

Diocese of AZ

COM

Discernment Process Guide

(Track One)

Inquiry Stage

Starts with an Inkling...what next?

1. Pray. Talk to God and listen to God.
2. Talk with your family/friends you trust. What do they reflect back to you about this inkling you have?
3. Talk to a leader (rector/vicar/PiC/deacon/lay leader) at your parish about the inkling.
4. Not a part of a parish yet? Find one.*
5. Learn about the Diocesan Discernment Process in these pages.

** = all Episcopal discernment happens first in the parish context. You must be part of/known at/involved in a parish/community to undertake formal discernment in the Diocese of AZ. It is strongly recommended that you're involved at the parish level for a year before beginning parish discernment.*

Requirements to Consider

1. Are you baptized? Evidence of baptism must be provided during your process.
2. Are you confirmed? Evidence of confirmation must be provided during your process. You must be confirmed at least a year before you can be made a postulant in the discernment process.
3. Priesthood requires you to get a Masters of Divinity degree. Is your Bachelor's degree complete?
4. All parish leaders must complete Safeguarding God's People training every 5 years. Is yours current?

Note: If you have not been baptized and confirmed, speak to your parish leader about engaging those two steps. If you have been baptized or confirmed or both, but do not have the records for this, please contact the church which performed these sacraments who should have you on record. If they do not have those records for some reason, your parish leader should be able to assist you in scheduling a provisional baptism and/or a confirmation service upon the next Bishop's visitation/diocesan confirmation service.

Inquiry Stage-Best Practices

1. Be involved in your parish: committees, volunteerism, worship, worship ministries.
2. Undertake spiritual practices: journaling, the Daily Office, contemplative prayer, etc. that can help you grow and develop language around your potential sense of call.
3. Engage a Spiritual Director for spiritual conversations.**
4. Develop your self-awareness: engage a therapist/counselor, examine your motivations, examine your relationship to power/leadership/service. Discover your Spiritual Gifts.
5. Visit other churches. Does your call to parish leadership extend outside your local context?
6. Engage in self-care practices that prioritize rest and restoration.
7. Examine your need for privacy. Discernment is a highly personal exploration which must be confirmed by your self, your community, and the diocesan community before ordination is a possibility. Think intentionally about who you want to be “in the know” or not before you decide to begin.

*** = Spiritual Directors are usually paid professionals. If this causes a financial hardship, speak with your parish leader to discuss potential assistance. You can find Spiritual Directors through your parish connections or by contacting the Commission on Ministry at COM@azdiocese.org for suggestions.*

Inquiry Stage-Parish Leader Guide


So you have someone (an Inquirer) who has expressed they are feeling some sense of call to an ordained Holy Order or something else not fully developed yet. Here's your next steps:

1. Hear them and engage a pastoral exploration conversation with them. Commit to regular pastoral conversations with them over the course of their discernment, whether informal or formal discernment occurs to help them discover what this inkling is.
2. Help pave the way for if formal discernment is undertaken: are they baptized? Are they confirmed? If they're considering priesthood, do they have their Bachelor's degree already? Help them understand these requirements and do what you can to help make sure those things are addressed early. While an Inquirer should not lean on you to complete their process of discernment, it is yours to help them enter with eyes wide open on diocesan/canonical requirements.
3. Familiarize yourself with the Diocese of AZ process in these pages. Reach out to COM@azdiocese.org with any questions.
4. Encourage their self-awareness and prayer life: Spiritual Director, therapist, involvement in the parish and the worship life thereof.
5. Start thinking about who in the parish might have the gift of discernment that you could call upon to be part of a 5-7 member Parish Discernment Team (PDT) for 4-6 months. The Inquirer should suggest 1-2 people they'd like to have included on the PDT, you would select the rest. No clergy (active or retired) should be included on a PDT.
6. Plan to attend the Day of Ministry Discernment (DMD) with your Inquirer.*
7. Be prepared for the parish to make a financial commitment to your Inquirer's potential future. The process includes a full psychological assessment and an Oxford Background Check: these cost approximately \$1,000 collectively. After the discernment process, were your Inquirer to be made a postulant, further expenses related to formation may arise. The Vestry/Bishop's Committee should be prepared to commit financially (at least in part) to the Inquirer's path toward ordained service in the church.

