

PROCESS FOR DISCERNING BAPTISMAL MINISTRY

*“You are God’s viceroy, God’s representative.
You are God’s stand-in, a God Carrier.
You are precious; God depends on you.
God believes in you and has no one but you
To do the things that only you can do for God.
Become what you are.”*

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Presented by

The Committee for Baptismal Ministry Development
Commission on Ministry for the Diocese of Oregon
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The Commission on Ministry is a committee of twenty-seven members appointed by the Bishop and confirmed by Diocesan Convention. The Commission is composed of two committees: The Committee for Ordained Ministry Development (COM-O), and The Committee for Baptismal Ministry Development (COM-B). The COM-B only will revise this document.

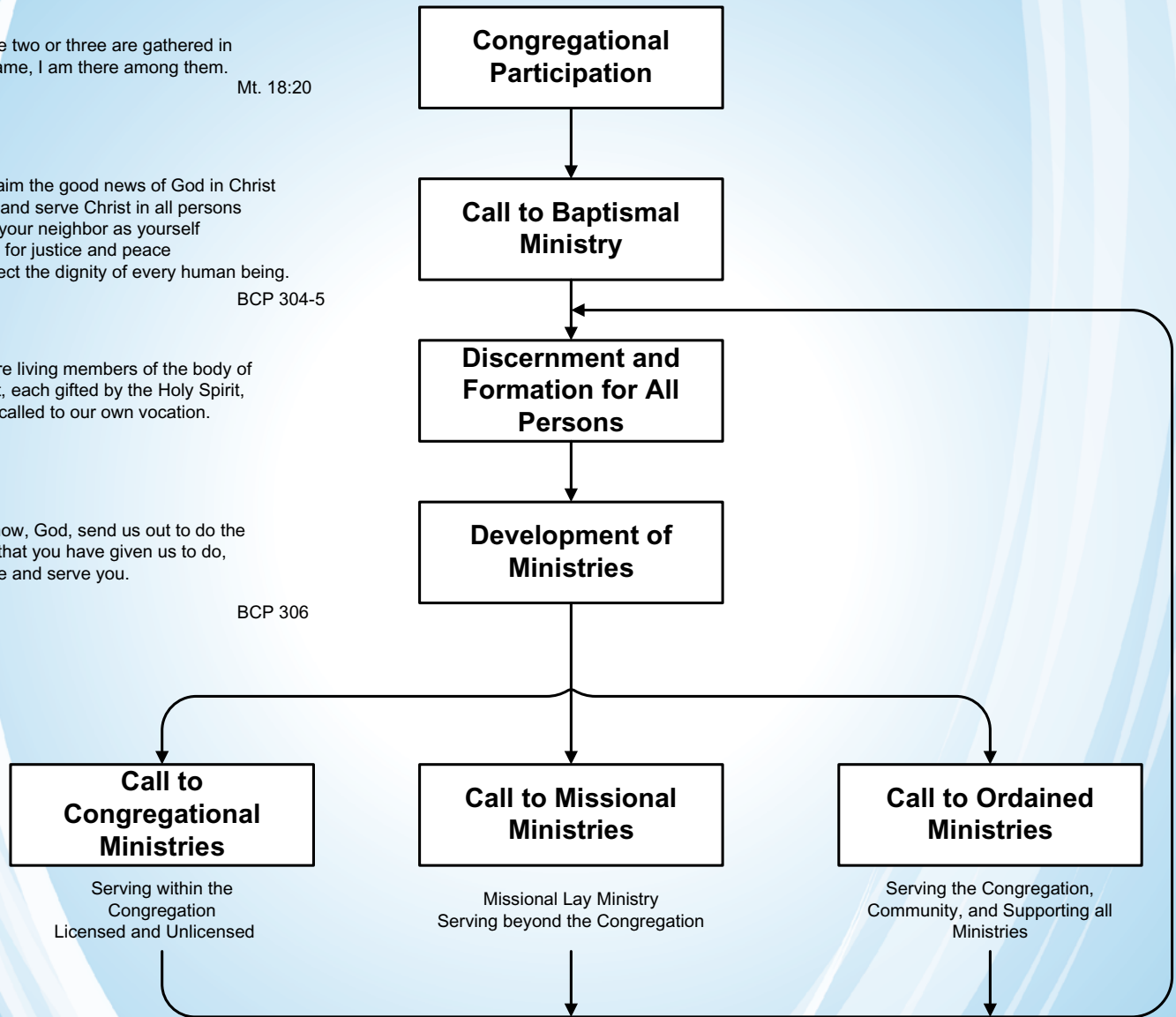
PROCESS FOR DISCERNING BAPTISMAL MINISTRY

Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.
Mt. 18:20

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ
Seek and serve Christ in all persons
Love your neighbor as yourself
Strive for justice and peace
Respect the dignity of every human being.
BCP 304-5

We are living members of the body of Christ, each gifted by the Holy Spirit, each called to our own vocation.

And now, God, send us out to do the work that you have given us to do, to love and serve you.
BCP 306



Christian service is dynamic. Discernment for ministry is an on-going, life-long process

Introduction

“Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ’s Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God” BCP 858.

Baptism creates unity in the Body of Christ, a unity of all people in their calling to be the people of God. Within this community, each member is gifted by the Holy Spirit so that the ongoing ministry of Christ is shared by all its members. In 1979 the Episcopal Church produced a prayer book that put baptismal identity and ministry at the forefront of the church’s life. This shift emphasizes a community of all the baptized, sharing the responsibility for mission and ministry in God’s service. All baptized persons are called to sustain their ministries through commitment to life-long Christian formation.

The Process of Discerning Baptismal Ministry is designed as a flow chart to indicate the dynamic process baptized Christians experience as they discern and identify their call, enter into formation, and develop their ministry within the community of faith, the Church. This is an ongoing, life-long process during which each person grows in and through their ministry or ministries, often moving into new challenges and opportunities.

The Early Church recognized itself as the community of saints on earth with each of its members empowered by the Spirit of God through baptism. It was a holy gathering of Christians dedicated to Christ. Like the Early Church, each Christian today is called to be Christ in the place in which she or he lives.

