The Episcopal Diocese of Northern California
Guidelines For A Congregation’s Commission on Ministry (CCOM)

*Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles.*

(Luke 6:12-13)

**The Role and Ministry of the CCOM**

The ministry of the Congregation’s Commission on Ministry (CCOM) is essential to the ongoing life of the Body of Christ; congregationally, at the diocesan level and in the wider church. The CCOM’s primary function is to grow into being a prayerful group working within the congregation to help discern and support people in their various calls to ministry; lay and ordained. This includes exploring the implications of the fact that all baptized Christians are called to ministry, growing in awareness of the vast diversities of and possibilities for lay and ordained ministries, working with individuals prayerfully to help discern where God might be inviting them at a particular point in time, and working with congregational leadership to identify, raise up and support members of the congregation in their formation for diverse ministries. The CCOM functions in an advisory capacity to the Rector or Vicar of the congregation in regard to licensed and other lay ministries as well as ordained ministries. Further, the CCOM has a key advisory role to the Bishop, the Diocesan Commission on Ministry and the Standing Committee in the process of discernment and support for those who may be called to ordained ministry from their congregation.

The CCOM should be an ongoing commission of the congregation with possible 3-year rotations. The Rector/Vicar and/or Chair of the CCOM should prayerfully choose the initial members, with replacements chosen by the Rector/Vicar, Chair and current members of CCOM.

The CCOM can also have an essential educational function within the congregation, aside from providing information about the required processes for licensing and ordination. The CCOM can raise awareness of the ministry of all the Baptized, can encourage ongoing exploration of call both individually and congregationally, can help to increase awareness of the vast diversity of ministries possible both within and outside the institution, and provide support and ongoing discernment for those who are already serving in various ways. The CCOM can also pay attention to members whose ever-readiness to take on one more thing can lead to burn-out. As well as helping identify people with gifts for ministry within the congregation, diocese and larger church, they can encourage and support congregants in their ministries beyond church doors. The
CCOM can also increase recognition of and support for ministries already quietly being carried out by people who may not even be aware that they are serving Christ in what they do.

**The Membership of the CCOM**

Because of the critical nature of the CCOM’s work, its members should be prayerful people, committed to Christ, engaged in ongoing, personal spiritual growth. They should care deeply for the Church, trust in the Holy Spirit to guide the process, be able to listen, be willing and able to change their minds for good reason, be honest, fair and compassionate in their dealings with other people. Members need to be deeply aware that God works with different people in different ways, and that a genuine call cannot always be described rationally. Members must be willing to listen attentively with people whose personality and style of communication may be very different from their own. Each member of the CCOM must be committed to respecting confidentiality.

The CCOM should represent as broad a spectrum of the congregation as possible. Gender and liturgical preference should be balanced. Members should be familiar with the Episcopal Church, should not be newcomers to TEC or to the congregation and should have life and/or professional experience which lend themselves to an understanding of the discernment process. Potential CCOM members should show themselves interested in learning about the process of discernment and be willing to go through a time of formation for their essential ministry.

**Initial and Ongoing Formation of CCOM Members**

Regular practice of group prayer, including Lectio Divina and silent listening should be an ongoing part of CCOM meetings. CCOM members need also to be increasingly aware of and able to talk about the Spirit’s action in their own lives so that they grow in sensitivity to that action in others.

CCOM members should begin by reading, praying with and discussing together the Baptismal (pp. 298-314) and Ordination (pp. 510-555) sections of *The Book of Common Prayer* and the section of the Catechism regarding The Ministry (pp. 855-856). Ongoing group study of and prayer with at least the scripture passages in Appendix A are highly recommended.

CCOM members should read together and discuss the book, *Listening Hearts*. Other recommended books are included in Appendix C, the Bibliography, at the end of the guidelines. Some useful tools for the discernment process are listed in Appendix B.

Members should become familiar with the process for becoming an Ordained Priest or Deacon in our Diocese. Please refer to the ordination guide and manual, which can be found on the Diocesan web site. It is helpful, also, to become aware of the three different tracks for ordination in the Diocese of Northern California. The Diocesan web site has
flowcharts that give brief overviews of the ordination process. Members should also be familiar with the guidelines and requirements for Licensed Lay Ministers in our Diocese. These can be found on the Diocesan web site.

