Outline for Those Seeking Ordination to the
Vocational Diaconate, Transitional Diaconate, and Priesthood
In the Episcopal Diocese of the Susquehanna

January 2026

Note: This document is in accordance with the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church 2024 and includes local variances particular to The Episcopal Diocese of the Susquehanna.

Exploring a Call

1. A call to explore the idea of ordained ministry is perceived by a Parish Member.
2. The Parish Member initiates a conversation with their Rector (or Bishop's Designee).
3. If the Rector (or Bishop's Designee) affirms the call of the parish member, they write to the Bishop expressing support for the parish member to begin the discernment process for ordained ministry.
4. The Bishop responds to the Rector's (or Bishop's Designee) letter and invites the Explorer for a meeting, copying the Rector on the email. The Explorer meets with the Bishop to further explore discernment options and

    a. Upon the Bishop's invitation, the Explorer meets with the Commission On Ministry (COM) for an introductory meeting or

    b. The Bishop recommends that the Explorer continue in lay ministry, including a possible course of study for licensure as a lay minister according to the roles outlined in Canon III.4.

    If the recommendation is for the Explorer to meet with the COM, they submit an essay as requested by COM, to be received at least two workdays prior to the meeting.

    During that meeting the COM assesses the Explorer's readiness to engage in a formal discernment process. If that is recommended, then the COM identifies a COM Companion for the Explorer and makes a recommendation to the Bishop to invite the Explorer to establish a Discernment Committee. The Bishop invites the Explorer and Rector (or Bishop's Designee) to form a Discernment Committee. The COM

Companion, and COM Vice President if needed, make themselves available to assist in the training of the committee, to provide information concerning the requirements for ordination, and to consult with the committee as needed throughout their work.

5. Next steps, which may occur simultaneously with the Discernment Committee process, may include other discernment activities recommended by the Bishop.

6. At this time, it is recommended that the Explorer will enter Spiritual Direction, if not already so engaged.

7. At the completion of their work, the Discernment Committee provides its report to the Explorer and Rector (or Bishop's Designee). If, after reflection, the Rector (or Bishop's Designee) and the Explorer decides to move forward, the committee provides its report to the Bishop by emailing the Bishop's Executive Assistant, the Vestry and Rector (or Bishop's Designee). At the same time, the Explorer submits the formal *Application for Nomination* which includes a statement identifying themselves as a confirmed adult communicant in good standing, notice of any other applications for ordination in other dioceses, a description of the discernment processes completed to date, to the Vestry.

   The Vestry sends the *Application for Nomination* to the Bishop by emailing the Bishop's Executive Assistant, accompanied by the initial parish endorsement, entitled the *Vestry and Rector Letter of Support Form*, which pledges the congregation or other community of faith to contribute financially and involve itself in the Nominee's preparation for ordination. If it be a congregation, the form shall be signed by two thirds of the Vestry, or comparable body, and by the Rector (or Bishop's Designee). At the same time, the Explorer sends the Bishop official transcripts from all attended post-secondary educational institutions.

   (Note: The Parish Member becomes a "Nominee" only at this point. Using this term earlier may be prematurely misunderstood as "being in the process." Nomination by the Vestry and Rector is also the event that triggers the 18-month minimum timeframe to ordination under the national canons.)

Nomination

8. On receipt of the *Application for Nomination*, *Discernment Committee Report*, *Vestry and Rector Letter of Support Form*, and secondary school transcripts, the Bishop contacts the Nominee and

   a. invites the Nominee to apply for Postulancy, or

   b. may assign further work for the Nominee to complete

9. The Nominee sends the completed *Application for Postulancy* to the Bishop by emailing the Bishop's Executive Assistant and continues discernment and formation activities as appropriate.

10. A psychological evaluation and medical exam are conducted at the initiation of the Nominee as part of the postulancy application process. These must be updated every 36 months throughout the process. Information about forms and places to contact for these exams can be obtained from the Bishop's Executive Assistant, at nfree@diosusquehanna.org or 717-236-5959 ext. 1101. Costs are normally shared by Nominee and parish.

