, woven into a developmental history that includes a chronology from early childhood to the present. Nominees might want to break the history into sections, such as early childhood with summary background on parents and siblings and the quality of home life, school years through high school, post high school years and college years, and adult life experiences to the present. In each section, Nominees should note significant life events that influenced both their spiritual and



developmental lives. Nominees should be prepared to articulate how these events influenced their sense of a call to the ordained ministry.

- c. Because of the volume of materials that the Diocese collects and reviews for each Nominee, succinctness is highly valued. The ten-page limit is just that, a maximum. In-depth interviews will be a part of later phases of the process, so greater details can be presented at those times.

## II. Meeting 2: Exploration of Autobiography, Part I

- A. Present: Nominee, Committee
- B. Drawing on both your reading of the Nominee's autobiographical statement and what you learned from the first meeting, explore the following questions or other questions raised by the information you have gathered.
  1. What pressures have there been in this person's life?
  2. What pressures are currently in this person's life?
  3. How does he or she respond to pressure?
  4. Describe the areas of primary involvement for this person: at work, home, church, and community.
  5. Describe this person's current ministries in those areas.
  6. How does he or she tie together the secular and sacred realms of life?
- C. The PMDC now begins to explore the COM's basic questions (below). You can rearrange the order of these questions as seems best. The discussion should include findings from any career counseling the Nominee has undergone and your knowledge of the Nominee's home life, work life, congregational life, and other interests.
- D. CAUTION: Because of the probing nature of the questions, we recommend that all PMDC members share their own views concerning these questions as much as possible to avoid an inquisitorial posture. The PMDC is judging the Nominee's fitness for ordination, but at the same time much can be learned from our collective viewpoints. While opinions are being expressed and judgments are being made, a sense of Christian love and learning is vital if these meetings are to be productive for all concerned.
- E. Questions topics for Meeting 1 – pressures, ministries, areas of growth:
  1. What is the Nominee's understanding of the Christian ministry?
    - a. How does he or she view the ministry of the whole Body of Christ? How does he/she view the Mission of the Church as described in the Catechism on p. 855 of the BCP? (*The Mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ*). How has he/she held themselves accountable for that mission in their lives?
    - b. How does he or she differentiate between the ministries of lay persons and ordained persons? How has he or she partnered with other people to produce tangible fruits of God's love and love of neighbor?
    - c. How does he or she understand the ordained minister's task to seek and serve Christ in all persons; to make Christ's redemptive love known to all persons? How has he/she enabled someone else, especially the poor, weak, sick and lonely, to experience God in their lives or has taken the needs, concerns and hopes of the community to the church?
    - d. How does he or she understand the ordained minister's task to be a prophetic voice in challenging injustice and encouraging reconciliation? How has he/she addressed an injustice and encouraged reconciliation in their church or community?
    - e. What is his/her theology of stewardship and how does that translate into their life?
  2. What further growth is needed, and does the Nominee have the capacity to achieve such growth?

- a. What is his or her academic record? How has he/she demonstrated the commitment to lifelong learning at this point in their life?
  - b. What are his/her spiritual gifts and how have they used them to date? How are they continuing to grow into their uniqueness as a child of God?
  - c. How open is he or she to questioning, self-exploration, and testing his or her view of reality? How do they monitor their impact on others in various situations? How do they track their emotions and engage them?
  - d. What evidence do you see of balance in their lives? Healthy physical lifestyle? Cultural competence? Social awareness (sense and understand others)? Appropriate work-life balance? What is their interest in books, literature, music, art? What hobbies or serious interests does the person have? What places do they like to visit? Who are the people (from history) he/she would most like to be with? Who are their friends? What careers are those friends in? What makes them friends? How do they think the relationship will change?
  - e. What evidence you see of ethical living? How are they living lives of integrity, compassion and courage?
3. In what ways do you envision and experience the Nominee as one who is growing in the Christian faith? How do they ground themselves in personal and corporate prayer? How are they developing a deeper Biblical spirituality? What are their spiritual disciplines and how are they grounded in Anglican spirituality? How do they stay connected with a community who nourishes their spiritual life?

### **III. Meeting 3: Exploration of Autobiography, Part II**

A. Present: Nominee, Committee

B. Question topics for Meeting 3 – emotional health, capacity for leadership

1. What is the status of the Nominee's emotional health?
  - a. How aware is he or she of his or her own feelings?
  - b. How well does he or she express strong positive and negative feelings?
  - c. When dealing with his or her feelings, do physical gestures and movements (body language) match the words spoken?
  - d. To what extent is he or she aware of and comfortable with his or her sexuality? How well-integrated is his or her sexuality or sexual identity with other aspects of his or her life?
  - e. Are there any indications that he or she aspires to the ordained ministry as a way of solving his or her personal problems?
  - f. Does he or she have a level of maturity and ability to adapt to different situations that is commensurate with his or her age level?
  - g. When did he or she fail and what did they learn from the experience?
  - h. When did he or she choose to take responsibility rather than place blame?
  - i. What would they change about their life if they could?
  - j. What does this person value the most; what can't she or he live without?
2. What is this person's capacity for leadership?
  - a. Is he or she aware of and at ease with a variety of leadership styles and able to use them as the situation indicates?
  - b. How has he or she gathered a diverse group and facilitated the articulation of a shared vision that enabled everyone in the group to grow and develop?
  - c. How has he or she sees a need, taken the initiative with a sense of self-confidence, and enthusiastically enabled others to act?
  - d. Can he or she motivate others? How has he/she facilitated a group of people to see needs, search for opportunities, experiment, take risks?
  - e. How does he or she function in interpersonal relationships? How had he/she facilitated others in listening and responding to one another to establish mutual goals, resolve a conflict

3. How comfortable is he or she with being a person in whom authority rests? To what extent is he or she ready to claim and use the authority appropriately?