It is strongly recommended that a day be set aside for the CCOM to spend in a workshop or retreat led by a trainer from the Diocesan Commission on Ministry to explore together the process and ministry of prayerful discernment.

As new members rotate onto the CCOM, they should be joined in their reading and exploration by at least two or three experienced members. An annual shared review of the ideals and practices of the CCOM is recommended. Continued reading and group discussion in the areas of discernment and ministry should be expected of the CCOM.

Discussion with the Rector/Vicar about expectations, limitations and boundaries is essential, as is clarifying the processes to be followed. For example, with whom should members of the congregation first talk if they are sensing a pull toward a particular ministry? Must it always be with the Vicar/Rector or could they approach a member of the CCOM, particularly in the case of lay ministries? At what point must the Rector/Vicar be approached? Could sub-groups of the CCOM meet regularly with a person in the initial stages of exploration? If a person is exploring a possible call to ordination, what are the steps the person will have to take? How is a person who is sensing a call of some sort going to learn about the process of discernment?

**Processes for Exploring Possible Invitations to Licensed Lay and other Lay Ministries**

These processes will vary by congregation. It is part of the responsibility of the CCOM to educate the congregation about the procedure. Generally a person exploring a call to one or more Licensed Lay Ministries will approach either the Rector/Vicar or the person who coordinates the particular ministries. Alternatively, the person may be approached by someone who senses that they might have the gifts and heart for a particular ministry. The person will be put into contact with the CCOM.

Normally the CCOM will request that the Discerner write a one to two page letter that includes a brief spiritual autobiography and addresses the sense of call to that ministry. They may be asked to address specific questions at the discretion of the CCOM. One or two listening meetings with the CCOM should be planned. The CCOM then informs the Rector/Vicar of the outcome of those meetings. If a background check is required for the particular ministry, the Rector/Vicar will provide the necessary paperwork.

Training depends on the practices of the congregation. The Rector/Vicar will request the license from the Bishop for those ministries that require licensing.
Process for Exploring Possible Invitations to Ordained Ministry

A person who senses that God might be inviting him or her to explore a call to ordained ministry should enter into spiritual and pastoral discussions with the Rector/Vicar to begin the process of prayer and discernment within the congregation. It is also necessary for that person to be in an ongoing relationship with a spiritual director.

The Rector/Vicar, if/when she or he believes it to be appropriate will arrange an initial interview for the Discerner to meet with the Bishop. After meeting with the Bishop, the Discerner may or may not be invited to begin the formal discernment process.

If the Bishop gives approval to begin the formal process, the Rector/Vicar will connect the Discerner to the CCOM. Before the initial meeting with the CCOM, the Rector/Vicar should ensure that the Discerner understands the process to be followed.

The CCOM will enter with the Discerner into a deeper, intentional exploration of a possible call to ordination. The role of the CCOM is not to prove or disprove a call, but to engage with and support the Discerner in a process of prayerful, attentive, focused listening.

There can be no fixed time-line for this discernment, but a minimum of 3 – 6 months is expected. Ideally the Discerner and CCOM members will enter the process together; willing to hear whatever God might be saying and will come prayerfully to a consensus. The CCOM then sends conclusions and recommendations to the Vestry, and the Vestry makes a decision to recommend or not recommend the Discerner to the Bishop.

If the decision is to recommend to the Bishop, the Rector/Vicar ensures that the Discerner is provided with all necessary forms for the formal application process and will work closely with the Discerner to gather all required materials. Upon receipt of a completed application, the Bishop decides whether to invite the Discerner to attend a Discernment Weekend with the Diocesan Commission on Ministry and the Standing Committee. At the conclusion of the Discernment Weekend, the Commission on Ministry and the Standing Committee make a recommendation to the Bishop regarding Postulancy. If the recommendation is accepted by the Bishop, Postulancy begins.