** = ideally, you would attend the DMD in the year in which your inquirer will engage the process. DMDs are held in the first quarter of any year, followed by a Parish Discernment Team training in the spring, and documents, etc. due in the fall/winter. Diocesan COM meetings for aspirants are held in the spring of the next year. While Diocesan process doesn't change substantially from year to year, we encourage you to not assume something that you heard at a DMD in prior years is still the correct way. Stay up to date by attending the most recent DMD to assure a smooth process for your Inquirer.*

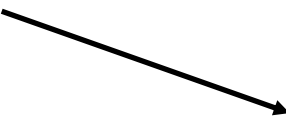
Inquiry Stage moves into...

Attend the Day of Ministry Discernment (DMD) with your parish leader and a trusted friend or family member. Ask questions. Participate. Ask your people to do the same.




Pray some more. Decide if you'd like to formalize your discernment.

Aspirant Stage 1



To engage the formal diocesan discernment, submit **FORM ONE** by the deadline. (found on diocesan website.) This is due about 6 weeks after the DMD. This will make you officially an Aspirant in the Diocese of AZ.

Form One will activate our tracking of your process in the Diocesan office and you will be included in our COM planning/considerations unless we get no further paperwork submitted after Form One, at which time, your file will be made inactive as an indication you did not complete any formal stages of discernment.



Your submission of Form One will result in a letter to the Inquirer and their parish leader to organize a Parish Discernment Team and then the Inquirer, Parish Leader, and the PDT members should attend the Parish Discernment Training scheduled later in the spring. Your parish leader should consult with you about 1-2 people who you would like to include on your PDT. These persons should not be clergy.

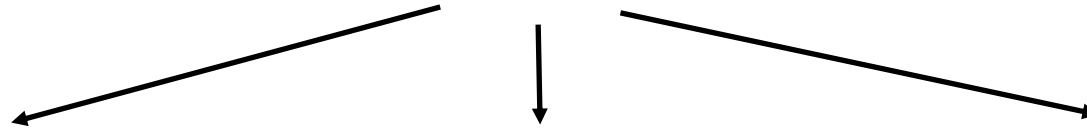
Parish Discernment Team Guidance

- Parish Discernment Teams should be made up of 5-7 members of the parish. The Inquirer/Aspirant should suggest 1-2 people well-known to them to include in the makeup of the team. The Parish Leader would select the additional 3-5 people from the parish who they experience as having the gifts of discernment. People with the gift of deep listening, courage, kindness, and willingness to ask questions are particularly useful to Aspirants. No clergy (active or retired) should be included on a discernment committee. No clergy should not be in attendance for the discernment meetings.
- The PDT should have a Chairperson who assists with convening and scheduling and reporting.
- All Parish Discernment Team members should attend the Parish Discernment Team Training.
- All Parish Discernment Team members should be present at all Parish Discernment Team meetings.
- Parish Discernment meetings should occur no less than 2 weeks apart, preferably 3-4 weeks apart. PDTs should anticipate this discernment process taking 4-6 months.
- Parish Discernment Team members should be prepared to share their own stories/spiritual autobiographies with the group.
- A list of topics to discuss/cover as the PDT will be shared at the PDT Training: the Aspirant's faith life, experiences, work history, experience with doctrines of the church, self-care, growing edges, strengths, hopes, leadership capacity and more will be included.
- The training will also include guidance for what if the PDT does not come to a unanimous recommendation, how to engage with aspirants in everyday life, integrity of the process, how to get help with a process, and more.
- The Parish Discernment team will conduct all but its final meeting with the aspirant. The final meeting is reserved for the PDT members without the Aspirant present to determine the content of their report to the rector/parish leader. The chair will collect the information and complete the report (Form Two, Part One) to submit to the rector/parish leader. All PDT members must sign the report upon review and acceptance. The report should come with a recommendation toward next steps for the Aspirant.

Aspirant Stage 2

PDT completes its work and submits Form 2, Part 1 to the parish leader.

The parish leader holds a pastoral response meeting with the Aspirant to report the PDT's response/recommendation. The PDT report and a letter from the parish leader is submitted to the Diocese for the Aspirant's file no matter the outcome stated in the PDT report.



If PDT discerns a call to priest or deacon:

PDT report is submitted to the diocesan file.

Parish leader submits a recommendation letter to diocesan file.

Parish leader gains 2/3 support from the Vestry/BC for financial support* and encouragement (Form Two, Part Two) via signature and submits to diocesan file.

Aspirant submits Form 3 and Form 4 to diocesan file.

Aspirant submits Spiritual Autobiography and Form 5 to diocesan file.

Aspirant submits to an Oxford Background Check.