Thus, discernment of gifts and ministry for all believers becomes central and vital to the church’s potential. Ministry flows out of relationship with God and takes on varied and exciting forms: congregational, missional, and ordained. Regardless of titles, our work is to be Christ in and for the world: “God calls us to use our time and talents to do God’s work in the world every minute of every day, in every situation and relationship in which we find ourselves.”*

The Commission on Ministry for All the Baptized (COM-B) invites you to reflect on your service and ministry with this flow chart, embracing the gifts of the Holy Spirit, proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ, seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself, striving for justice and peace, and respecting the dignity of every human being.

*“Christ has no body now on earth but ours;
No hands but ours; no feet but ours.
Ours are the eyes to see the needs of the world.
Ours are the hands with which to bless everyone now.
Ours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good.”*
St. Theresa of Avila

* The Rev. George Regas, Rector Emeritus, All Saints Episcopal Church, Pasadena, California

Congregational Participation

We seek a congregation to join for many reasons. Perhaps we have been long led by curiosity about the existence and nature of God. Others wish to understand and apply the model for life exemplified by Jesus Christ. Some come with questions and are in need of answers, support, or fellowship. Some join the church to honor their baptism as an infant or child, and still others wish to find expression of their faith in a new community.

Regardless of our reason for joining, new church members begin the journey to ministry with presence and participation in the life of the church, particularly in prayer, worship, and the Eucharist. Congregational participation is the context out of which a call to ministry proceeds, for it is there, above all, that we meet the living Christ who draws us into his ministry.

“Where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them.” Mt. 18:20

Call to Baptismal Ministry

Following a period of congregational participation, we may sense a call to a deeper, more committed relationship with God. In response to God’s grace experienced within the community, we enter more fully into our baptismal covenant. This covenant relationship with God in Christ is the wellspring from which all ministries arise and from which the enabling grace to fulfill them is received.

The Book of Common Prayer (pp. 304-5) clearly outlines our baptismal vows, and lays out our Christian responsibilities for the life of the church and for the welfare of our local and global communities. We pledge ourselves with the aid of God’s grace to:

Continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers. Persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord. Proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ. Seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself. Strive for justice and peace and respect the dignity of every human being.

