

**Episcopal Diocese of Northern California Policy:
Alcohol/Substance Dependency and Mental Health Issues
For Individuals Seeking Ordained Ministry**

Policy

We are all broken people, striving, with God's grace, towards health and wellbeing in our lives. The problems of alcohol/substance dependency and mental illness are not viewed as character defects, but treatable medical issues. The Church supports the work of all individuals in seeking sobriety and wellbeing. The successful exercise of ministry, especially ordained ministry, requires that the individual be in a state of sobriety and good mental health. The following procedures address the minimum criteria for pursuing ordained ministry in this Diocese.

Diocesan Procedures

After receiving information concerning an applicant's prior or current treatment for alcohol or drug dependency or mental health wellbeing, the Bishop, at her or his discretion, shall advise the Chair of the Diocesan Commission on Ministry (DCoM) of these findings. This should be done prior to the Discernment Weekend so that these concerns can be addressed and explored at that time by the DCoM and the Standing Committee prior to a recommendation for Postulancy.

Should it be revealed that an individual in the ordination process has developed, or had a recurrence of an alcohol or substance abuse dependency problem while in formation, the individual's advancement to candidacy or ordination shall be placed on hold during a two-year, enforced sabbatical during which time the individual shall become involved in a recognized recovery program.

Should it be determined that an individual in the ordination process is experiencing mental health issues that affect their wellbeing, advancement toward ordination shall be placed on hold until it is deemed by a mental health professional that the individual may continue safely in the ordination process.

Alcohol/Drug Abuse & Dependence

Authority:

Resolution 2015-D014 — *Evaluate Individuals in the Ordination Process for Addiction Concerns*

- **Resolved**, "That the sponsoring Clergy, Vestries, Commissions on Ministry, Standing Committees and Bishops interviewing and evaluating Nominees, Postulants and Candidates for Ordination explore directly issues regarding substance use in their lives and family systems; *and be it further*,
- **Resolved**, "That Nominees, Postulants and Candidates who may have addiction issues be offered appropriate resources and referred to qualified mental health, healthcare and/or addiction professionals for further evaluation prior to proceeding in the ordination process."

Procedure:

1. An applicant that has experienced an addiction or dependency to alcohol, mind altering chemicals or drugs (to include illicit or prescription medications) which had created an abuse that affected their behavior, judgement and/or cognitive skills, shall have at least (2) years of continual sobriety prior to submitting an application to the ordination process. This time frame is indicative of an ongoing commitment to sobriety and successful recovery program that is recognized by health care professionals.
2. When an applicant with a prior history of alcohol or substance dependency (as noted on their application) has been approved to attend a discernment weekend, the Bishop may, at her/his discretion, inform the DCoM chair of the applicant's prior history of alcohol or substance dependency. The DCoM chair may, with the approval of the Bishop, inform other members of the DCoM. This will allow the DCoM chair to ensure that appropriate consideration of the applicant's history is possible during the weekend, while maintaining as much personal privacy for the applicant as possible.
3. In the case of an applicant with a prior alcohol or substance dependency history that meets the requirements in Section 1 and who is moved forward into Postulancy, that individual shall be involved in a continuing recovery program (such as the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous) and be able to provide proof of participation throughout the ordination process. Other recognized treatment options agreed upon by the Bishop may also be utilized.
 - Proof of participation can be obtained from a Sponsor, Mentor, Spiritual Director, DCoM Liaison or professional treatment facility.

4. Should it be revealed that a person in the ordination process has developed or had a recurrence of an alcohol or substance abuse dependency problem while in formation; advancement in the ordination process shall be placed on hold until the individual has completed 2 years of enforced sabbatical and continual sobriety recovery. Upon completion of the enforced sabbatical, the individual shall be evaluated by a treatment professional to ensure the individual is involved in successful ongoing recovery, is working a recognized recovery program and is able to continue the journey toward ordination. A report shall be forwarded to the Bishop by the DCoM Chair.

- During the enforced sabbatical period, the individual in the ordination process shall be supported through the Diocese, their Mentor, Spiritual Director and DCoM Liaison.
- If approved by the Bishop, academic formation can continue during the enforced sabbatical period.

Mental Health Wellbeing

1. When an applicant with a prior history of mental health treatment (as noted on their application) has been approved to attend a discernment weekend, the Bishop may, at her/his discretion, inform the DCoM chair of the applicant's prior history of mental health treatment. The DCoM chair may, with the approval of the Bishop, inform other members of the DCoM. This will allow the DCoM chair to ensure that appropriate consideration of the applicant's history is possible during the weekend, while maintaining as much personal privacy for the applicant as possible.

2. If, at the Bishop's discretion, the Bishop feels the individual's DCoM liaison should know of the individual's mental health history for informed monitoring during the ordination process, the DCoM liaison can be so informed.

3. If a DCoM member receives information from those associated with the individual in the ordination process, that a condition or behavior has surfaced that they believe may cause concern or affect the individual's ability to function in the ordination process, the DCoM Chair shall be so advised and a report forwarded to the Bishop by the Chair.

- If the individual's ordination process is placed on hold, it should be determined by a mental health professional approved by the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California when the individual may safely continue in the ordination process.