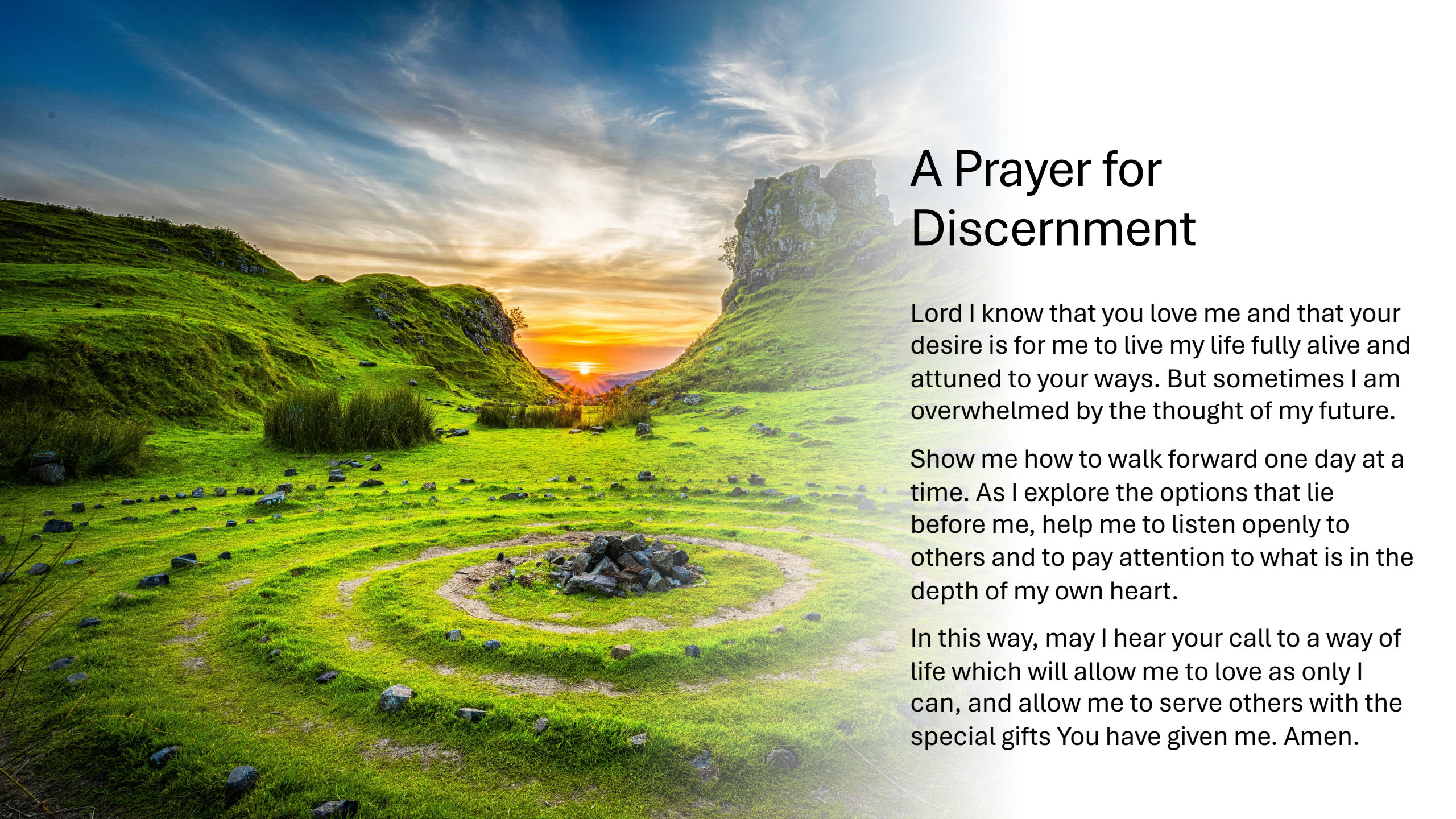


A photograph of a dirt path winding through a dense forest. The path is light brown and is flanked by lush green grass and various plants. The trees are tall and thin, with a thick canopy of green leaves. The lighting is soft, suggesting an overcast day. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

Discernment Team Orientation



A Prayer for Discernment

Lord I know that you love me and that your desire is for me to live my life fully alive and attuned to your ways. But sometimes I am overwhelmed by the thought of my future.