#### **IV. Meeting 4: Explorations of Call to Ordained Ministry**

- A. Present: Nominee, Significant Other, Committee (you may also invite a priest, deacon and/or lay person there to speak to the different orders of ministry).
- B. Both the Aspirant and his/her Significant Other should be given time to address the following questions.
- C. Questions topics for Meeting 4:
  1. What evidence do you have that this person is called by God to the ordained ministry?
    - a. Is the Nominee confusing a calling to ordination with a calling to Christian service? Review the following definitions from the Catechism (p. 855-856 of BCP) How does he/she relate to each of these definitions?
      - 1) The duty of all Christians - ... is to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God.
      - 2) The ministry of lay persons ... is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship and governance of the Church.
      - 3) The ministry of deacons ... is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a servant of those in need; and to assist bishops and priests in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Deacons are catalysts who bring the needs of the world into the church and lead the church into the world in ministry.
      - 4) The ministry of priests .. is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as pastor to the people; to share with the bishop in the overseeing of the Churches; to proclaim the Gospel; to administer the sacraments, and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God.
    - b. Are his or her primary interests congruent with the basic function of an ordained minister?
      - 1) How does he/she proclaim the Word of God in the manner in which they model life in accordance with the Gospel in their own lives, in their family, in their community?
      - 2) How do he/she love and serve the people with whom they are currently working?
      - 3) How do they see their role as a minister of the sacraments?
      - 4) How do they see their role as leading ministry in their community?
      - 5) How do they see their role in teaching, counseling, developing people?
      - 6) How do they see their role in serving all people? Making Christ and his redemptive love known to all people? Interpreting to the church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world?
      - 7) What sort of ministry do they see themselves called to? Urban/Rural/Suburban? CEO/Program Director/Pastor?
    - c. Is he/she prepared to engage the physical realities of the ordination process?
      - 1) Are his or her innate abilities commensurate with the demands of the ordained ministry?
      - 2) Does he/she have the ability to follow God's Call wherever that may lead (what are the constraints of family, careers or other factors tying them to a particular location and how have they engaged those questions as a family unit)?
      - 3) The Call to ministry is a call to the wider church. Has he/she experienced a time when they had a goal and found themselves re-directed outside of their comfort zone?
      - 4) Has he/she experienced a major change in their life? What went smoothly; what was difficult/ How is he/she handling this potential change?

- 5) How will the time commitment (classes, field placement, CPE) of seminary or deacon's school impact the family?
  - 6) How will the financial commitment of seminary or deacon's school impact the family? Does he/she know how much it is going to cost? Does he/she have a plan for financing seminary? If there are two wage earners, do they have a plan for living on one income? What is their current debt load (mortgage, vehicle loans, other large debts or expenses such as children's' education) and can they handle further debt for seminary? Is one spouse responsible for the finances? If so, is the other spouse aware of the financial situation?
  - 7) How will the move to a new community to attend seminary impact the family?
  - 8) How can he/she engage the Call to Holy Orders as a full career (finances, age, health, etc)?
2. Can you envision this person as a Deacon or Priest in the Church?

**V. Meeting 5: Decision regarding the recommendation for proceeding in the ordination process**

- A. Present: Committee only
- B. The committee reviews the previous weeks' work and makes a final decision about whether to recommend that the Nominee proceed in the ordination process.
- C. Using the recorder's documentation and members' input, prepare a written summary for the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting, using the format provided in the appendices.
- D. It is especially important that prayer be a significant part of the agenda for this meeting.

**VI. Meeting 6: PMDC shares the decision regarding the recommendation for proceeding in the discernment process**

- A. Present: Nominee, Significant Other, Committee
- B. Present the written summary of the committee's work to the Nominee and his/her significant other.
- C. If the committee endorses the Nominee to the Vestry and sponsoring Priest or other parish leader, this report will accompany the Vestry and sponsoring Priest or other parish leader's letter of endorsement to the Bishop.
- D. If the Nominee is being re-directed or being asked to wait, the PMDC may need to assist the Nominee in recognizing and valuing a challenging, satisfying form of ministry in his or her other areas of primary involvement, i.e., work, family, community, or congregation, rather than in an ordained ministry.
- E. PMDC members should discuss what changes they have experienced during the meetings in their own attitudes about or concepts of Christian ministry.
- F. They also should determine what is needed to conclude this series of meetings among the committee, the Nominee, and the Sponsoring Priest or other parish leader.
- G. Decide how best to support the Nominee in the coming months.
- H. Celebrate the work that has been done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.