**approximately \$1,000 in total fees include psychological and Oxford Background Check fees. Should be split between aspirant and parish as both have ability. Some partial scholarships are available.*

If PDT discerns a call to continued Lay Leadership:

PDT report is submitted to the diocesan file.

Parish Leader submits a recommendation letter to the diocesan file.

Parish Leader develops an affirmation of lay ministry liturgy to encourage and uphold the aspirant—COM can assist in resourcing this.

Parish leader works with the aspirant to discern further lay ministries to lead/develop at the parish level, recommends possible diocesan or national lay ministry leadership opportunities as well.

Parish leader facilitates any grieving or support needs if this calling is a disappointment or change in hopes for the aspirant.

If PDT is unable to discern a call:

PDT Chair consults with Parish Leader to articulate any concerns/needs.

Parish Leader and/or PDT Chair consult COM Chair/Secretary for further guidance if needed.

Parish Leader sends summary letter (and PDT report that was generated) to diocesan file indicating decided option of these:

- Continue the discernment process, delving into further depths of questions still outstanding until a call is determined.
- PDT recommends further work with a Spiritual Director or therapist for a time frame, with a commitment to reconvene the PDT at set intervals in the future to come to a determination.
- Halt the discernment process indefinitely and give the aspirant an opportunity to resume it when they feel called after further work/reflection/growth/experiences. If more than 18 mo. later, a new PDT could be convened.

Aspirant Stage 3

Upon receipt of Forms 3, 4, 5 by the set deadlines (available on COM page of Diocesan Website):

Aspirant will receive contact from the COM in regard to submitting:

- Official transcripts from college education
- Proof of completion of Safeguarding God's People
- Medical examination form
- Proof of baptism
- Proof of confirmation

Aspirant will be asked to make time to schedule a session with:

- The Regional Discernment Team—an additional body of regional diocesan wisdom figures who will hear your story and make a recommendation about your further discernment. This may be via Zoom or in person.
- The Diocesan Psychologist—a full psychological assessment will be conducted using inventories and interview time to assure that each aspirant is in a psychologically well enough space to engage the demands of ordained parish leadership.

****Finally, Aspirant will be assigned a COMpanion at this time: a member of COM who will be a resource guide in terms of the Diocesan Discernment Process. Not a confidante or friend, this COMpanion is one who can help with questions or problems with process to assure clarity for the Aspirant.****

