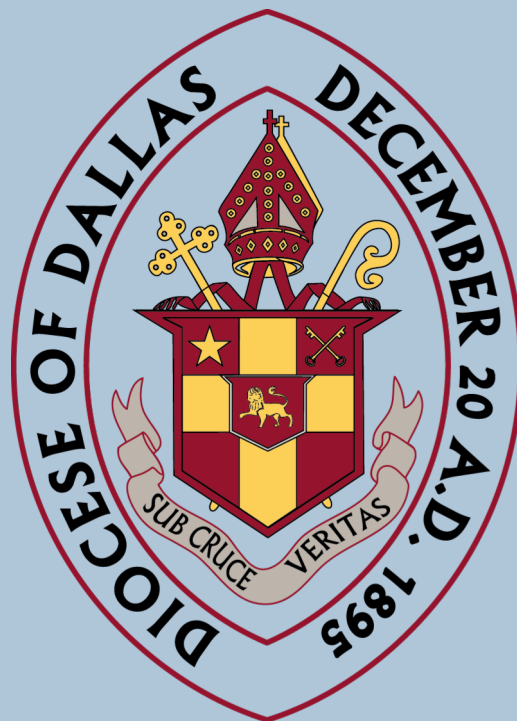


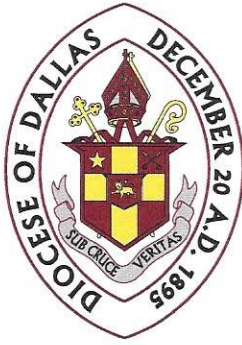
# PATHWAY TO HOLY ORDERS



EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF DALLAS

COMMISSION ON MINISTRY

2017



# The Episcopal Diocese of Dallas

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The Right Rev. Dr. George R. Sumner, Bishop

“My sheep hear my voice”  
John 10:27

Dear brothers and sisters,

Greetings in Christ! At the heart of the Christian life is listening to the word of God. We begin sometimes to listen to the word found silently throughout creation (Psalm 19); but most importantly we do so as we listen to the Scriptures. They tell us who we are as well as where and when we live. Then through them Jesus Christ calls us to follow Him as disciples. As by the Sea of Galilee, there is found our first discernment.

It may now be that you feel called to live out that discipleship in the form of ordained ministry. We are glad you are exploring this. Whatever answer you and we hear, your faithfulness and attentiveness offer their own reward from God. You will need to find an honesty and openness about your own personality and gifts. Throughout it all you will be required to repair to the divine grace.

The hearing of this specific call of God's is both inside and around us, both individual and corporate. That is where your parish church and the Commission on Ministry come in. They too are seeking to listen to God's voice. They are best understood as cooperating with the aspirant in this work of listening. In this way the “Pathway” is best understood as a spiritual path, one defined by a rich doctrine of the Church and the Holy Spirit. Throughout, no matter the outcome, may we hear Christ's voice: “*Ephphatha*, be opened” (Mk 7:34).

Faithfully yours,

The Right Rev. George R. Sumner  
Bishop of Dallas

# THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF DALLAS



## Overview of the Discernment Process

### The Pathway to Holy Orders

The path to ordination begins and ends with the diocesan bishop. Along the way, however, many others are involved in the work of discernment, including your parish priest, your parish, and a couple of bodies at the diocesan level. This work involves four distinct steps: Aspirancy, Postulancy, Candidacy, and Ordination. This process typically takes three years from Nomination to Ordination.\*

### Important Notices:

- Before embarking in discernment, familiarize yourself with the relevant portions of the most current Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church (III.5-9), as well as the ordinal in the Book of Common Prayer.
- Anyone wishing to pursue ordination in the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas is required to agree with and abide by the historic faith and practice of the Anglican/Episcopal tradition as found in the Book of Common Prayer (1979), especially the orders for The Holy Eucharist (Rite 1, pp 323f), Holy Baptism (pp 299f), The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage (pp 423f), The Burial of the Dead (pp 469f), and The Catechism (pp 845f). Read these carefully and consider whether or not you can agree to these in their entirety in good conscience.
- Please note, you may begin the discernment process before reaching the minimum age for ordination, but you must be 24 years of age before the date of your ordination to the diaconate.