Through our acceptance and ongoing renewal of these promises and our growing readiness to honor this covenant, we manifest God’s promises to us and are marked as Christ’s own forever. This dynamic interplay between our growing spiritual maturation and God’s loving response creates and recreates in each of us the Reign of God, and through covenant with God, we are then ready and able to proclaim and share this Reign with others. Clearly supporting this concept, the Episcopal Church’s Title III Canon notes that “all baptized persons are called to minister in Christ’s name, to identify their gifts with the help of the Church, and to serve Christ’s mission at all times and in all places.” Further, God calls on the Church, being an instrument of the Holy Spirit, to awaken a call in persons within whom she discerns special gifts and to invite them into specific ministries.

Discernment and Formation for All Persons

Discernment

Discernment means to “distinguish, determine or sort out.” Within the context of Christian spirituality, discernment is a life-long practice of holy listening within community at a deep and profoundly intimate level. Through this listening process, we distinguish God’s voice from earthly ones, and sort out God’s intention for our individual lives. In addition, discernment draws us into deeper relationship with God through the mission and character of Jesus Christ, and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Within the Trinity, both privately and with our church community, we are invited to pray, study scripture, meditate, and use other spiritual disciplines to align our “listening hearts” with God’s own so that we may outwardly manifest our inward transformation.

The Discernment Cycle

Discernment begins with a call, but we might not recognize it as such. We may feel a pull, a yearning or longing for purpose. We may feel a vague or clear sense of dissatisfaction with our lives, or we may need clarity for a life decision or guidance toward ministry. We may simply wish to know God for the first time, find a church and a spiritual family, or enter more fully into our faith than we have before. We may be first-time discerners, or we may have experience with the recurring and cyclical nature of discernment. In any given discernment event, we may not know the origin of our discomfort. Therefore, we enter into our discernment process receptive to what God reveals to us, distinguishing God’s voice from our own, and hearing God in the voices of those within our worshipping community who engage with us in this mystical process. In some cases the Church may awaken and invite a call to ministry.

Optimally, a discerning person seeks out their clergy, spiritual director or trusted soul friend to discuss their sense of call. We seek such individuals because they are trained in recognizing spiritual movement in others and are able to walk helpfully with us without hindering our process. Regular meetings are held to ground the discerners in prayer and scripture, to ascertain the movement of God in the individual’s life, and to offer reflective activities to support the discernment process. Over time, clarity will evolve, although one cannot rush the process, and unexpected twists and turns are common. Discernment can ebb and flow, confuse and clarify, and eventually lead to unanticipated insights. Trusted spiritual guides shepherd an individual through discernment experiences and support the seeker in living out God’s response.

Trusted spiritual guides are needed in every congregation. In addition, sometimes an individual may seek out or request the formation of a Congregational Discernment Committee. A Committee may already exist in the discerning person’s congregation as a standing entity, or it may be created to facilitate individual discernment. In either case, such a Committee functions with the oversight of the priest-in-charge and follows the guidelines of operation set forth by the diocese. The Committee supports an individual in ministry discernment.

Formation

Christian spiritual formation is a life-long process that continues throughout our journey of faith. During formation, the Holy Spirit, with our responsive cooperation, works within us to fashion us into the people God calls us to be. As we surrender ourselves more fully to God, we experience the transformation of our inner being, the healing of our relationships, and the revelation of the ministries to which we are called.

To elaborate, formation brings about our unique Christian learning and growth. This process brings us into revelation and awareness of God's true nature, and an understanding of ourselves as made in God's image. This reality is celebrated in our baptism. As we are healed and made whole by the grace of God, we learn to forgive and to love, following the example of Jesus Christ, loving God and all living beings. We come to recognize Christ in others and in ourselves and bring Christ's reconciling love to our families, friends, strangers, and even our enemies. Over time, our formation manifests itself in a deepening desire to serve others as Christ did.

To this end, God leads us through formation to an understanding of our own spiritual giftedness for ministry. We then develop these skills through religious or vocational training so that we may set out into the world to do the work God calls us to do. As we endeavor in ministry to realize God's Reign on earth, Christ lives within us, strengthening our resolve. We are his body, our ministry is his ministry, and the difference we can make in the world is the difference Christ is making through us.