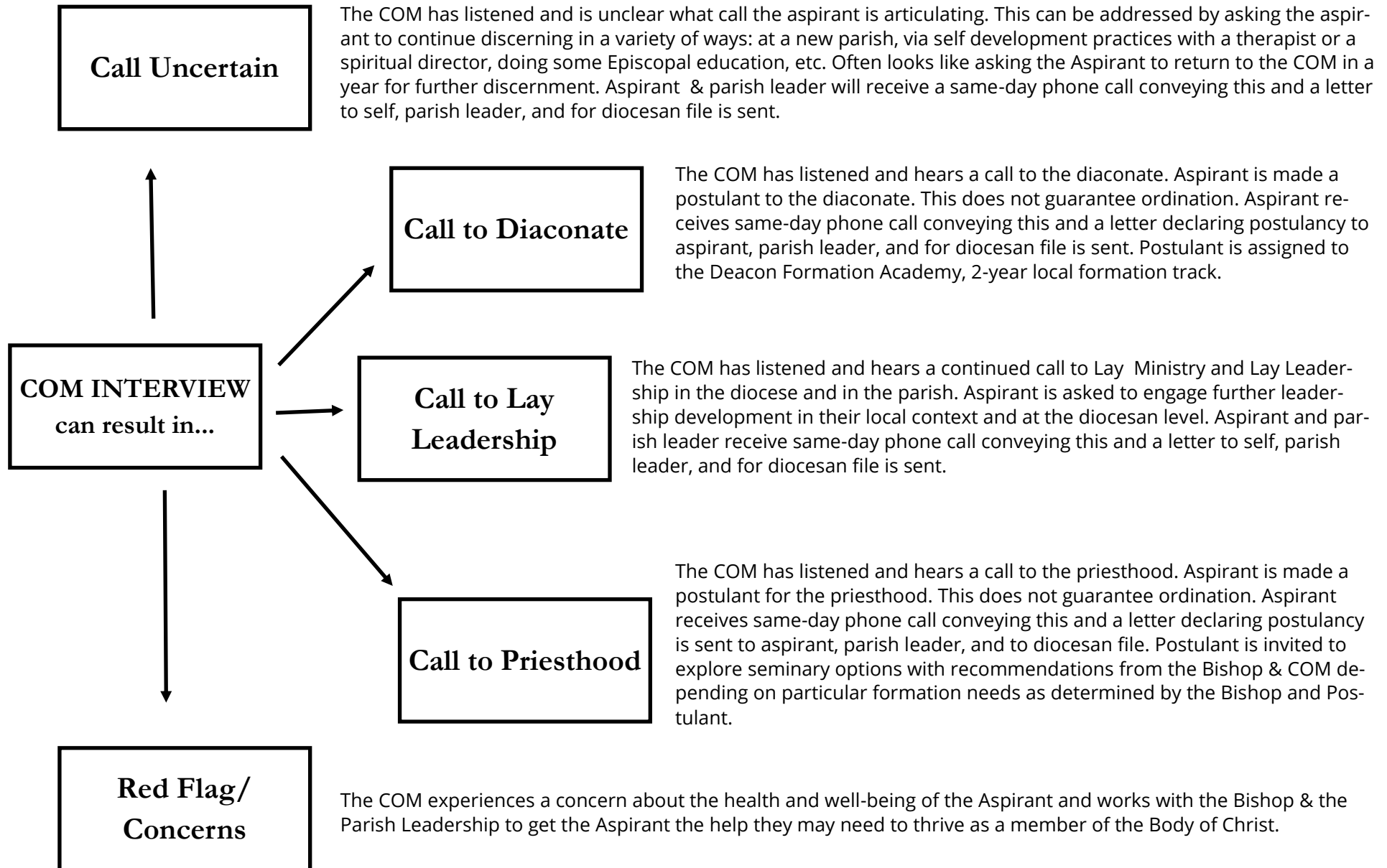
Bishop Interview

Upon receipt of the psychological reports from the Diocesan Psychologist and the report from the Regional Discernment Teams, the file for an aspirant will be complete and the Diocesan Office will reach out to schedule a 1-on-1 interview between the Aspirant and the Bishop.

COM Interview Scheduled

At about the same time, an Aspirant will be contacted by the Secretary of the Commission on Ministry to schedule an interview with the Commission on Ministry which will determine whether an aspirant will become a postulant for one of the Holy Orders or will be encouraged to continue in Lay Leadership.

Possible Outcomes for Aspirants



Postulancy & Candidacy

****All postulants and candidates must write 4 quarterly Ember Day letters to the Bishop. They may be CC'ed to your COMpanion, parish leader, or others, or may simply be sent to the Bishop alone. It is up to postulants/candidates to send these in a timely fashion. Reminders will not be sent.****

Diaconate Postulancy /Candidacy/Ordination Path

1. Begin the Deacon Formation Academy in June after gaining postulancy in spring.
2. Complete Year One & undertake 6-month local internship at different parish.
3. Post-Internship, apply for candidacy (Form 6), and receive continued support from your Vestry/Bishop's Committee (Form 7).
4. Make sure all needed documents are included in your file.
5. Go before the Standing Committee for interview to gain candidacy.
6. Upon gaining candidacy, apply for diaconal ordination (Form 8), and receive continued support from your Vestry/Bishop's Committee (Form 9).
7. Prepare for ordination with the DFA cohort.
8. Ordination, God willing and the people consenting, will occur the first week of June in most years.
9. Request a mentor deacon with whom to meet at least quarterly for the first year.

Priesthood Postulancy/Candidacy/Ordination Path

1. Begin Formation in fall following spring COM interviews (or whenever has been arranged and approved by the Bishop).
2. Complete Year One of Formation & requirements.
3. Complete Year Two of Formation & requirements, assure a Middler Evaluation is send to your diocesan file by January of Year Two.
4. COM will schedule a Candidacy Interview with you in the spring of your Middler Year. You will be asked to write answers to further questions, to submit your transcript to date, and to attend the interview either via Zoom or in person as you're able.
5. Apply for candidacy (Form 6), and seek continued support from your Vestry/Bishop's Committee (Form 7).
6. Make sure all needed documents are included in your file.
7. Go before the Standing Committee to interview to gain candidacy.
8. Upon gaining candidacy, apply for diaconal ordination (Form 8) and continued support from your Vestry/Bishop's Committee (Form 9).
9. Be ordained a deacon.
10. Complete your senior year of formation.
11. In spring of senior year, submit application for priestly ordination (Form 10) and continued support from Vestry/Bishop's Committee (Form 11).
12. Upon approvals, be ordained a priest in coordination with Bishop's schedule and that of your local parish.
13. Request a mentor priest with whom to meet at least quarterly for the first year.