Show me how to walk forward one day at a time. As I explore the options that lie before me, help me to listen openly to others and to pay attention to what is in the depth of my own heart.

In this way, may I hear your call to a way of life which will allow me to love as only I can, and allow me to serve others with the special gifts You have given me. Amen.

Introductions Using Mutual Invitation



Why Are We Here?

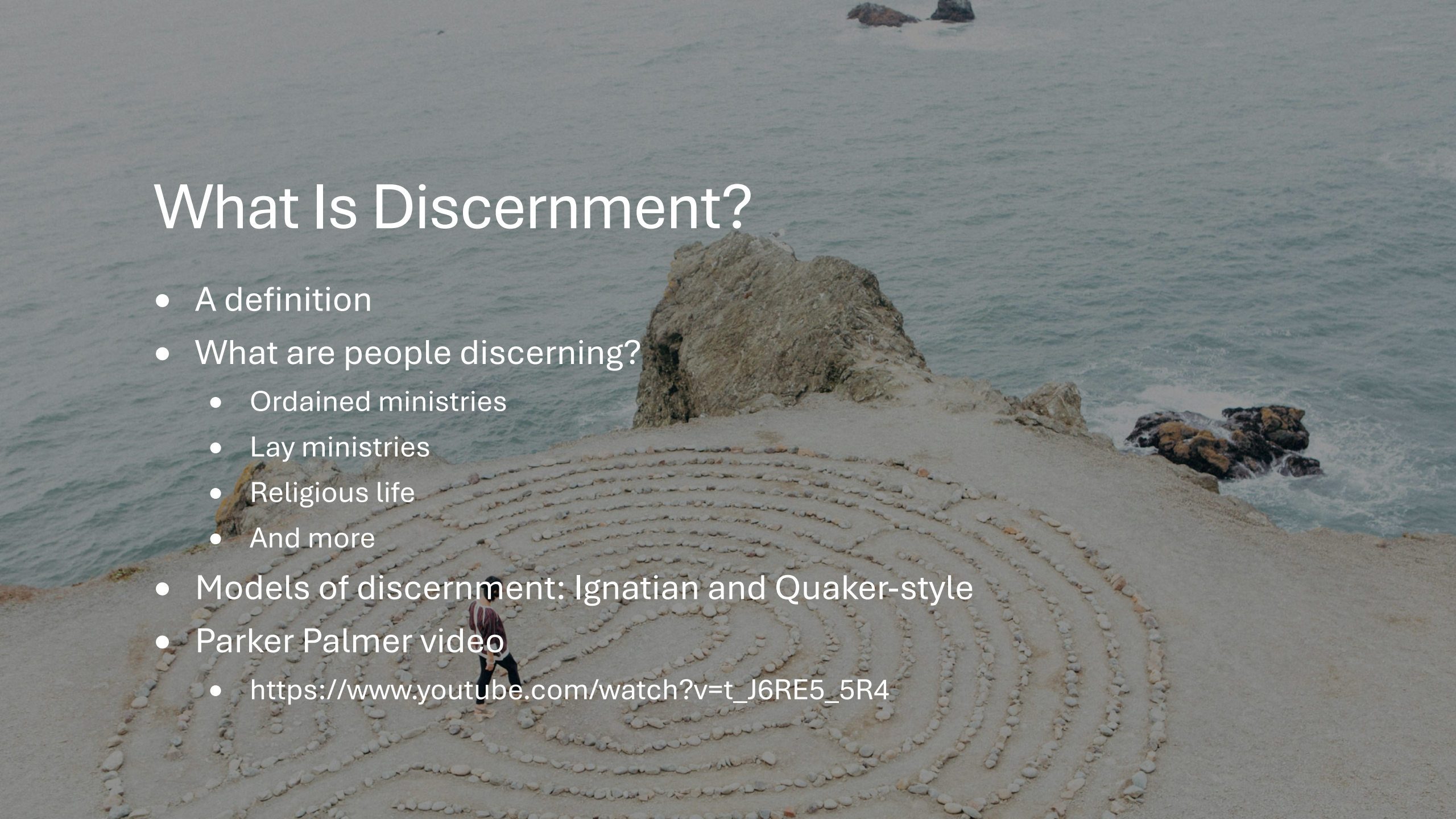
A person is seen from behind, walking away on a dirt path that winds through a dense forest of tall, thin trees. The sunlight filters through the leaves, creating a dappled light effect on the path and the surrounding foliage. The overall atmosphere is serene and contemplative.