Guidelines for CCOM Discussions with Those Exploring a Call to Ordained Ministry

Once the Rector/Vicar has formally referred the Discerner to the CCOM, the CCOM and the Discerner should meet together for prayerful exploration of the possible call. These times with CCOM members and Discerner should be spaced sufficiently apart that there is time for serious prayer and reflection by all parties.

- A mutual understanding of what discernment is and is not should be reached before beginning group exploration of the possible call. A variety of statements regarding
discernment are found in Appendix E. Discussion surrounding those statements can prove fruitful for coming to a mutual understanding of the purpose of this process.

- The gathering should open with a brief prayer followed by several minutes of silent attentiveness. Take time to become settled in God’s presence.

- An unhurried, reflective atmosphere should be maintained. There should be silence after each person has spoken so that all can absorb what was said.

- All should hold desires and convictions lightly; leaving room for the Holy Spirit. All should be genuinely seeking God’s guidance.

- Members of the CCOM should commit to regular prayer for the Discerners. Discerners should commit to regular prayer for members of the CCOM.
Possible Areas for CCOM Exploration and Prayer Before, Between and After Meetings with the Discerner

1. How well do you know the Discerner? What more do you need to know? Have you observed the Discerner in a variety of situations?

2. Does the Discerner appear to have a sense of the Holy present in his or her life?

3. How does she or he attend to the presence of God? Do you have a clear sense of the person’s life of prayer? Spiritual resources?

4. What emotional responses do you have about the Discerner? What about the Discerner, if anything, triggers especially positive or negative responses in you?

5. What do you know about how the Discerner is viewed by other members of the congregation?

6. Can you put into words on which all can agree your understanding of why the Discerner believes he or she is being called to ordination?

7. What do you experience as the Discerner’s understanding of ministry as she or he feels called to exercise it? Is the Discerner aware of the similarities and the unique features of each order of ministry? (Laity, Diaconate, Priesthood)

8. In your experience with the Discerner, does she/he interact with others in an open, honest, giving and receiving way? How have you become aware of the Discerner’s ability to listen and take initiative? How does the Discerner deal with the way things are done, with traditions that matter to people, when sensing a need for change?

9. Does the Discerner appear to have a clear sense of boundaries? Is she/he able to talk about situations that required decisions about what was or was not his/her business?

10. Is the Discerner eager to learn, excited about new ideas? Is she/he able to reflect and ponder. Is he/she open to being challenged?

11. Does the Discerner have a balance of interests in life or is the church his/her single focus?

12. When the Discerner has had difficulties and problems, how has she/he sought help?

13. What do you know about how the Discerner reacts to and relates to persons in authority? How does she or he deal with disagreements with ones in authority?
15. What do you understand about how the Discerner deals with conflict?
16. Does the Discerner consistently engage in self-care physically, emotionally and spiritually? Where does he or she need to pay more respect to her or his own needs?
17. Does the Discerner seem to have a sense of the world outside his/her particular location and passion? Is there a curiosity about other cultures and communities?
18. Is there a sense of connectedness to a wider community – to the diocese – to the broader Church both inside and outside Anglicanism?
19. Have you become aware of anything that would significantly enhance or impede the exercise of the Discerner’s ministry? (e.g. past history with substance abuse, having been abused as a child, marital issues, a tendency to church hop, repeating dysfunctional patterns of behavior, weight issues, etc.? None of these is a necessary bar to effective ministry. Any of them, recognized and prayerfully, intelligently dealt with through counseling, etc. can be used by God to significantly enhance ministry. Ignored or evaded, they can be serious red flags.)
20. Is the Discerner sufficiently aware of and realistic about the financial implications of a seminary education/School for Deacons or other necessary training?

Areas of Exploration for Discussion

The following five areas need to be explored in some depth with the Discerner. These questions are suggestions that can be adapted, added to, followed through on or deleted at need, but should provide guidelines for beginning the discussions. The Discerner should know in advance about the areas and kinds of questions that are to be explored so that he or she can engage with them prayerfully and thoughtfully.

Call to Ministry
The CCOM listens to and supports the Discerner in articulating her or his sense of call to ministry.