11. Background Checks and Safe Church Training:

    a. The Nominee contacts the Bishop's Executive Assistant to ask that a formal Oxford Background Check be initiated. The diocesan office absorbs the cost of the background check.

    b. The candidate must complete the two PA background checks and the FBI fingerprinting background check. These must be updated every 36 months throughout the process. Find more information here:

    c. https://diosusquehanna.org/safe-church/

    d. The Nominee completes their Safe Church/Safe Communities training. This must be updated every 36 months throughout the process. Find more information here: https://diosusquehanna.org/safe-church/

12. The Bishop's Executive Assistant confirms with the COM Vice Presidents and the Bishop that all materials have been received.

13. At the Bishop's request, the COM Scheduler contacts the Nominee to arrange the interview. The Nominee will provide an updated essay, a week before their scheduled interview with the COM. The Nominee meets with COM to reflect on their experiences. The COM shares with the Bishop its evaluation of the Nominee's qualifications to pursue a program of preparation for ordination.

14. The Bishop decides if the Nominee is to continue forward with the ordination process.

    a. If not, the Bishop meets with Nominee to discern next steps for lay ministry.

    b. If it is determined that the Nominee is to move towards ordination, the Bishop makes them a Postulant.

        1. The Bishop writes to the Postulant, Rector (or Bishop's Designee), sponsoring parish, COM, Standing Committee, Seminary Dean and Postulant testifying to postulancy.

2. The Bishop's Executive Assistant records the Postulant's name and date of admission in the Register.

Postulancy

15. The Postulant meets with the Bishop to choose a formation program. The Bishop approves the program and then directs the Postulant to begin. Part of this discussion will be an explanation of the Individual Formation Plan (IFP) Report Form, which the Postulant will be expected to keep up to date and share with the Bishop and COM periodically. Forms are on the Feast of the Epiphany (January 6) and June 15 throughout the process.

    A link to the IFP Report Form for the Priesthood Track can be found here:

    https://theepiscopaldioceseofcentralpa.formstack.com/forms/ifp_report_priesthood

    A link to the IFP Report Form for the Diaconate Track can be found here:

    https://theepiscopaldioceseofcentralpa.formstack.com/forms/ifp_report_diaconate

    At this time, the Postulant will enter Spiritual Direction, if not already so engaged.

16. The Postulant begins to write Ember Day Letters directly to the Bishop (the weeks of Ash Wednesday, Pentecost, Holy Cross Day celebrated September 16, and St. Lucy's Day celebrated December 13) to provide an update on formation and discernment. These are submitted by email as Word document attachments and shall contain an update on the Postulant's personal life and ministry, spiritual life, academic progress, employment, family life, and physical, emotional, and financial health.

    After at least one year of postulancy, the Bishop discerns the readiness of the Postulant to apply for Candidacy. This assessment takes into account material submitted in Ember Day letters, academic progress, conversation with the Postulant and possibly their Rector (or Bishop's Designee). The Bishop may ask for a meeting with the Postulant. The Postulant may, at any time, ask for a meeting with the Bishop.

17. The Bishop gives the Postulant direction to:

    a. Continue towards candidacy,

    b. Redirect toward lay ministry, or

    c. Continue studies and formation as a postulant, thereby extending the postulancy period.

    The Bishop may give additional instructions for further individual formation.

18. If the Bishop's direction to the Postulant is to continue towards candidacy, then the Postulant files their *Candidacy Application with the Bishop's Executive Assistant* which shall include:

    - *Candidacy Application* paperwork, including the-date of their admission to postulancy.
    - *Rector and Vestry Endorsement for Candidacy Form*
    - Transcripts from education/formation program.
    - Medical exam, if more than 36 months have elapsed.
    - Psychological exam update, if more than 36 months have elapsed.
    - Clinical Pastoral Education evaluation and credentials, which is normally scheduled at the end of Postulancy.
    - Seminary evaluation, or comparable program evaluation.
    - *Individual Formation Plan* update

    It is expected that each person in the ordination process will complete at least:

    a. One academic year of an internship, as defined by the institution the Postulant is attending, in a parish or ministerial setting, as in a typical seminary field education placement, approved by the Bishop and COM with evaluations submitted at the conclusion thereof.

    b. One unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) with evaluations submitted at the conclusion thereof.