“Don’t ask what the world needs.
Ask what makes you come alive,
and go do it.
Because what the world needs
is people who have come alive.”

~ Howard Thurman

What Is Discernment?

- A definition
- What are people discerning?
 - Ordained ministries
 - Lay ministries
 - Religious life
 - And more
- Models of discernment: Ignatian and Quaker-style
- Parker Palmer video
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_J6RE5_5R4





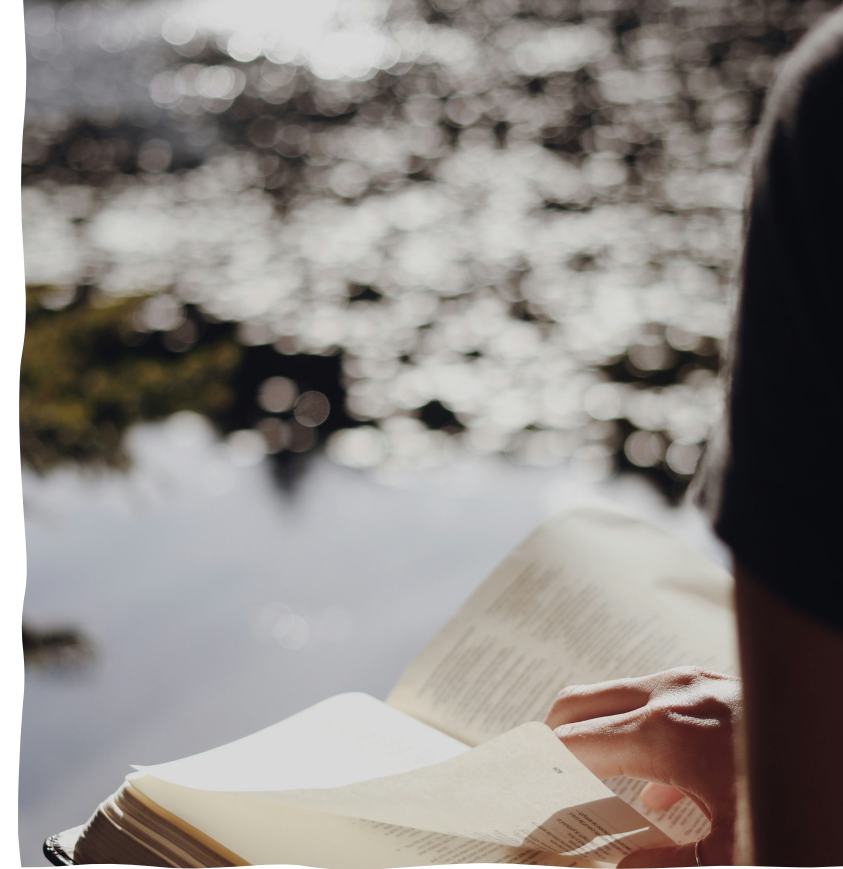
Ordained Leaders

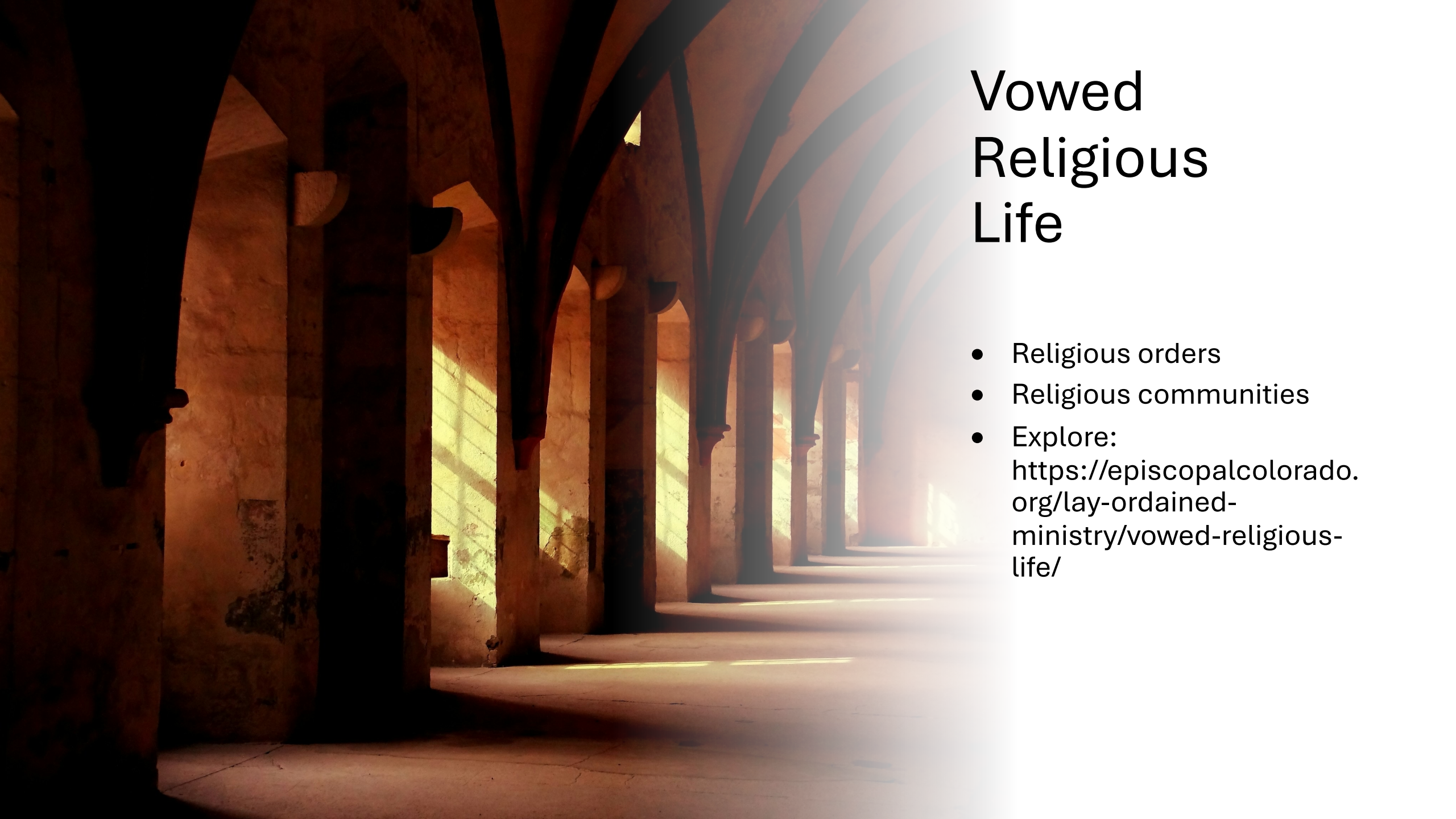
What are qualities of ordained leaders?