- If the call being explored is to ordination (diaconate or priesthood), how does the Discerner distinguish between the two vocations?
- What is it about the ordained expression of ministry that the Discerner cannot offer as a committed lay person?
- Who have been role models for the Discerner?
- What does the Discerner understand about the concept of servant leadership in terms of the ministry of deacon or priest?
- How does the Discerner experience the sacramental nature of the ministry he or she is exploring?
- Has the Discerner studied and prayed with the appropriate ordination rites in the Book of Common Prayer?
- What stands out from those rites for the Discerner?
Spiritual Life and Prayer
The CCOM explores with the Discerner the nature of her or his spiritual life – prayer and other spiritual disciplines.

- What regular routines of prayer, worship, study, Sabbath and service does the person use?
- Does he or she see a spiritual director regularly?
- What is that relationship like? How does the Discerner understand her or his relationship with God?
- Does the Discerner feel more or less in relationship with one or another of the Persons of the Trinity?
- How does he or she understand and experience the Eucharist?
- How does the Discerner experience and understand his or her relationship to and responsibility for the rest of creation?
- How does that affect her or his spirituality?
- How has the Discerner experienced growth and change in her/his spiritual life during his/her lifetime?
- What kinds of blocks have there been? Special moments?

Family Life and Self Care
The CCOM explores with the Discerner the nature of his or her family life and other close relationships. How does his or her spouse or partner (if in a such a committed relationship) feel about this exploration of a possible call.

- Is the spouse or partner supportive? Uncertain? What concerns have been raised.
- How have they worked out the possible difficulties that responding to such a call could bring?
- What about children or other dependents? Parents? Siblings? Do they know? How are they reacting?
- What kind of relationship does the person have with her or his family of origin? If the person is not in a familial relationship, explorations can be made of close friendships.
- What family of origin issues or current relationship issues might challenge or create difficulty for the Discerner in the ministry she or he is exploring.
- What sort of financial considerations might there be, particularly in terms of seminary or the School for Deacons? How will these and other related expenses be covered?
- What sort of debt load is the Discerner currently carrying?
- How does the Discerner care for him or herself both physically and mentally?
- What issues might there be surrounding health? What does she or he do for relaxation, for fun?
- What kind of reading does he or she do for enjoyment?
Leadership and Ecclesiology (Theology of the Church)
The CCOM explores with the Discerner how she or he understands and relates to the Church both institutionally and as the Body of Christ.

- How has the Discerner experienced life in the institutional church in the past? In the present? What has changed?
- How does the Discerner see the institutional church moving into the future? Is he or she hopeful about the future church? Worried? Discouraged? All of the above?
- How does the Discerner see his or her role in the present and future church?
- What sort of leadership experience does the Discerner have? How would she or he describe his or her leadership style? Where does the Discerner need to grow in leadership? How might this growth be sought and nurtured? How have others described the Discerner’s leadership gifts?
- How does the Discerner understand the authority of the Bishop, the Convention, General Convention, priests and deacons? How does the Discerner understand the relationship of clergy and bishop on this diocese? If the question is to discern a possible call to the Diaconate, is the person prepared to go wherever the Bishop asks?
- If the Discerner is exploring a call to a non-parochial way of living a call to ordination (for example, hospital, school, prison chaplaincy, ordination within a religious or other intentional community, etc.) how does she or he believe that his or her call would be lived out within the larger life of the Church?
- How does the Discerner handle conflict? Where are her or his growing edges in this area? Can the Discerner talk about times when he or she made a major mistake of some sort and what was learned from that experience? How does that experience influence the way the Discerner might handle disagreements and conflict?

Academics and Intellectual Life
The CCOM explores with the Discerner his or her interest in the faithful life of the mind learning, connecting intellect with faith, stretching mentally.

- What formal educational formation, if any, has the Discerner had in the Christian faith?
- In the Anglican/Episcopal way of living that faith? How has the Discerner studied and learned outside the realm of formal academic training? What areas are of particular interest to the Discerner? Where does the Discerner think that she or he needs extra work to learn. How would the Discerner go about teaching others about Christianity?
- The CCOM might explore different scenarios in which the Discerner would need to share the traditions and teachings of Christianity.
- How familiar is the Discerner with the Diocese of Northern California’s requirements for ordination?