    The Postulant authorizes the supervising institution to send documentation of these items to the Bishop through the Bishop's Executive Assistant.

19. The COM Scheduler invites the Postulant to attend the midwinter COM retreat again.

20. Once the candidacy paperwork has been completed, at the Bishop's request, the COM Scheduler, invites the Postulant to a COM Candidacy interview. The *Individual Formation Plan Report* is shared with COM. After the interview, COM issues a statement to the Bishop attesting to the continuing formation of the Postulant.

21. The Bishop notifies the Standing Committee president of the COM's support and sends the Postulant on to the Standing Committee for a Candidacy Interview.

    The Standing Committee reviews documentation, which may include the IFP Report and other material relating to the application of the Postulant and issues a report on their findings to the Bishop.

22. At the Bishop's discretion, the Postulant is made a Candidate for Ordination.

    a. The Bishop informs in writing the new Candidate, Rector (or Bishop's Designee), COM, Dean of Seminary or SSFM, and Standing Committee of the move to Candidacy.

    b. The Bishop's Executive Assistant records the name and date of admission to Candidacy in the register.

Candidacy

23. The Candidate continues formation and education through completion of seminary or other formation program(s).

    Candidates for the Vocational Diaconate are contacted by the Bishop and arrange to take the Diocesan Canonical Examination. Candidates for the Priesthood are nominated by the Bishop to take the General Ordination Examination (GOE). The GOE nominations are made in the fall. The exam is offered annually during the first week in January.

    a. The Bishop reviews results of the Canonicals or GOEs and reports on their outcome to the COM.

    b. If remediation in any field of study is recommended by the Bishop, the Bishop notifies the Examining Chaplains and a plan for increased competency and the metrics for desirable outcomes is designed.

    c. The Examining Chaplains communicate to the Bishop certifying successful completion of remediation to the Bishop and the COM.

24. The following trainings are also certified as required by The Episcopal Church Canons and have been initiated and completed by the Candidate:

    a. The Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, "particularly Title IV thereof."

    b. The Church's teaching on racism. Completing the Stevenson School for Ministry's course *Becoming Beloved Community 1* fulfills this requirement.

    The Diocese also requires training on the Church's teaching on the Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery. Watching the RDD video, available from the Dean of the Stevenson School for Ministry, fulfills this requirement.

Ordination

25. At the invitation of the Bishop, final interviews and certifications prior to ordination are conducted:

a. The required certifications are completed and obtained by the Candidate and received in the Bishop's office:

    1. Application for Ordination to the Diaconate or Application for Ordination as a Transitional Deacon

    2. Rector and Vestry Endorsement for Ordination to the Diaconate Form, or Rector and Vestry Endorsement for Ordination as Transitional Deacon Form.

    3. Individual Formation Plan Update

b. If appropriate, a meeting with Archdeacon for Deacons regarding placement is held. This meeting is initiated by the Archdeacon.

c. The COM Diaconal Ordination Certification: At the Bishop's request, the COM Scheduler invites the Candidate to their Diaconal Ordination Interview. Prior to the meeting, the *Individual Formation Plan* update is shared with COM. After the meeting, the COM sends its Certification to the Bishop.

d. The Bishop then informs the Standing Committee that the Candidate is ready for their Diaconal Ordination Interview.

e. The Standing Committee Diaconal Ordination Certificate: The Standing Committee President invites the Candidate to their Diaconal Ordination Interview. Afterwards, the Standing Committee sends its Certification to the Bishop and the Bishop's Executive Assistant.

f. A certificate of studies completion from a Seminary, SSFM, or comparable program as approved by the Bishop is sent to the Bishop by the Candidate as part of the application for ordination.

g. The Candidate meets the canonical requirements:

    - At least 18 months from acceptance as Nominee to ordination.

    - At least 24 years of age.