The following portion of this document is a summary of the discernment process from beginning to end. Where “rector” is written, presume that “priest-in-charge” or “vicar” is also applicable.

Use this document as a checklist. Though it contains valuable information, please note that it is not exhaustive, and additional requirements may be added. All forms referenced in this document may be found on the diocesan website, [edod.org](http://edod.org).

\* Timing and formation requirements may be slightly different for those who have completed substantial amounts of seminary prior to beginning discernment. For those already ordained in another church who wish to become an Episcopal priest and/or deacon, some of the details below may be different as well, depending on which church you are coming from and the amount of pastoral experience you have. Please see the Canon for Vocations for further details on your specific case.

**BEGINNING THE JOURNEY: BECOMING AN ASPIRANT FOR HOLY ORDERS**

Discernment begins informally with those who know you best: your family and friends, your priest, and other members of your parish. When the time is right, you begin your first steps as follows:

- Have an intentional conversation with your rector about beginning formal discernment. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Plan to attend the annual diocesan Discernment Retreat, if you have not already; it is usually held annually in early August. Attending the retreat is not a commitment to discern, but rather an opportunity for you and your spouse (if applicable) to explore the idea of beginning formal discernment. This retreat is required for all who wish to move forward in discernment. Date of Attendance: \_\_\_\_\_
- Schedule a meeting with the bishop through his assistant to discuss your interest in beginning formal discernment. This first meeting is one-on-one, just you and the bishop. Be sure to introduce yourself to the Canon for Vocations and the Canon to the Ordinary if you haven't already. Date Scheduled: \_\_\_\_\_
- You become an aspirant if/when the bishop approves you to engage in formal discernment. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Notify **both** the Canon for Vocations and your rector of the bishop's decision. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE PATH TO NOMINATION**

Once you've been made an aspirant, discernment officially begins at the parish level, where a committee will work with you to determine whether or not to nominate you to pursue Holy Orders at the diocesan level. Your relationship with your parish is a vitally important part of the work of discernment, and you will need their support in order to continue formal discernment.

- Your rector convenes a Parish Committee on Vocations (PCOV). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Write a spiritual autobiography (2-3 pages) for the PCOV before they meet. Date submitted: \_\_\_\_\_
- Meet with your PCOV for the necessary period of time, usually around 6 months. Date begun: \_\_\_\_\_ Date completed: \_\_\_\_\_
- When their interview process is complete, your PCOV submits a report along with their final recommendation to the parish vestry (**FORM A**). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- If they decide to nominate you, the vestry submits their nomination to the Diocese (**FORM B**) along with a copy of FORM A. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Your rector submits a recommendation to the Diocese (**FORM C**). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- If nominated by your parish and supported by your rector, you write a letter to the bishop accepting their nomination (**FORM D**) and you become a nominee. Our church's canons require that your letter contains the following information:
  - 1) your full name and date of birth,
  - 2) length of time you've been resident in the diocese,
  - 3) evidence of your baptism and confirmation,

- 4) whether or not you've previously been nominated or applied for postulancy in any other diocese,
- 5) a description of your discernment process thus far from your point of view, and
- 6) indication of any and all degrees you've earned and certified areas of specialization, together with copies of official transcripts and/or certifications awarded.

Date submitted: \_\_\_\_\_

- Send us a digital photo of yourself for your file. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Once you become a nominee, discernment moves from the parish to the diocesan level, where you discern with and gain the support of the Commission on Ministry (COM). You are not likely to know many members of the COM, if any. The COM is made up of both clergy and lay members from across our diocese, and their role is 1) to discern for themselves and confirm the vocation sensed by the bishop and affirmed by your vestry, and 2) to observe whether or not you are internalizing all that you are learning and experiencing in discernment and formation. Their role is to make a recommendation to the Standing Committee and bishop that you be approved for the various stages leading up to ordination, and ultimately for ordination itself. While their function is to advise the bishop, your time in discernment with the COM is a vital part of the process and should be engaged accordingly. The first step in progressing towards ordination is, again, being granted postulancy.