- What is the Discerner’s academic background; both their strengths and weaknesses?
• Is the Discerner familiar with the typical Seminary curriculum or that of the School for Deacons? Does the Discerner have the intellectual and financial resources to make education at a Seminary or The School for Deacons realistic?
• How is the Discerner currently developing his or her knowledge? What has the Discerner recently read that has been intellectually and spiritually challenging? What is he or she looking forward to reading next and why?

**During the Process**

It is essential that the Discerner be kept informed, throughout the process, of any concerns that might come up among members of the CCOM. No concern that may influence decisions by CCOM members should be kept from the Discerner, and the Discerner must be given ample time and opportunity to pray, think about and respond to such concerns. Not only is this a question of fairness, but the way in which the Discerner responds to difficult issues can provide insights both to the CCOM and to the person.

Before the final interview, everyone on the CCOM should have had sufficient opportunity to share their observations, enthusiasms and concerns with the rest of the CCOM and with the Discerner.

The final meeting with the entire CCOM and the Discerner should be an open and frank discussion. Nothing that goes into the final report should come as a surprise to the Discerner, who must be given the opportunity to ask for clarification and respond to concerns.

**CCOM Report to the Rector/Vicar and the Vestry/Mission Committee**

When all agree that there has been sufficient time and opportunity to explore all pertinent issues with the Discerner, and if the Discerner continues to sense a call to ordained ministry, CCOM members need to come to a clear consensus about their own responses to the Discerner’s call to ordained ministry. A report prepared by the Chair and signed by all CCOM members will:

1. Recommend that the Discerner continue the process toward ordination. After meeting with the Discerner in a in-depth exploration of all aspects of their Call, it is the consensus of the CCOM that the Discerner has a clear understanding of the process and requirements for ordination in our Diocese, has thoroughly tested the Call and that they too sense that the Discerner may have a Call to ordained ministry.
2. Agree that they, too, a sense of call to ordained ministry, but recommend further time, prayer and discernment for the Discerner to clarify what that call might be.
3. Not recommend the Discerner, at this time, to continue an exploration of a Call to ordained ministry.

Ideally, none of these responses will come as a surprise to the Discerner.
The CCOM Report to the Vestry should include:

1. Date
2. Name of Discerner
3. Names of CCOM members
4. Responses to the following:

   a. The CCOM’s understanding of the Discerner’s call to ordained ministry.
   b. The CCOM’s understanding of the Discerner’s spiritual strengths and weaknesses.
   c. An assessment of the Discerner’s intellectual ability to pursue graduate level studies in theology, scripture, etc.
   d. A description of the Discerner’s family situation, including how spouse, partner, children, siblings and parents feel about the Discerner’s desire for ordination.
   e. A description of the Discerner’s spiritual history
   f. A description of the Discerner’s life and ministry in the congregation
   g. An assessment of the Discerner’s potential for leadership in the church.
   h. An assessment of the Discerner’s effectiveness in pastoral and/or interpersonal relationships in the congregation.
   i. Additional observations that the Rector/Vicar and Vestry/Mission Committee should know about.
   j. The CCOM’s formal recommendation for the Discerner at this point in time.
   k. Signatures of all members.
   l. The CCOM report will be sent to the Bishop along with the Vestry/Mission Committee endorsement, should that body decide to endorse the Discerner.
Follow-up

Once the final CCOM report to the clergy and vestry has been submitted to the Vestry/Mission Committee, the CCOM’s role in the preliminary work of discernment is complete. However, the CCOM has the responsibility to offered continued support to the Discerner, regardless of the decision.

If the Discerner has received a positive recommendation and is accepted as a Postulant in the diocese, CCOM members should continue to stay in touch, provide encouragement and support and occasionally to meet, if possible, with the Postulant as she/he moves through the process. The CCOM functions as a liaison between the Postulant and the congregation.