Undeniably, the evolution through baptism into ministry is a holy and sometimes arduous process. Therefore, it is important that our formation be centered in regular participation in the Eucharist as well as supported by other forms of private and communal worship. In addition, traditional discernment practices and disciplines may help us understand God's presence and activity in our lives and help bring about the transformation of our lives that God seeks to realize in us. These practices include, but are not limited to, prayer, meditation, scripture study, *lectio divina*, retreat, fasting, as well as spiritual direction. As our formation leads to discernment, we also are called to share our spiritual maturation process within a community of believers, preferably those with whom we worship. In this way, the synergistic process of our formation and discernment is witnessed, encouraged, and affirmed by others as we are transformed more fully into the people God calls us to be.

Ultimately, our Christian spiritual formation enables us to live more fully into a life dedicated to fulfilling our baptismal promises:

To continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers

To persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord

To proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ

To seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves

To strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being

These promises encompass the substance of Christian formation, and their careful study is thus fundamental to our formation as followers of God in Christ. As we are formed more and more fully as Christ's disciples, we are called to embody this discipleship by living into these promises.

Call to Congregational Ministries

Congregational ministries are dedicated to building up, sustaining, and invigorating the worshipping community. Many baptized persons are called to ministries for which they are naturally gifted. Beyond this, a call to ministry may necessitate licensure within the diocese or secular study and training. These ministries may include but are not limited to the following:

Licensed Ministries

- Pastoral Leadership
- Worship Leadership
- Preaching
- Eucharistic Ministry
- Eucharistic Visitors
- Catechists

Unlicensed Ministries

- 1) Service
 - Buildings
 - Grounds
 - Financial Administration
 - Counters
 - Office Administration
 - Vestry, Senior or Junior Warden
- 2) Community
 - Pastoral Care
 - Stephen Ministry
 - Parish Nurse
 - Spiritual Direction
 - Discernment Committee
 - Ministries Coordinator
 - Community Outreach
 - Social Justice
 - Diocesan/Convention Representation
 - Hospitality and Fellowship
 - Intercessory and Healing Prayer
- 3) Education
 - Child Care
 - Religious Education and Formation (for adults and youth)
- 4) Worship
 - Altar Guild
 - Worship Planning and Participation
 - Music and Choir
 - Musical Leadership
 - Choir
 - Vocalists/Instrumentalists
 - Acolytes
 - Lectors
 - Ushers and Greeters

Call to Missional Ministries

The Book of Common Prayer tells us that the ministry of the baptized is to “represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world” (p. 855). The natural response to the Sacrament of Baptism and the outcome of our spiritual formation process is to minister to others.

Through ministry, Christian disciples live out their baptismal covenant by discovering and then utilizing their spiritual gifts. The attitude and spirit we bring to these ministries is that of the mind and heart of Christ, allowing him to be present in all aspects of our lives. Such service may be in the form of paid or volunteer vocations within the local community, across the country or around the world. These ministries include all manner of service offered in God’s love as members of the Body of Christ including but not limited to the following:

Agriculture – those who farm and tend the land or livestock and grow or produce food for all.

Armed forces and Public Protection – those who ensure and defend our personal freedoms and deter crime

Arts – those who provide beauty and creative expression through drama, art, or music

Churches – those who are priests, deacons, ministry leaders, spiritual directors, monastics, and those who pray for the concerns of others

Communication – those who develop, promote, and maintain communication

Construction – those who plan, design, and build communities and infrastructure.

