The Commission on Ministry is a highly dedicated group of lay persons and clergy who are appointed by our Bishop to assist him in discerning a call to ordination. Most of our Commission members have served in this ministry for ten years or more. One of our Commission members, Betsy Tezza, has been a member of the Commission for more than 25 years. All of us see this ministry as the most important way in which we can serve our diocese.

The Commission on Ministry is a part of a very elaborate and necessary system of checks and balances in the diocesan process of ordination. The call begins with the individual and is affirmed by his or her priest and his or her local congregation. After an interview and a series of tests administered by the Canon to the Ordinary and by the diocesan psychological examiner, the individual becomes an Aspirant to Holy Orders. She or he then spends two days with the Commission on Ministry and if approved by The Commission, the Aspirant is recommended to the Bishop. The Bishop then decides if the Aspirant will be allowed to become a Postulant to Holy Orders and enroll in a Seminary recommended by the Bishop.

After 18 months in seminary, the Postulant meets with the Commission on Ministry and with the Standing Committee to determine if she or he can continue in the ordination process. If approved by both the Commission and the Standing Committee, he or she becomes a Candidate for Holy Orders.

At the end of his or her seminary education, the Candidate is screened by a third group, the Board of Examining Chaplains, who ascertain the Candidate's theological acumen. If approved by the Examining Chaplains, the Candidate meets for a final time with the Commission on Ministry and with the Standing Committee and upon approval of both, she or he is then recommended to the bishop for ordination to the Transitional Diaconate.

After a period of no less than six months, he or she is interviewed by the Standing Committee again and if approved, recommended to the bishop for ordination to the Priesthood.

Download information on the ordination process.

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Criteria for Discerning a Call

We are often asked about the criteria we use to help us discern a call. Here is a brief list of

some of the expectations of the Commission on Ministry. For the individual seeking ordination to the priesthood, we expect to see:

• A basic understanding of and belief in orthodox Christianity. While we don't expect the individual to be an accomplished theologian, we do expect him or her to be able to articulate his or her faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

• An Existing Ministry. This could be a teaching ministry or a pastoral ministry but it needs to be more than simply serving as a chalice bearer or serving on an altar guild.

• Identifiable leadership – This could be vestry membership, a committee chair, or even in secular leadership roles. Do other church members come to this individual for information or advice?

• Leadership potential - Has she or he developed a new ministry or church program or improved on an existing one? Does he or she have a vision for future ministry?

• A discernable desire to preach and teach – Proclamation of the Word and teaching the Scriptures are two primary duties of a priest.

• (If married) A good marriage and a willing spouse. If the aspirant is married, the spouse must be 100% in agreement with the call and be willing to relocate and make the necessary (and permanent) sacrifices in lifestyle.

In short, every Commission on Ministry member asks himself or herself this question: Would you have this person as YOUR rector or vicar?

Characteristics We are Not Looking For

In addition, there are certain characteristics we do not look for in people seeking ordination to the priesthood. We are not looking for:

• Someone who wants to “help people.” We have secular counselors and social workers, and we don’t need to ordain people for that purpose. If the aspirant’s primary desire is to visit the sick and minister to the poor and needy, he or she might be hearing a call to be a permanent deacon instead of seeking the priesthood.

• Someone who simply wants to lead worship. While the priest is in charge of the liturgy, Sunday morning is only a small part of the priest’s week.

• Someone who sees the priesthood as “the next step up.” Some people apply secular standards to the faith, and assume that as one grows in his or her faith, he or she progresses from a lay person, to a Sunday school teacher, to a vestry person, to a warden, to a deacon, and then to a priest. The priesthood is not a “step up” in ministry.

• Someone who is relatively new in their faith, or recently converted. While we give thanks for budding new Christians, Jesus says you will know them by their fruits. We need to be able to see some fruits of existing ministry.

• Someone who would make a good assistant. Again, we need identifiable leaders. Leadership is one of the gifts of the Spirit, and the gift of leadership is not given to everyone. If ordained, our applicants will probably serve as assistants at first, but we are looking for potential rectors. We in the Church don’t need to ordain someone who might make a good assistant, but would make a poor rector. We need to find and affirm people who have vision, ideas, passion, drive, and the desire to lead parishes and missions.

The process above only addresses the call to the Priesthood. The process for ordination to the Deaconate is completely different. If you are sensing a call to ordained ministry, speak to your rector or vicar. If you have particular questions, please feel welcome to write me at John@HolyCross.net .

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