Should the Discerner be deferred or simply not recommended, the CCOM should serve as much as possible as a support and source of prayer and information for the Discerner. Areas observed as needing growth and attention may be gently discussed with the person and encouragement as he or she lives into the answer will be needed.
**Appendix A**

**TOOLS FOR THE CCOM COMMUNITY DISCERNMENT PROCESS**

1. Prayer - Center all your work with prayer, keeping the process God focused.

2. Scriptural References to Call, Discernment and Ministry:
   
   a. Exodus 3:7-12
   b. Jeremiah 1:4-9
   c. Luke 4:16-21
   d. John 20:21-23
   e. Acts 6:1-8
   f. I Corinthians 12

3. Spiritual Autobiography - The Discerner shares the story of their faith journey and how their experience with and understanding of God has developed and changed over the course of their life.

4. Sense of Call paper - The Discerner articulates in writing their present sense of Call. As the discerner continues to meet with the CCOM, their sense of Call may evolve, so it can be good to require it at the beginning and again near the end of the discerner's time with the CCOM. *This is especially useful for those pursuing ordained ministry.*

5. Licensed Lay Ministries Guidelines - Diocese of Northern California website

6. Ordination Manual & Documents-- Diocese of Northern California website

7. Title III of the National Canons of the Episcopal Church 2012 edition- 
   

8. *The Book of Common Prayer*
   
   a. Baptismal Promises: 298-314
   b. Ordination Services: 510-555
   c. Catechism (section on The Ministry 855-856)

9. Spiritual Gifts Discernment/ Spiritual Gifts Inventory
   
   [http://home.earthlink.net/~haywoodm/SpiritualGiftsDiscernment.html](http://home.earthlink.net/~haywoodm/SpiritualGiftsDiscernment.html)

10. Information about the Diaconate:

       [http://www.sfd.edu/diaconal-discernment-kit](http://www.sfd.edu/diaconal-discernment-kit)


    c. "*A Deacon in Every Congregation...*" Episcopal Diocese of Northern California- 
       [http://www.norcalepiscopal.org/deacon](http://www.norcalepiscopal.org/deacon)
Appendix B
Bibliography


Morris, Danny E. and Charles M. Olsen, *Discerning God’s Will Together, A Spiritual Practice for the Church*, Published by Upper Room, December 1, 1999


Appendix C

INFORMATION FOR CONGREGATIONAL COMMISSIONS ON MINISTRY REGARDING THE DISCERNMENT OF A VOCATION AS A DEACON

Concerning the Order of Deacons.
The Holy Scriptures and ancient Christian writers make it clear that from the apostles’ time, there have been different ministries within the Church. In particular, since the time of the New Testament, three distinct orders of ordained ministers have been characteristic of Christ’s holy catholic Church. First, there is the order of Bishops who carry on the apostolic work of leading, supervising, and uniting the Church. Second, associated with them are the presbyters, or ordained elders, in subsequent times generally known as Priests. Together with the Bishops, they take part in the governance of the Church, in the carrying out of its missionary and pastoral work, and in the preaching of the Word of God and administering his holy sacraments. Third, there are Deacons who assist Bishops and Priests in the governance of the Church and as itinerant mission leaders assigned by the Bishop to inspire, empower and enable members of the church to fulfill their Baptismal Covenant by serving the needy, the weak, the sick and the lonely in their communities.

The Preface to the Ordination Rites (BCP 510) provides the above discussion of the relationship among the three orders of ordained ministry. Differentiating between the three orders makes it clear that Deacons are members of a separate, distinct and equal order of clergy within the Episcopal Church.

The Diaconate in the Diocese of Northern California is an order of ordained persons serving as mission leaders in assignments within the Diocese as determined by the Bishop. The Deacon is ordained to a separate, distinct and equal order of ministry dedicated to:

• Serving and enabling others to serve the needy, the weak, the sick, and the lonely,
• Holding before the Church the needs of the world, interpreting those needs to the Church, and enabling baptized persons, to bring the ministry of Christ to the world, through fulfillment of their Baptismal Covenant,
• Providing unique faculties of ministry, which a Bishop may call upon as an extension of his/her ministry in the world.