**THE PATH TO POSTULANCY**

The path leading to postulancy is a time of more intense and focused discernment.

- Complete the Application (**FORM E**). The application is extensive, and requires several essays. Please allow considerable time to complete. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Complete Release of Information to Diocese (**FORM F**). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Complete Release of Information to Applicant Only (**FORM G**). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Complete the Financial Statement (**FORM H**). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Complete the Nominee Agreement (**FORM I**). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Take the Predictive Index online (**FORM J**). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- The chair of the COM will send you an official invitation to interview. Your rector and your spouse/fiancé (if applicable) will accompany you in this interview.  
Date letter received: \_\_\_\_\_

Scheduled Date for Postulancy Interview with the COM: \_\_\_\_\_

After your interview, if the COM recommends you for postulancy they will direct you to complete the canonically required medical and psychological exams (III.8.5(k), III.8.7(a), III.6.5(j)) and a comprehensive background check.

- Complete a Background Check (**FORM K**). The cost of this is \$300. You are responsible for the expense, though you may ask your parish to consider a contribution.  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Life History Questionnaire for Mental Health Examination (**FORM L**)  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Behavior Screening Questionnaire for Mental Health Examination (**FORM M**)  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Mental Health Examination (scheduled through Diocese). The cost for this exam is \$500. Your parish should pay 1/3, the diocese will pay 1/3, and you are responsible for the remaining 1/3. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Medical Examination (**FORM N**). To be scheduled with your own doctor. You are responsible for cost. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- You submit evidence of your Safe Church training. Date of submission: \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE:** The canons of the Episcopal Church require the background check and the mental and medical health examinations to have been completed within thirty-six months (3 years) of your ordination to the priesthood and/or diaconate. Any of these more than three years old at the scheduled date of your ordination will need to be done again.

After the bishop receives and reviews the results of the medical and psychological examinations, he will review the COM's recommendation and make a judgment on whether or not to grant you postulancy. If you are made a postulant, the bishop or the Canon for Vocations may invite you to discuss any developmental recommendations the COM may have given. At this point you will also develop a plan for your theological formation and training with the bishop and the Canon for Vocations. At this time you will also be assigned a member of the COM as a liaison, to provide support and encouragement along the way. Your liaison can be an effective advocate for you on the COM, so be sure to invest in that relationship as well.

Date Postulancy Granted by the Bishop: \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE:** once you become a postulant, your relationship with the bishop becomes closer and more formal. The bishop will need to be made aware of any significant life changes, including things such as the need for a new job, a desire to get married, etc., as these can have a significant impact on discernment and formation.

**THE PATH TO CANDIDACY**

The path to candidacy is a time focused on your continued theological and spiritual formation. The interview for candidacy is an opportunity to check in with you, the discerner, making sure you are 1) demonstrating the same qualities that were evident at your postulancy interviews, 2) still confident and growing in your sense of vocation, and 3) receiving suitable formation.

- Complete any supplemental requirements or conditions specified by the Commission on Ministry and the bishop that may have been given.
- Write the bishop four times a year, during the Ember Days. **DO NOT NEGLECT THESE LETTERS.** They are canonically required and important both for informing the bishop as to your progress and well-being, and as an indicator of your active engagement in the ordination process. Failure to submit letters **ON TIME** will result in disciplinary action, and continued disengagement can result in being removed from the discernment process.
- Before your interview submit any of the following which will have been completed by the time of the interview:
  - o Documents from your completion of one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program. (In some cases a CPE-equivalent experience may be approved, or a rigorous and challenging missionary experience. The bishop must approve any alternative.)
  - o Letter of reference and any other relevant documentation from a Field Education Experience or Parish Internship
- If your process is on the timeline of a three-year residential seminary, in your second year your parish vestry completes and submits to the diocese their Reaffirmation for Candidacy for Holy Orders (**FORM O**). (NOTE: The length of postulancy could be different, depending on the nature of your approved discernment process and formation. Please consult with the office of the Canon for Vocations regarding the timing of your application for candidacy.)  
 Date submitted: \_\_\_\_\_
- Once the diocese receives FORM O, you write a letter to the bishop applying for candidacy. Be sure to include in the letter the date you were admitted as a postulant (**FORM P**). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Submit at least one audio sermon to the COM. Date submitted: \_\_\_\_\_
- Submit an update to your spiritual autobiography, reflecting on your development and growth since your application for postulancy. Date submitted: \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE:** if all necessary materials are not submitted in a timely manner, your interview could very well be postponed to a later date.

