

# THE PATH TO ORDINATION



EPISCOPAL DIOCESE  
*of West Texas*



## INTRODUCTION

# The Path to Ordination in the Diocese of *West Texas*



*For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us. -Romans 12: 4-6*



Every Christian is called into ministry. Each follower is called into ministry to join our Risen Lord in God's mission of reconciling all people and all creation to God. God's mission has a Church – the Body of Christ. The vast majority of the members of the Church are called into the vital ministry of the laity. God calls some members of the Body of Christ into the ordained ministry – deacon, priest, or bishop. The ministry of the ordained is a different – not a better – ministry than that of the laity. Through celebrating the sacraments, administration, pastoral care, teaching, proclamation, and leadership, ordained ministers bring order to God's mission.

This Path to Ordination outlines a discernment process for those persons seeking to gain clarity in God's call to them. In particular, this process is for those who are discerning whether they are possibly being called to the ordained ministry. Through prayer, reflection, and conversation with lay and ordained leaders, the Diocese of West Texas seeks to assist people in discerning where and how God is calling them to serve. The path is the same for those discerning ordination to the diaconate, priesthood, or bi-vocational priesthood.

Faithful discernment takes time. The process described herein includes the major steps in this process. Along the way, clergy and lay leaders make recommendations to the Bishop, who prayerfully makes final determinations. There may be other steps or requirements asked of those in this process that are not included in this guide. Leigh Saunders, Executive Assistant to the Bishop, is a resource for those who have questions along the way.



## A PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE

*O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light rises up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in your light we may see light, and in your straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### **PREREQUISITES BEFORE BEGINNING THIS DISCERNMENT PROCESS:**

- Before entering this discernment process a person must be a baptized Christian who has been confirmed or received by a bishop in the Episcopal Church.
- One must be an active, adult member in good standing of a congregation or college ministry in the Diocese of West Texas for a minimum of 12 months.
- Several conversations with a clergy person.
- Attendance at a Discernment Weekend, which the Diocese will host, is recommended.
- A bachelor's degree or equivalent is required by seminaries. A person may be currently enrolled in an institution of higher learning when beginning this process.

### **LOCAL VOCATIONAL REFLECTION**

When the local clergy person deems it appropriate, the seeker begins the 4 discernment conversations outlined in the *Vocational Reflection Process* with the local clergy. This document is available from Archdeacon Besson or Leigh Saunders. Each conversation and reflection will take a minimum of 3-4 weeks.

- Spiritual Autobiography
- Rule of Life
- Self-Awareness
- Exploring Ministry in the Church.

### **MEET WITH THE BISHOP**

Upon completion of Sessions 1-4, should the individual sense a possible call to ordained ministry, and with the support of his/her priest, the priest contacts Leigh Saunders to schedule a meeting with the Bishop.

The Bishop will meet with the individual and their priest and determine whether or not the person will continue to the next step in the discernment process. If the Bishop determines the person will continue in the process, the Bishop will notify the seeker and their clergy and send the information to the Chair of the Discernment Committee of the Commission on Ministry.

### **VOCATIONAL REFLECTION WITH THE DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE**

- The Chair of the Discernment Committee contacts the person and assigns to him/her one or two members of the Discernment Committee to guide them in the next 4 discernment conversations outlined in the Vocational Reflection Process. Each of these will take 3-4 weeks to complete.
  - Friends & Family
  - Life in Relationship
  - Power, Authority, & Obedience
  - The Stations of our Lives.
- As part of this step in the process the person will also be reflecting on whether their call is toward the diaconate, or a bi-vocational or full-time priesthood track.

## INTERVIEW WITH DIOCESAN DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

- At the discretion of the Bishop, and with a recommendation from the liaison(s) from the Discernment Committee assigned to the person, the person may interview with the Diocesan Discernment Committee. The written work from Sessions 1-8 will be the starting point for the conversation with the Committee.
- The Discernment Committee makes a recommendation to the Bishop. That recommendation may be that the person is called to lay ministry or to ordained ministry. The Committee may also make a determination of "Not Yet" and recommend the person spend more time in discernment.

**The Bishop Determines** whether or not the person continues in this process toward ordained ministry or has a call to lay ministry. If the Bishop determines the person is to move forward in the path toward ordination, several canonical steps are required. Leigh Saunders is available to assist with these steps.

- Physical examination.
- Psychological examination.
- Background Check.
- A letter of nomination from the Rector/Vicar and Vestry/Bishop's Committee endorsing the nominee and pledging to contribute financially to their formation.
- Evidence of Baptism & Confirmation

**The Bishop admits the person as a Postulant** and determines the appropriate course of formation: residential seminary, Iona School, etc. The Bishop informs the Member of the Clergy, the Standing Committee, and the Commission on Ministry. Throughout the formation process the postulant participates in annual retreats of the Examining Chaplains and writes canonically required Ember Day letters to the Bishop.

## CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION & CULTURAL COMPETENCY

- During formation, the postulant is expected to complete Clinical Pastoral Education. Typically, this takes place during the summer months between semesters.
- It is strongly encouraged that the postulant learn Spanish and undertake other courses that will increase his/her cultural competencies for ministry in South Texas.

## CANDIDACY

A person desiring to be considered as a Candidate for ordination shall apply to the Bishop. This typically takes place one year before completion of studies. The application shall include:

- A letter of recommendation from the Vestry/Bishop's Committee and Member of the Clergy.
- An interview and recommendation from the Standing Committee.
- The Bishop determines whether or not to admit the person as a Candidate.

## EXAMINATION

Upon completion, or near-completion of the formation process, the Candidate completes the General Ordination Examinations and meets with the Examining Chaplains. The Bishop receives a recommendation from the Examining Chaplains regarding competency in the canonically required areas of formation.

## ORDINATION

When all canonical and diocesan requirements have been met, and the person has received consent from the Standing Committee, the Bishop may choose to ordain the Candidate to the Sacred Order of Deacons (transitional or permanent) and following other requirements including consent of the Standing Committee and a minimum of 6 months as a deacon, to the priesthood.



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