The liturgical functions of the Diaconate are secondary to the social and justice ministry functions. If a Deacon is present, however, they are expected to proclaim the Gospel, set the table, clear the table and deliver the dismissal.
The Call to Diaconal Ministry
A call to Diaconal Ministry is largely individual in nature and comes through an individual’s prayerful communication with God. The call is reinforced by the individual’s Congregation. The Church as a corporate body must recognize, test, and affirm an individual’s call to ministry. It is the Church which affirms God’s call to explore the ordained ministry. This affirmation is accomplished by:

- The individual’s Clergy person and Parish Vestry or Mission Committee
- The Commission on Ministry
- The Standing Committee
- The Bishop

Some of the signs of a call to the Diaconate are an individual’s demonstrated desire and ability to:

- Serve and to enable others to serve the poor, the powerless, the weak, the sick and the needy,
- Hold before the Church the needs of the world, to interpret those needs to the Church,
- Be a symbol of and model for the ministry of all the baptized.
- A strong personal ministry, empathy with those less fortunate and a strong spirituality are not by themselves adequate to determine a call to the Diaconate.
- Deacons must also have the innate ability to raise up and lead others in serving those in need.

Discerning the Call
The process of discerning the call to the Diaconate begins when a baptized person approaches his or her Rector/Vicar and asks for information.

The primary responsibility for recognizing and developing a vocation to ordained ministry lies with the Parish/Mission. It may seem presumptuous to observe, question and judge another’s call to ordained ministry. However, for someone aspiring to Holy Orders in the Church, this is not a private matter, but the proper concern of the entire Body of the Church.

The next step is to have the Rector, Vicar or Priest-in-charge bring the Discerner to visit with the Bishop who may recommend that a Congregational Commission on Ministry (CCOM) become involved.

The CCOM meets with the Discerner for a period of time not less than 3 – 6 months. If the CCOM discerns a call to the diaconate, the CCOM recommends the Discerner to the Vestry/Mission Committee. If the Vestry/Mission Committee agrees, an application and supporting materials is sent to the Bishop who will make a decision about extending an invitation to attend a Discernment Weekend to meet with the Diocesan Commission on Ministry and Standing Committee.
**Deacon Formation**
The Deacon Formation Program of the Diocese of Northern California is primarily through the School for Deacons in Berkeley, CA. Details of the training program can be found on the School for Deacons website.

With permission from the Bishop, a nominee may attend classes at the School for Deacons during the discernment period.

**The Ministry of Deacons**
The ministry of Deacons in the Diocese of Northern California is to inspire, empower and enable the people of the Church (within and without the Parish or Mission) to explore opportunities for their own ministries in the world. Deacons are charged in ordination to be an “example” and it is from the honesty of that example that Deacons try to inspire others to fulfill their baptismal vows. It is not just what Deacons say or do that inspires—it is their totality.

As leaders of outreach ministries, the Deacons build relationships within the life of their ministry assignment. The Deacon and Rector/Vicar will discuss and agree upon goals, areas of responsibility, and extent of participation that are most appropriate to the Deacon’s skills and availability, as well as the needs of the community where they are assigned.

The Parish or Mission commitment of a Deacon is, first and foremost, to lead Justice and Social Ministry in their assigned communities. In addition, Deacons may assist in liturgical ministry as specified in the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer. Deacons do not usurp liturgical roles normally assigned to Lay People: i.e. reading lessons, the Prayers of the People, and chalice bearer. However, some liturgical activities are appointed to Deacons by the Book of Common Prayer rubrics and the Bishop’s directives. Specifically:

- Proclaim the Gospel
- Set the table
- Clear the table
- Dismiss the people
- Serve as the Bishop’s chaplain

*If there is a Deacon present, only the Deacon should perform these functions.*

Other Ministry activities may include: (This list is neither exhaustive nor restrictive)
- Preach the diaconal message of Christ
- Inspire others to fulfill their Baptismal Covenant
- Empower others to do God’s work here on earth
- Enable others to access resources necessary for God’s work
- Raise up and support lay outreach ministers
- Support Outreach Committee
• Exemplify outreach in personal ministry
• Assist in gathering data on outreach alternatives
• Mentor follow-up groups to hands-on outreach
• Lead/facilitate participation in community programs
• Train and supervise Eucharistic Ministers and Visitors
• Teach and enable Christian Education
• Take Communion to the hospitalized and homebound
• Enable Bible study programs
• Train Acolytes
• Prepare Lay-readers and Lectors
• Duties appointed by the Proper Liturgies for Special Days (Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil)
• Perform other functions specific to the Bishop and the individual congregation.