- Deacons
- Priests
- Explore “Qualities of Future Deacons”
 - <https://episcopalcolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Qualities-in-Future-Deacons.pdf>
- Explore “Qualities of Future Priests”
 - <https://episcopalcolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Qualities-in-Future-Priests.pdf>

Lay Leaders

- Types of ministry
 - Licensed
 - Congregational ministries
- Qualities of lay leaders
- Explore web page:
<https://episcopalcolorado.org/lay-ordained-ministry/licensed-lay-ministry/>





Vowed Religious Life

- Religious orders
- Religious communities
- Explore:
<https://episcopalcolorado.org/lay-ordained-ministry/vowed-religious-life/>

What Else Are People Discerning?



What Is Discernment in Community?



OPEN

- A sacred container for listening to the Holy Spirit
- A gift and a mutual blessing
- A compassionate listening and gentle exploring process, loving and attentive to the seeker
- Completely confidential: no commenting outside the team; however, congregation may be invited to pray for the seeker and the discernment team (if the seeker is ready for this)
- Spirit-led
- Shared leadership
- Open-ended
- Comfortable with silence, allowing the team and seeker to notice the movement of the Holy Spirit
- Comfortable with whatever unfolds during the discernment process
- Able to speak the truth in love

“We can never achieve wholeness simply by ourselves but only together with others. Consequently as we involve the community in discerning call, God enlivens and strengthens both us and the community.”

~ Susan Farnham

What Discernment in Community Is Not

- Having preconceived notions of outcomes
- Guided by rules and regulations
- Informational
- An interrogation
- A support group (You are not a cheerleader for the seeker)
- Driven by deadlines
- A mutual sharing group
 - 90:10 guideline



What Is the Team Looking For?

- Does the seeker know what they are getting into and why they are doing this?
- Is the seeker able to articulate who and what they are?
- Is there a level of transparency apparent in their personhood?
- Does the seeker understand they are discerning for the Episcopal Church, not a specific congregation, diocese, or another Christian tradition?





Break

Fire

What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water would.
So building fires
requires attention
to the spaces in between,
as much as to the wood.

When we are able to build
open spaces
in the same way
we have learned
to pile on the logs,
then we can come to see how
it is fuel, and absence of the fuel
together, that make fire possible.

We only need to lay a log
lightly from time to time.
A fire
grows
simply because the space is there,
with openings
in which the flame
that knows just how it wants to burn
can find its way.

[Judy Brown](#) from [The Sea Accepts All Rivers](#)



How Do We Ask Open, Honest Questions?

- Explore “Open, Honest Questions” from the Center for Courage and Renewal
 - <https://couragerenewal.org/foundations-participant-portfolio-3/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2022/09/22-08-18-Open-Honest-Questions.pdf>



When Does Discernment End?

- It is okay to stop the process at any time if it becomes clear to the seeker that this is not what they want to do with their life—at least at this time.
- If this happens, the seeker should continue meeting with their priest and spiritual director.





What Happens at the First Meeting?

- Begin with a prayer experience offered by one of the discernment team members (15-20 minutes).
 - Intentionally invite the Holy Spirit.
- Confirm that everyone on team has read the book Listening Hearts by Suzanne Farnham.
 - Priest should provide discernment team members with a copy of the book.
 - It is recommended the seeker read Let Your Life Speak by Parker Palmer.
- Share spiritual autobiographies.
 - 10 minutes each (have timekeeper).
 - Each person shares their spiritual journey (no more than 10 minutes).
 - Option to use template provided by formation team.
- Seeker gives an expanded version of their spiritual journey (up to 20 minutes).
- Close with prayer.

Future Sessions

- Begin each meeting with a 15-20 minute prayer experience offered by a discernment team member (all members take turns).
- Following each meeting, the discernment team members, not including the seeker, should briefly discuss what they would like to explore next with the seeker. This should be based on observations, reflections, and discussions from previous meetings.