Scheduled Date for Interview with the COM: \_\_\_\_\_

If the COM votes to recommend you for candidacy, the Standing Committee will interview you as well. Their approval is required before you can be made a candidate.

Beyond getting to know you, their canonical responsibility is to ensure that you are being adequately and properly prepared for ordained ministry according to the canons of the Church and according to our bishop's standards and expectations.

Scheduled Date for Interview with the Standing Committee: \_\_\_\_\_

\*NOTE: your rector needs to accompany you in this interview. Your spouse/fiancé will not be needed at this interview.

If the bishop accepts the recommendation of the COM and the certification of the Standing Committee, you will be made a candidate for Holy Orders.

Date Candidacy Granted by the Bishop: \_\_\_\_\_

### **THE PATH TO ORDINATION TO THE DIACONATE**

- Complete any supplemental requirements or conditions specified by the COM and the bishop.
- Continue to write the bishop four times a year during the Ember Days.
- Continue your formation, which should be at or nearing completion.
- Submit your most recent seminary transcript(s) to the diocese. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Submit any outstanding items related to Field Education/Internship, CPE/Mission experience, etc.
- Complete and pass Diocesan Ordination Exams. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Request endorsement for ordination to the diaconate from your sponsoring parish (**FORM Q**). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Write a letter to the bishop requesting ordination to the diaconate, being sure to include the dates you were admitted to postulancy and candidacy (**FORM R**). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- The COM may interview you. Scheduled Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- The Standing Committee will interview you. Scheduled Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If the bishop concurs with the recommendation and approval of the COM and Standing Committee, he will approve you for ordination to the diaconate and schedule your ordination (in most cases no sooner than 18 months from the date of your nomination).

Diaconal ordinations are typically performed at St. Matthew's Cathedral. A member of the Cathedral staff will reach out to you regarding the details of your service. Format and content of any invitations must be approved by the bishop's office before mailing. Refer to the Bishop's Customary under 'Guidelines for Ordinations' for his expectations.

Date Approved by the Bishop for Ordination to the Diaconate: \_\_\_\_\_

Scheduled Date for Ordination to the Diaconate: \_\_\_\_\_



## **THE PATH TO ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD**

If you are on the Path to Priesthood, you must be a deacon for an absolute minimum of six (6) months. Once you are ordained a deacon and are placed in a parish, the parish in which you currently minister as a deacon takes over as your sponsoring parish, as they are in the best position to observe your ministry and continued discernment towards the priesthood.

- Request endorsement for ordination to the priesthood from the vestry of your sponsoring parish (**FORM S**). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Your rector writes a final letter of recommendation. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Write a letter to the bishop requesting ordination to the priesthood, being sure to include the dates you were admitted to postulancy, candidacy, and the date you were made a deacon (**FORM T**). Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- The COM may interview you. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- The Standing Committee will interview you. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If the bishop concurs, he will schedule your ordination to the priesthood in consultation with your rector (if applicable). You and your rector are responsible for planning of your ordination service. As with ordination to the diaconate, format and content of any invitations must be approved by the bishop's office before mailing. Again, refer to the Bishop's Customary under 'Guidelines for Ordinations' for his expectations.

Date Approved by the Bishop for Ordination to the Priesthood: \_\_\_\_\_

Scheduled Date for Ordination to the Priesthood: \_\_\_\_\_

**REMINDER:** The canons of the Episcopal Church require the background check and the mental and medical health examinations to have been completed within thirty-six months (3 years) of your ordination to the priesthood and/or diaconate. Any of these more than three years old at the scheduled date of your ordination will need to be done again. This is the case for ordination to the priesthood, even if you were ordained recently to the diaconate.