Creation Care – those who work for the careful protection of our planet and its creatures, including family pets, and those who promote responsible stewardship of its resources

Education – those who teach or counsel and those who learn in our schools, universities, libraries, churches, and corporations

Government – those in political or civic office and those who assist and support them

Healthcare – those who heal and tend all with mental and physical illnesses in our clinics, hospitals, nursing homes, and hospice programs; those who perform medical and psychological research; those who manage insurance

Hospitality – those involved in welcoming others, and providing safe and nurturing environments for others in restaurants, hotels, meeting and conference centers, churches and corporations

Intercultural Outreach – those who offer humanitarian care throughout the world

Industry – those who participate in commerce, trade, manufacturing, distribution, and provision of business services

Landscaping – those who work to beautify our yards, parks, and green spaces

Legal Justice – those who uphold and carry out the laws of our country, those who mete out justice, and those who work in prisons and correctional facilities

Relationship Nurturance – those who befriend, parent, grandparent, tend marriages, and partnerships, and hold families and communities together, and promote intercultural and interfaith understanding

Social Services – those who care for the poor, the sick, the mentally ill, the elderly, and all marginalized members of our society

Call to Ordained Ministries

In baptism all of us become servants of God and are to be ministers of God's love and reconciliation in the world. Some ministers are set apart through the sacrament of ordination for servant ministry as bishops, priests, and deacons. In identifying these ordained ministries, the Church refers to the Old Testament where God raised up prophets, kings, and priests for the Hebrew people. As the early Church began to coalesce into worshipping communities, some were called out to minister to the poor, the sick, the hungry, and others in needs; these persons were called deacons. Within each such community, there also arose one who was called to serve as chief pastor or overseer (*episkopos*): the bishop. As more and more people converted to Christianity, the number of congregations multiplied and presiders (priests) were called forth from within their worshipping communities to assist the bishop by presiding over the liturgies in his absence.

These three ministries comprise the ordained portion of baptismal ministry in the Episcopal Church today. Deacons serve both in the church and in the world, assisting at the Eucharist and representing the church to the world through ministries to the poor, the sick, and the troubled. (See *The Examination for Deacon*, BCP 543-44.) The priest is called out to equip the saints for the work of the ministry and preside over the celebration of all the sacraments except for two which are reserved for the bishop: confirmation and the rites of ordination. (See *The Examination for Priest*, BCP 531-32.) A priest who has served a local congregation or congregations may be identified to lead the diocese as a bishop. The bishop serves as chief pastor of the diocese and administers all the sacraments, especially confirmation and ordination. (See *The Examination for Bishop*, BCP 517-19.)

While serving in a congregation as a confirmed communicant for at least two years, a seeker may sense the Holy Spirit's call to serve as a deacon or priest. The stages in the discernment process for those who feel so called is prescribed by the Diocese and published in *The Ordination Manual* of the Diocese of Oregon. Copies of this manual may be obtained from the Bishop's Secretary or the Vocations Director, or may be downloaded from the Diocesan website (www.diocese-oregon.org).

Conclusion

Being Christ in the world is a high calling and takes myriad forms. In whatever ministry God has called you to, your work is important and vital to the life of your congregation, your family and community, and to the world.

Discernment and formation are a life-long process; thus your ministries may expand and change over time. Our Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori notes that "All ministry is grounded in baptism." She recognizes the great need for all the baptized to be engaged in the work God has called them to do. The very life of the Church depends on this. In *A Wing and a Prayer: A Message of Faith and Hope*, she writes:

We need leaders in the church—and I insist that every baptized person is a Christian leader somewhere—who know how to lay down their lives for others. We need leaders who are engaged in daily ministry in the world, we need ordained leaders, and we need those who blur the boundaries.

We must be clear about our motives to serve. Sacrificial love is the seedbed for an abundant harvest. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus recognized the significance of ministries of mercy to the hungry, the poor, the sick, the prisoner, the stranger: "Inasmuch as you have done it unto the

least of these my brothers, you have done it unto me” (25:35-40). Bishop Katherine gives us a standard by which we can measure our ministry:

We need people who know how to give themselves and their ministries away. There’s an old theological term, *kenosis*, that means emptying. It’s most often used in reference to God becoming human. If we are made in the image of God, it should characterize our being as well. Our ministry needs to be kenotic.

While we empty ourselves of distractions, obsessions, and unmet expectations, we will live prayerfully, seeking to “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). Through putting away selfishness, we strive to become imitators of God, loving others “as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2).

Walking this road as servant and seeker is no easy task. It, too, is a life-long process, depending on the Spirit’s gifts and direction. At baptism, following the vows and immersion, the Bishop or Priest’s prayer over the candidates concludes:

Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. *Amen.*

May God bless you on your journey to seek and serve Christ.