

Frequently Asked Questions

about postulancy and formation in the Diocese of Olympia

Is there a document that explains the process of discernment for vocations?

The document is called the Discerning Vocations Manual. You can obtain this by contacting the Canon to the Ordinary and Liaison to the Commission on Ministry, Marda Steedman Sanborn.

What are the kinds of ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church?

We are all, by virtue of our baptismal covenant ministers of the Church, called to represent Christ in the world. There are three kinds of ordained ministers in the Episcopal Church: deacons, priests, and bishops (BCP 855).

What about lay ministry?

Lay people, though not ordained ministers, are nonetheless still ministers, called to bear witness to Christ wherever they may be; and according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church (BCP 855).

What is a deacon?

A deacon is a minister called to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as servant to those in need; and to assist bishops and priests and proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of sacraments. Bishop Rickel describes the job of a deacon as "finding trouble in the world and bringing it back to the Church" (BCP 856). There are vocational deacons and transitional deacons; all priests must first serve as transitional deacons before ordination to the priesthood.

What is a priest?

A priest is a minister called to represent the Christ and his Church, particularly as a pastor to the people; to share with the bishop the overseeing of the Church; to proclaim the Gospel, to administer the sacraments; and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God (BCP).

What is a bishop?

A bishop is a minister called to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese; to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the whole Church; to proclaim the Word of God; to act in Christ's name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ's ministry (BCP 855).

Can I be ordained if I am gay?

Absolutely. While the ordination of gay people has been controversial, the Commission on Ministry accepts gay people, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered as postulants, and Bishop Rickel has ordained LGBT people as priests and deacons.

What if I am a woman?

Yes. In July 1976 the 72nd General Convention passed a resolution stating that "no one shall be denied access" to ordination into the three orders of ministry: as deacons, priests or bishops, on the basis of

their sex. Women were ordained as priests beginning in 1977, and first female bishop was consecrated in 1990.

Is divorce a deal breaker?

Strictly speaking, no. The COM and Bishop will want to know the circumstances of your divorce, what impact it has had, and whether any financial outcomes will affect, postulancy. However, being divorced in itself is not an impediment to ordination.

Does age matter?

Age is one of many factors the Commission on Ministry will consider, as your age will influence your experiences and visions of ministry. You are required to be at least twenty-four before ordination (TEC III 8.6b) and both deacons and priests are required to retire at seventy-two (TEC III 7.7/9.7), but may be reassigned at the discretion of the bishop and with consultation of the congregation.

What is discernment/why must it be x time?

We are always going through discernment. Formal discernment though, while a step in the process, should not be merely treated as just a step. Discernment is thoughtful and prayer, deliberate and with purpose. Though a portion of discernment may conclude and/or lead to an answer, it never truly ends. For these reasons the bishop and the Commission on Ministry recommend that you take your time in discernment and not rush it.

Why discernment groups?

While discernment can be individual and requires inward prayer and reflection, discernment for holy orders should be done in a group for mutual support, guidance, and so that you might be challenged and pushed, and affirmed as we undergo discernment.

What I can do I help myself prepare?

There are lots of technical things you can do to prepare, such as prayer, discernment, spiritual direction, and meaningful conversation with your priest. But you should also talk with your family—they will be your primary means of support. Like any serious change in your life (and the process towards ordination is certainly one of them) you need to consider the change you are about to make, and be sure you are doing it for the right reasons.

What period of time is anticipated to complete what is referred to as “the process”?

There is no specific amount of time it takes to complete “the process.” This is because everyone takes a slightly different path to ordination and because complete different parts of the process at different times and rates. Bear in mind that discernment should take at least twelve months, seminary takes at least three years, and those pursuing ordination to the priesthood must be transitional deacons for at least six months before ordination as priests.

The Commission on Ministry encourages you to take your time in this process, and not to rush things. Working towards ordination is not a race, but a deliberated and prayerful process.

How much does this all cost?

This is an expensive process. Though the costs will be different for everyone, you should consider the costs of your education (tuition, books, moving, if applicable to you), CPE, the required medical and

psychological examinations, and possible a loss of income depending on your formation. You should plan accordingly, and talk with the Canon to the Ordinary to get a better understanding of the financial burden of postulancy.

How do I pay for it?

There are a number of different ways to pay and to help defray costs. Your congregation should and is required to provide financial support (see TEC III 6.2/8.2) with a line item in their budget. The diocese has scholarships available, usually awarded in December of each year. You might fundraise in your congregation, or with your friends and family. You can apply for the FAFSA to help with seminary costs, and there are a wealth of scholarships available at each seminary, from the Episcopal Church (DFMS), and from other organizations.

Why do congregations have to put a line item in the budget to support postulants?

According to TEC III 6.2/8.2, congregations are required to support postulants through financial support. Separate from canon though, financial support demonstrates that congregation truly support postulants and candidates by helping them defray the considerable costs associated with the process.

Why do I have to apply online?

It's the twenty-first century! Applying online actually makes it easier for the COM and the bishop to access your files. Another advantage to submitting your application online is that you will always have access to your file.

What if I am turned down? Can I appeal?

If you are turned down for postulancy the bishop will tell you why, and offer guidance for how you might strengthen a future application. However, there isn't a process to appeal a decision.

What are the requirements for seminary in the diocese?

The Diocese of Olympia does not specifically require that you formally go to seminary, Episcopal or otherwise, as a requirement for postulancy. The most important thing is that you are able to meet canonical competency requirements, Episcopal seminary is the best way to achieve that and is always the first and preferably choice.

There are number of benefits from going to seminary, and we do understand that for a number of reasons this might always be possible. If you have questions about seminary options, talk to a member of the Commission in Ministry, Bishop Rickel, or the Canon to the Ordinary.

What are the expectations of ordained leaders?

There are many expectations of ordained leaders in the diocese. Bishop Rickel has listed five things we seek in ordained leaders. To that end, we seek persons who: are spiritually grounded and Christ-centered, have a proven gift of gathering and developing a community, practice Christian stewardship, demonstrate authority, and understand authority. To read about these in detail please visit the Expectations of Clergy document elsewhere on the vocations page.

Is it possible to be ordained in the Diocese of Olympia and then called away?

We ordain people for the whole Church, not just one diocese or congregation, but it would be great if you stayed in the diocese and we will make every effort to find a placement here.

If I am ordained a deacon, can I return to my home congregation to serve?

We raise up, and ordain priests and deacons for the whole church, not just for specific congregations. Following ordination, you will be assigned to a congregation different than the one that sponsored you.

Can a decent living be earned as a deacon? As a priest?

Deacons are non-stipendiary meaning they don't get paid. As for whether a "decent living" can be made as priest, will entirely depend on how you define a "decent living" and what the financial needs are for yourself and your family.

Where do I look for help in this process?

There are many resources for help in this process, including priest or clergy excising oversight, members of the Commission on Ministry, the bishop, and the Canon to the Ordinary. Each of these people can help you in the process in a different way. If you have specific questions about applying for postulancy, what is required of you, or any other technical aspects of the process, contact the Canon to the Ordinary.