Recommended reading:

*Discerning God’s Will Together* by Danny Morris
*A Sacred Voice is Calling* by John Neafsey
*Weeds Among the Wheat* by Thomas H Green, S.J.
*Many Servants* by Ormond Plater
*Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order*, by James M. Barnett
*BCP: Ordination of a Deacon* (Pg 537)
CCOM Guidelines found on the Diocesan website.

In addition to “Possible Areas for CCOM Exploration and Prayer Before, Between and After Meetings with the Discerner” in the CCOM Guidelines you might want to explore the following:

• What or who made you who you are? What persons? What events? Or…?
• In your personal dream, what kind of world do you live in?
• What gives you a sense of purpose or mission?
• What are your gifts? How are you actualizing your gifts?
• How have you exhibited leadership? At your work? In the world? At church?
• Does your family support and approve a call to the diaconate?

*Acknowledgement: The Diaconate in the Diocese of Maryland, The Rt. Rev. John L Rabb*
Appendix D
Descriptions of Discernment

The following descriptions are taken from a variety of sources. It will prove helpful if the CCOM take time during their formation to explore the implications of these statements and to share their exploration with the Discerners who come to them. The CCOM members should be able to articulate their definition of discernment.

- Discernment is the process of making choices through the eyes of faith so that we are brought closer to the person of Christ.

- Discernment is a process that looks to the objective facts of the situation and to the inner yearnings of the individual for clues as to where the individual is called.

- During discernment our sense of call is tested with others and against Scripture, reason, experience and tradition.

- Discernment is always provisional and must be tested by its fruits.

- Discernment is not a once-in-a-lifetime process. There is a need continually to assess whether our choices are in alignment with our faith.

- Freedom is a prerequisite to discernment. When we close our hearts and minds and think we have all the answers, we are not ready for discerning the Spirit’s urging.

- In classical spirituality, discernment focuses on distinguishing God’s Spirit from other spirits that are present in a given time and place.

- Discernment is a journey rather than a destination.

- Discernment is a prayerful, informed and intentional attempt to sort through all the voices to get in touch with God’s Spirit at work.

Adapted from the Commission on Ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Iowa
Appendix E
The Quaker Clearness Committee Model


This informal model may be used in conjunction with another discernment process or as a “stand alone” process in small congregations where most of the members know one another. The purpose of a clearness committee is to “[invite] people to help each other with personal problems while practicing a discipline that protects the sanctity of the soul.” (Although Parker uses the term “problems,” this process can be effectively used in discerning vocation. Much of the Listening Hearts material is based on the clearness committee model.)

It works like this. The Discerner brings an issue to a group of 4-5 people she/he has invited to be on the committee. In preparation for their meeting, she/he writes 1-2 pages about the issue, giving a clear statement of the issue, relevant background, and relevant foreground.

The group meets for 2-3 uninterrupted hours, and the Discerner is the center of attention. Committee members are forbidden to speak to her/him except to ask open, honest questions. Some attention should be paid to what “open” and “honest” means. Asking the question, “Have you ever considered therapy?” is a leading question – not open and honest. Asking “Have you often felt this way?” is acceptable. The Discerner usually answers each question, but has the right to pass. There is lots of silence, and nothing is hurried. Advice and oversimplification from committee members are not allowed.

About 15 minutes before the session ends, the Discerner is asked if she/he would like to do some “mirroring”. If not, the group continues with questions. If so, committee members reflect, or mirror, what the Discerner said or did, but might not be aware of. “When you talked about X, your voice dropped and you seemed tired, but when you spoke of Y, your energy rose and your eyes got bright.”

There are two levels of confidentiality in effect in a clearness committee. First, what’s said in the meeting stays there. Second, members may not approach the Discerner with comments or suggestions, either during or after the meeting.

Of course the clearness committee can (and should) be infused with prayer – both corporate and individual. The group may want to select a convener to keep track of time and to facilitate times for prayer.