

A Competency-Based Approach to the Ordination Process

Episcopal Diocese of Michigan

October 2020

This document outlines a competency-based approach to selecting, evaluating, and supporting people in the ordination process in the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan. These competencies guide congregational leaders in supporting and assessing those within their parishes who feel called to ordained ministry. These competencies are developmental. From initial identification of a call, through Postulancy, Candidacy, and life in ordained ministry, they provide a framework for growth, not a set of boxes to be checked. The way that someone approaching Postulancy embodies the characteristics will necessarily be different from the way someone approaching Candidacy, or with 10 years of parish ministry, approaches them. Questions at each stage of the process are tailored to these different expectations.

1. COMPELLING FAITH

- A. **Compelling spiritual life and a passion for the Gospel:** Our clergy love God with heart, mind, and soul, know Christ and want to make Christ known, and address the great spiritual hunger in the culture at large and in our congregations. They have a vision for the Episcopal Church's ministry and how to guide our people to greater faithfulness and spiritual depth. They have both a deep reverence for the sacraments at the heart of our liturgical life and a sacramental worldview in which outward and visible things reveal inward and spiritual truths. Clergy understand the history of the Christian church and the historical context of the scriptures, enabling them to articulate core principles of our tradition and use them to guide our work in this time.

Characteristics:

- Loves Jesus
- Is faithful, with a strong, regular prayer life
- Is connected to a Christian faith community
- Embodies and engages scripture in daily life
- Understands how care for creation encompasses environmental stewardship
- Understands the history of the church, the historical context of the scriptures, and how the Holy Spirit is speaking to us through these in our time

- B. **Ability to communicate the Gospel in ways that people and communities find engaging and relevant to their lives:** Our clergy need to speak several "languages," both human and technological, during worship, in personal conversation, and in social media. They are called to minister in a wide variety of contexts, among all sorts and ages of people, from birth through death. They find ways to meet people where they

are, and to engage people's hearts, minds, and imaginations with the Good News of Christ. They help people find ways to share God's love in their everyday contexts. They also demonstrate flexibility in how they interact with their communities and in using online and/or virtual tools.

Characteristics:

- Shares their faith, including why they're in the church, in a compelling and real way
- Articulates a sacramental understanding of their call, specific to the order to which they feel called
- Can talk about what it means to proclaim the Word, and to translate that to draw people to go with them to create the change in the world
- Demonstrates competence with current media tools and possesses a growth mindset and openness to learning new technologies as they emerge

2. SELF-AWARENESS AND OPENNESS TO GROWTH

A. **Spiritual maturity, self-awareness, and authenticity:** The work of the Episcopal clergy is challenging. Effective clergy must be able to persevere in challenging circumstances, recognize their personal growth edges, and be willing to learn new skills and ask for help. They must be able to understand that all social locations are not the same, and that race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and other factors shape our experiences, both of the gospel and the world.

Characteristics:

- Is kind, relational, and empathetic
- Is self-aware, thoughtful and reflective
- Shows willingness to grow and learn alongside others
- Demonstrates resilience, including the ability to persevere in challenging circumstances and even in the face of failure
- Self-regulates and maintains healthy boundaries
- Possesses a strong spiritual center, plus physical and mental stamina
- Seeks out voices of those who differ from them, especially those who are oppressed or marginalized, in literature as well as in person
- Is mindful of their own social location, and cognizant that others will perceive things differently from their social locations, and aware of the ways that racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other collective and structural sins that have shaped our worldview

3. VOCATIONAL AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY AFFIRMATION

- A. **Clarity about the nature of ministry by both the individual and community:** Our Baptismal Covenant calls us all to ministry. Our clergy understand and can articulate the differences between orders – lay, deacon, priest, and bishop. Those in ordained ministry have a strong sense of how their call matches the duties of their order. Because discernment is a community process, the local faith community must openly recognize in each person in the ordination process gifts of leadership, respect for all, integrity, loving care and willingness to serve. As the person moves through the process, those around them (supervising clergy, bishop, seminary instructors, congregations served, etc.) continue to affirm their call to ordination.

Characteristics:

- Shows understanding of baptismal ministry and the orders of ministry
- Articulates a compelling understanding of their call to a particular order
- Is supported by community in that call

- B. **Willingness and ability to be vocationally flexible:** The predominant model of ministry in most Episcopal churches has been that of one minister (the priest) ministering to all the people, standing at the center of the church’s ministry. That model is changing. Our churches are in a variety of contexts in a variety of locations with a variety of needs. Few ordained people are likely to serve in one role or at one type of church or in one city for their entire vocation. In addition, a growing number of congregations require clergy leaders who do not depend on congregational support for their entire livelihood. Our clergy demonstrate flexibility in their vision of professional ministry as they respond to God’s call to them and the church in our world.

Characteristics:

- Flexible
- Clear about how all work (paid and unpaid) is ministry
- Able to identify new models of ministry and ways of financial support

4. LEADERSHIP AND CONTEXT

- A. **Ability to lead, organize, and equip others in ministry:** Our clergy equip others for meaningful Christian lives and vocations, inviting others into the life of Christian community and ministry. This requires community organizing skills and the ability to identify and mentor new leaders. It also requires an understanding of racism, sexism, classism, able-ism, homophobia, transphobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other sins that have shaped the institutional church and society, as well as the tools to expose and dismantle these sins in practical, Gospel-informed ways.

Characteristics:

- Demonstrates transformational leadership
- Empowers, encourages, coaches, and creates other leaders
- Collaborates and works as part of a team
- Demonstrates understanding of and ability to use community organizing tools
- Is contextually aware and aware that context varies
- Understands the systemic nature of injustice

B. **Innovative leadership:** Our clergy take risks and try new things in ministry. They demonstrate creativity, the capacity to discern new paths, and the willingness to make mistakes and learn from them. Innovative leaders see opportunities where others see decline; possibilities where others see insurmountable challenges. They also demonstrate a spiritually-informed understanding of the tools they use for transformation, so that they do not replicate the injustices of historical and contemporary society.

Characteristics:

- Shows spiritual grounding
- Demonstrates emotional maturity and self-awareness in the face of failure and/or difficult people and circumstances
- Is entrepreneurial, smart, and creative

C. **The ability to lead congregations through change:** As the cultural context for our ministries changes, the majority of our congregations face significant challenges in responding to God's call to mission beyond our walls. Our clergy are called to reshape, renew and reform our communities. As with our spiritual ancestors, a process of transformation is required for all of us on the journey.

Characteristics:

- Is inspirational, flexible, and able to lead people
- Is comfortable in the world
- Understands church history and its relationship to our current times