    - Continuing endorsements by sponsoring clergy and two-thirds of the sponsoring vestry, sent to the Bishop by the Candidate as part of the application for ordination.

    - A criminal background check, psychological examination and medical examination completed within the last 36 months. The Candidate verifies with the Bishop's Executive Assistant that paperwork is within the required time frame.

26. The Bishop contacts the Candidate to schedule ordination to the diaconate. The Bishop informs the Candidate, Rector (or Bishop's Designee) and Vestry, COM, Dean of Seminary, SSFM or comparable program, and Standing Committee.

27. At the appointed date and time, the Bishop ordains the Candidate to the Diaconate. *(Note it is the responsibility of the Candidate to send out their invitations. The Bishop's Executive Assistant has a template that must be used. The Candidate will work with the Diocesan Liturgist to develop the Ordination Bulletin, which is printed by the Bishop's Office.)*

From Transitional Deacon to Priest

28. The (transitional) Deacon serves in a ministerial placement approved by the Bishop.

29. After a period of six (6) months, at least 18 months from the time of Nomination, and after consultation with the Bishop, as initiated by the Bishop, the (transitional) Deacon applies for ordination to the Priesthood. The Deacon must be at least 24 years of age. Medical and psychological exams must have taken place and been updated within 36 months prior to ordination as a priest. A criminal background check must be completed within the last 36 months.

    The application shall be filed by the Deacon and include:

    a. An application from the (transitional) Deacon requesting ordination including dates of admission to Postulancy, Candidacy, and ordination as a Deacon.

    b. *Rector and Vestry Endorsement for Ordination to the Priesthood Form* from the Deacon's original sponsoring congregation signed by at least two-thirds of the Vestry and the Rector (or Bishop's Designee).

    c. Evidence of admission to Postulancy and Candidacy.

    d. A certificate from the seminary, SSFM, or other formation program showing the Deacon's academic fulfillment of coursework in the subjects required by the national canons including an evaluation that includes personal qualifications and affirmation and recommendation for ordination to the Priesthood.

    e. *The Individual Formation Plan* update.

30. At the Bishop's request, the COM Scheduler contacts the Deacon to schedule an Ordination to the Priesthood Interview. Prior to the meeting, the *Individual Formation Plan* is shared with COM. At the conclusion of the interview the COM attests to the Bishop and Standing Committee the successful completion of the program of formation, proficiency in the required areas of study and a

recommendation for ordination to the Priesthood. The Bishop notifies the Standing Committee of the successful COM interview.

31. The Standing Committee President schedules an interview with the Deacon and reviews the application. Following the interview, with a majority consenting, the Standing Committee certifies in a testimonial addressed to the Bishop and the Bishop's Executive Assistant that the canonical requirements for ordination to the Priesthood have been met, that there is no sufficient objection on medical, psychological, moral or spiritual grounds, and that they recommend ordination.

32. The Bishop, having received the certification from the Standing Committee, informs the Deacon of the outcome and may ordain the (transitional) Deacon to the Priesthood. *(Note it is the responsibility of the Deacon to send out their invitations. The Bishop's Executive Assistant has a template that must be used. The Deacon will work with the Diocesan Liturgist to develop the Ordination Bulletin, which is printed by the **Parish** where the ordination will take place.)*

    At the time of ordination, the (transitional) Deacon shall subscribe publicly, and make, in the presence of the Bishop, the declaration required in Article VIII of the Constitution. (I do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation; and I do solemnly engage to conform to the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of the Episcopal Church.)

    Note: Canon III 8.7e states, "No Deacon shall be ordained to the Priesthood until having been appointed to serve in a Parochial Cure within the jurisdiction of this Church, or as a Missionary under the Ecclesiastical Authority of a Diocese, or as an officer of a Missionary Society recognized by the General Convention, or as a Chaplain of the Armed Services of the United States, or as a Chaplain in a recognized hospital or other welfare institution, or as a Chaplain or instructor in a school, college, or other seminary, or with other opportunity for the exercise of the office of Priest within the Church judged appropriate by the Bishop.