



# **Called to Ministry**

## **Section 3: Holy Orders**

### **Doc 3D: Priesthood**

**Guidelines for Ministry of all the Baptized,  
Lay Licenced Ministries, and Holy Orders**

**for the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe**

#### **Commission on the Ministry of the Baptized**

The Commission on the Ministry of the Baptized serves to guide and empower all baptized people in discerning their ministries.

**European Institute for Christian studies**

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## **Holy Orders: Priesthood**

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# Holy Orders: Priesthood

## Qualities and Roles of Ordained Persons – Priesthood

### **Specific characteristics of the Priesthood**

For those discerning a possible call to the priesthood, the ministry of this order is:

1. To proclaim in preaching and in his/her personal life the Gospel of Jesus Christ
2. To celebrate the Eucharist and administer the Sacraments
3. To bless and declare pardon in the name of God
4. To share with the bishop and other clergy and laity in the councils of the Church
5. To teach the Faith.

The office of the priest is an extension of the bishop's ministry as chief pastor and guardian of the Faith. The priest as pastor brings God's healing and love to others both by demonstrating personal attributes and resources and by identifying and enabling the baptized for their own ministries. The priest also provides individual pastoral care through spiritual counseling and crisis support, but needs to know personal limits and be able to refer those needing in-depth psychological counseling. Pastoral ministry is found not only through individual pastoral care but also through the fellowship of the community of gathered Christians. The priest has a responsibility for coordinating the many expressions of pastoral care within a congregation, paying special attention to the health, wisdom and wholeness of the care that is offered.

The priest is called forth by God and the Church to declare and mediate God's grace and love to God's people. As preacher, the priest declares to the world the mighty acts of God in Jesus Christ. He or she seeks to move the hearts of listeners through strong Biblical exegesis, winsome testimony and oratorical skill. Over time, the congregation should experience a sense of God's presence, power and call upon their lives. The sacramental functions of the priest both welcome the follower of Christ into the household of faith through Baptism and Confirmation, and nurture those same persons through the worship life of the parish – focused in the Eucharist. In order to fulfil this important role, the priest must first learn how to receive and be open to God's grace in his or her own life, and to be directed by God as an instrument of reconciliation in the Church and the world. This depends on a strong relationship with God, and on caring, healthy relationships with others. In the ministration of the sacraments, as in pastoral care, people can be vulnerable and place great trust on the one holding the priestly office. The priest is called to remain firmly connected to God to honor that trust, always remembering that at the heart of priestly ministry is God's initiative to be reconciled to us, and to reconcile us to each other. The priest should be

constant in offering a sacrament of Reconciliation, as well as in pronouncing the absolution of sins in the liturgy.

Priests also prepare people to celebrate and live the sacrament of Marriage, help people discern their call from God, and bring healing in the Anointing of the Sick. The priest teaches through preaching, through various opportunities to act as Christian educator, and in the many other settings in which the relationship of the Scriptures and the traditions of the Church to daily life can be expressed. Priests act as teachers as they prepare people for Baptism and Confirmation, when they lead inquirers' classes, or when helping couples plan for marriage. Priests in charge of congregations are responsible to see to the teaching of the Faith through Church Schools and other regular educational offerings. Of equal importance is the teaching that is done through the priest's life itself, as she or he models what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. It is expected that the priest would model a balanced, well-rounded life in Christ, teaching others about God's will for justice, mercy, compassion, love and forgiveness, as it relates to our social and political lives together. The priest is to remain centered in prayer and to be well informed on the issues of the world, and must remain attentive to doing God's will, in order to resist those temptations to self-righteousness or self-promotion that may come with seeking to bring change in Church or society.

Priestly ordination is explicitly an expression of responsibility for sharing first of all in the governance and community life of the Churches in Europe. The word "Order" points to the fact that priests and deacons swear to obey their Bishop, and others who may have responsibility over them. As priests are ordained, not for a specific congregation but for the whole Church, the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe is deeply sensitive to the fact that when we ordain a person to the Sacred Order of the Priesthood, we are sacramentally enabling that priest to minister anywhere on the world. Therefore, preparation for ordination to the Priesthood is lengthy, difficult and unsure, for no one has a right to be ordained. It is God who calls and the Spirit of God who sets apart through ordination. The church can only discern that call from a person's own testimony, from the witness and support of his or her congregation, from the approval of teachers and mentors, and finally through the decision of the Bishop, who is aided in this by the Council of Advice and the Commission on the Ministry of the Baptized.

## **Formation and Ordination Process**

The Episcopal Church has maintained the threefold order of ordained ministry of Bishops, Priests and Deacons which has characterized Christ's One, Holy and Apostolic Church since its earliest days.

This section contains information on the process towards and the preliminary examinations required for Ordination to the Priesthood.

Several evaluations or checks are required early in the process, after the Applicant has been admitted to Postulancy. These are a psychiatric evaluation, a medical exam, and a background check. They help the Bishop in discernment, to determine if there are any impediments to ordination, or any areas that need to be addressed prior to ordination. More information on each is given below. Because these exams must be completed within 36 months of ordination to the Priesthood, anyone preparing for the Priesthood will end up completing the exams twice: once at the beginning of Postulancy, and again before ordination to the Priesthood.

### **Psychiatric Evaluation**

The psychiatric evaluation consists of two parts, a set-form and a narrative evaluation, in keeping with the prescribed forms of the Canons [see Canon III.8.5(k)]. Both become the property of the Diocese and will not be released to the candidate; the narrative is available only to the Bishop. The Council of Advice sees only a certificate that the exam has been completed.

Examinations are conducted by practitioners chosen by the Bishop for this purpose.

