

The Clergy – Aspirant Relationship

Suggestions from the Discernment Sub-Committee of the Commission on Ministry

The Clergy – Aspirant relationship should last for a minimum of nine months.

- This length of time allows for the priest, viewed as the gatekeeper by the Bishop's Office, to see an aspirant through a variety of seasons – both personal and liturgical.
- The priest should plan to meet once a month for an hour or more for conversation.
- Aspirants should be rotated through a variety of lay ministries within the parish – acolyte, chalice (LEM), lector, altar guild, usher – to give them more exposure to serving liturgically; an aspirant feeling a call to the diaconate may also start to volunteer in an organization outside the church or serve on/observe the parish's outreach committee. Lay leaders in each of these areas will provide mentorship and deepen relationship with the aspirant.
- Encourage the aspirant to pursue Eucharistic Visitor certification.
- Connect the aspirant to a priest and deacon within the diocese who may have a similar profile (e.g. a deacon in their 30s or a priest in their second career); have them meet for coffee and conversation.
- Encourage the aspirant to try services at different Episcopal churches if yours is their only exposure.
- Observe how they participate – or don't! – in the life of your parish.
- Have the aspirant connect IMMEDIATELY with a Spiritual Director.
- Topics for consideration:
 - o Family of origin and family of choice
 - o Life in a faith community – now and in past
 - o Sense of call/fulfillment/joys/passion
 - o Prayer practice
 - o Personal and embedded theology
 - o Reflections on experience of Spiritual Direction and any other self-work
 - o Reflections on various ministry experiences in the home church
 - o Reflections on volunteer work outside of the home church
 - o Reflections on meeting with other clergy whose process was similar
 - o Read the ordination services of both Priest and Deacon – examine and discuss differences together
 - o Share your own journey through discernment to ordination
 - o Begin discussion of their Spiritual Autobiography - lift up instances from your time with them that you believe are most helpful in telling their story

If the aspirant is a warden or vestry member, they should wait until the end of their term to begin discernment. The discernment process should be a sacred time of openness to the working of the Spirit. We have suggested a variety of tools to aid in this journey and provide rich fodder for your conversations. Please do not rush this process. The nine or more months of meetings should give you a solid understanding of the aspirant's call and commitment - and the confidence to put together a Congregational Discernment Committee or encourage a continuation in lay ministry for the aspirant.