Logistical Considerations

- Discernment teams meet with the seeker a minimum of seven months.
- Meetings should last no more than 90 minutes.
- Meetings occur every 4-6 weeks.
- Meetings can take place via Zoom or in person.
- Leadership is shared: in addition to different team members leading opening and closing prayers, they take turns facilitating individual sessions.
- The team should select a scheduler who can communicate with the team, schedule meetings, and create the prayer schedule.



A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a silver smartphone. The person is wearing a ring on their left hand and has pink nail polish. The phone is held over a laptop keyboard. The background is slightly blurred, showing a wooden desk and a blue object. The overall lighting is soft and warm.

Support for Discernment Teams

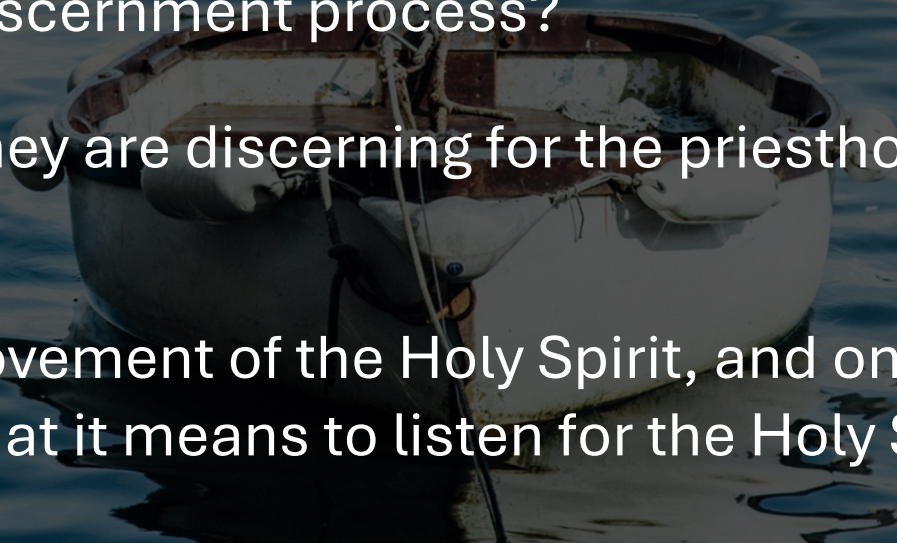
If Discernment Team has questions or needs direction reach out to your orientation trainer or rector if needed.

What Happens When Discernment Is Complete?

- Discernment team summary
 - Choose team member to write summary.
 - Should include:
 - Team's level of comfort with the seeker as someone who continues to feel called to lay or ordained ministry.
 - Team's support for moving the seeker forward in the process with enthusiasm
 - Any indications the seeker is appropriate for a specific path: ordained ministry (deacon/priest), vowed religious life, lay ministry
- Summary should be reviewed and signed by all discernment team members.
- The discernment team summary is sent to the rector or sponsoring priest.



Scenarios

1. You've progressed through the minimum seven months. Some people on the team think you're finished. Others think you're not. How do you decide if you should continue with the discernment process?
 2. In session two, the seeker says they are discerning for the priesthood. How do you respond?
 3. Your team is talking about the movement of the Holy Spirit, and one team member says they don't know what it means to listen for the Holy Spirit. What might you say?
- 

Scenarios

4. The person who is supposed to lead the opening prayer experience forgot to prepare. What do you do?
5. After session five, the seeker feels they are being called to the diaconate. What suggestions might you offer them for exploring this path more deeply?
6. The team is sensing a lack of transparency from the seeker. It feels like they may be telling the discernment team what they want to hear. What do you do?

Scenarios

7. A discernment team member expresses discomfort with allowing space for silence. How do you handle this?
8. The seeker shares that they are in recovery. How does the team receive this?