### **Medical Examination**

The Applicant pays for the physical examination, which is available to her/him for review. The Applicant may go to any physician of her/his choosing, as long as the physician completes a particular form, which the Applicant may attain from the Office of the Bishop.

### **Background Check**

The background check is conducted by an outside company contracted for that purpose by the Diocese. The Office of the Bishop will send the Applicant's name and address to the company, which will send the appropriate forms to the Applicant. The background check includes employment history, educational institutions, churches with which one has been affiliated, criminal record, traffic violations and credit history.

### **Ember Day Letters**

Once a person has been admitted as a Candidate (or before that if the Bishop so chooses), the Candidate is required to communicate with the Bishop in person or by letter four times a year in the Ember Weeks. These are called "Ember Day Letters," and they are taken very seriously. In these letters or communications, the Candidate should reflect on his/her academic, vocational, human, spiritual, and practical development. Ember Day letters are required of all Candidates and Deacons in the Diocese. The Ember Days are the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday following the

Third Sunday of Advent, the First Sunday in Lent, Pentecost, and Holy Cross Day (September 14).

## **Outline of the Ordination Process**

This is a synopsis of the ordination process as required by the Canons. Much detail has been omitted, in the interest of giving a general outline. Be sure to check the Canons of Title III for more complete information.

### **Priesthood Ordination Process**

#### **Discernment**

This process happens in the local congregation or other community of faith.

- Application/nomination to Bishop. See Canon III.8.1-2, for what needs to be included in the nomination.
- The Bishop then:
  - Confirms that the person is a confirmed adult communicant in good standing. Meets with the nominee in person.
  - Consults nominee regarding financial resources during formation, to be reviewed periodically throughout Postulancy and Candidacy. Notifies the COMB whether process may proceed.
- If Bishop approves person, COMB meets with Applicant.
  - Reviews the application.
  - Prepares an evaluation of the nominee's qualifications to pursue course of preparation.
  - Presents evaluation and recommendations to the Bishop.
- Bishop admits nominee as Postulant; notifies all concerned; records name in a Register kept for that purpose.

#### **Formation**

- Includes both Postulancy and Candidacy.
- Postulancy is no less than six months. Candidacy is no less than six months. The two combined are no less than 18 months.
- If no baccalaureate degree, formation program should include any additional academic work necessary.
- Should include some kind of formation in community.

- Formation should reflect the local community.
- Required areas for study:
  - Holy Scriptures, Church History, including the Ecumenical Movement, Christian History, including Missionary Theology and Missiology, Christian Ethics and Moral Theology, as well as studies in contemporary society, including racial and minority groups, Liturgics and Church Music, Theory and Practice of Ministry.

### **Candidacy**

Requirements for admission:

- Letter of support by the sponsoring community of faith.
- Statement from EICS to COMB attesting to continuing formation of the Postulant.
- Recommendations from COMB and from the Postulant's seminary.
- Bishop may admit person as a Candidate and records name in a Register.

### **General Requirements for Ordination**

- Postulant/Candidate communicates with Bishop on Ember Days.
- Bishop and EICS work closely with person to develop and monitor program of preparation.
- Bishop and COMB ensure pastoral guidance is provided throughout preparation period.
- Seminary or other formation program provides report on academic performance and personal qualifications at least once a year.

### **Ordination**

Before being ordained, the person must have:

- Background check
- Sexual misconduct, Title IV, and anti-racism training
- Medical and psychiatric exams

These exams must be completed before ordination to the transitional Diaconate, or before ordination to the Priesthood, as they must have been taken within 36 months of ordination.

Bishop obtains in writing:

- Application from Candidate requesting ordination as a deacon.
- Letter of support from sponsoring community.

- Certificate from seminary or other program showing scholastic record in canonical areas, and evaluation of readiness, including personal qualifications

Bishop provides the items mentioned above to Council of Advice, as well as the following:

- Certificates from Bishop on admission to Postulancy and Candidacy
- Certificate from COMB recommending ordination
- Council of Advice certifies canonical requirements met and there are no grounds for refusal; gives signed testimonial to Bishop.

The Bishop's Office maintains a record of the profile and progress of each Postulant/Candidate throughout the process, inserting appropriate dates, as follows:

- Applicant's Name
- Residence Address
- Mailing Address
- Phone Numbers: Residence/Business
- Email
- Sponsoring Congregation
- Clergy of Sponsoring Congregation
- Clergy notification to Bishop of interest
- Bishop approval of congregational Discernment Committee
- Bishop notification to COMB to assign Mentor to congregational Discernment Committee
- Report of congregational Discernment Committee
- Nomination in writing to Bishop
- Acceptance of nomination by Applicant, in writing to Bishop
- Clergy's Letter of Recommendation
- Required References: (3) Employer/Supervisor/Co-Worker
- Details of Community/Volunteer
- Details of Family/Personal
- Biographical Essay
- Admission of Applicant to Postulant
- Report of Medical Examination
- Report of Psychiatric Examination
- Background Check
- Bishop interview with Postulant
- Report of COMB interview with Postulant
- COMB Recommendation
- Postulant application for Candidacy
- Bishop admission of Postulant to Candidacy

- Bishop assigns Candidate to congregation (optional)
- Safeguarding God's Children training completed
- Preventing Sexual Misconduct training completed
- Anti-Racism/Diversity training completed
- Title IV training completed
- Clinical Pastoral Education Evaluation(s)
- Certification of readiness from those in charge of formation program
- COMB's Report on Candidate's fitness and readiness
- Application for Ordination
- Council of Advice's certification that all canonical requirements have been met
- Approval by Bishop for Ordination
- Date of Ordination