



***PROCESS FOR CONGREGATIONAL STRATEGIES
FOR LOCAL MINISTRY SUPPORT TEAMS***

PRESENTED BY THE COM / MINISTRY DEVELOPERS
WORKGROUP

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INTRODUCTION

The Commission on Ministry recognizes that all baptized persons are called to minister in Christ's name. This ministry takes place in the normal setting of each person's daily life, as each of us lives out the Baptismal promise to seek and serve Christ in all people. Thus ministry takes place in our homes and schools; in offices, and retail stores and auto repair shops; in hospitals, nursing homes, law courts and prisons; in playgrounds and fast food restaurants. It is through our everyday activity — through the ordinary and mundane as well as through the extraordinary -- that we all, as baptized Christians, follow the Risen Christ.

It is the responsibility of leaders within our diocese and congregations, especially those who preach and teach, to bring this awareness of ministry to life. We must remember that ministry takes place in the world, in ways that may not even be obvious to others as a religious moment, and that only a relatively small part of Christian ministry takes place in churches or religious settings, or is even identifiable as religious in nature.

The Commission on Ministry will assist congregations in nurturing the ministry of the baptized. However, no entity alone can bring to life the amazing realization that each of us, joined to Christ in baptism, is already given the gifts for ministry, and ordained to minister in his name.

INITIAL EXPLORATION

The Diocese offers a range of programs and resources that encourage congregations to deepen their understanding and practice of baptismal ministry:

- *Rooted in God* is a ten week study series that helps congregations explore what it means to be the church and to discern what God is particularly calling their church to become and do. It also includes a Rule of Life workshop. It is available without charge from the diocese.
- *Wade in the Water* explores ways that the ministry of the baptized can create healthy small churches. This resource can empower lay members to find a more active role within the church, including positions of leadership. It is designed to be used with small groups in a short series, or as a one-day workshop. Available from the diocese.
- *LifeCycles* is based upon the understanding that all Christians are called to, and commissioned by, baptism for participation in Christ's ministry in the world and in the church. Working through small groups, *LifeCycles* aims to empower all members to realize their God-given gifts and so become ever more active, articulate apostles at work in God's world, and to transform congregations to become vital, ministering communities. Available at www.LeaderResources.com for a membership fee.
- *I Have Called You Friends* by Kevin Thew Forrester gives a theological basis for mutual ministry and describes the experience of the Diocese of Northern Michigan. A study guide for the book is available from the Diocese of Vermont. The book is available from www.ChurchPublishing.org

- *Outward Signs: The Congregation as Sacrament Community* helps a congregation look at its unique mission and ministry. Eight sessions look at Sacramental Community, Worship, Christian Friendship, Stewardship, Education, Outreach, Evangelism and ends with a session on visioning for the future. It is available from www.LeaderResources.com

EXPLORE RE-STRUCTURING

When a congregation wants to explore a how to structure its corporate life to deepen its understanding and practice of baptismal ministry, they enter into a new relationship with the diocese in which the congregation and diocese become partners in the exploration. Such an exploration does not preclude any specific restructuring result: a Regional Ministry, a local Ministry Support Team, conventional clergy-led model, or a combination of these. The exploration process generally proceeds as follows:

- The initial query is directed to the bishop
- Ministry Developers and the bishop discuss the request and decide who among the Ministry Developers is best suited to respond to the request
- A Ministry Developer responds to the letter/request and sets up a meeting to talk with the congregation about what will happen next and contacts the chairpersons of the Commission on Ministry (COM)
- A Ministry Developer meets with the congregation
 - To listen to their story (using the *Initial Assessment Tools*)
 - What motivated them to make a request to the diocese
 - What is their history – how did they arrive at this place
 - What work has been done and what do they sense they need to do
 - What are they looking for from the diocese and larger church
 - To present “How Did We Get Here?” and the “Roadmap” (typical process, parameters and rationale) and to invite the congregation to work in identifying where they are and what needs to happen next.
 - To develop a plan with the congregation which the Ministry Developer will communicate to the COM, bishop and other Ministry Developers. It is understood that a congregation may have already done some of these steps and does not have to do each one over if they can offer the bishop and COM evidence that the work in a given area has already been done.

This plan will include *at least* the following items (plus others as identified) and an initial timeline. The following work is done in partnership with or with the assistance of the Ministry Developer and/or a Companion:

- The congregation, as a whole, learns about baptismal ministry: theology, Scriptural basis, common practices, impact on the congregation and individuals, etc., including both ministries in the gathered congregation and ministries when the congregation is dispersed. This learning process includes a commitment to a discipline of prayer and seeking God’s leading.

- The congregation learns about the various models for structuring its ministry including Regional Ministry, Local Ministry Support Team, etc.
- The congregation chooses one model to explore in depth using a process developed by the congregation and Ministry Developer.
- The Ministry Developer and/or Companion again shares the detailed “Roadmap” and plans the next steps, timeline, etc.

PROCESS FOR EXPLORING LOCAL MINISTRY SUPPORT TEAMS

Study

The Ministry Developer and/or Companion works with the congregation to ensure that *most* of its members understand the Local Ministry Support Team model and its implications for the congregation. This is likely to include some or all of the following:

- Members of the congregation interact with others who have this model in place through visits, case studies, phone calls, etc.
- The congregation learns about the various ministry roles that a congregation *might* have including those within the church and in the world
- The congregation learns about and practices discernment as a way of making decisions.

The COM meets with the congregation at the parish site to listen and learn about the congregation’s story leading to this desire for re-structuring how they are church. The COM will recommend discernment resources for use and distribute the resource “Skills and Knowledge for Ministry”.

Discernment

The congregation discerns what roles are needed to support its congregational life and the members of the congregation in their ministries (Local Ministry Support Team roles) and what ministries are needed to carry out its mission and ministry in the church and in the community/world.

The congregation identifies what competencies (skills, knowledge, experiences) are needed for each role and what competencies are needed for those who will be on the Local Ministry Support Team, using “Skills and Knowledge for Ministry”.

The congregation discerns what process it will use to call people into ministry and/or help them discern their ministry. Title III canons establish that every congregation will have in place an ongoing discernment process with the goal of helping any member of the congregation discern his/her ministry, find a place/way to exercise that ministry, be equipped for it and supported in it. There may be two different processes established: one for ongoing discernment of all ministries and a second process for those called to be on the Local Ministry Support Team. It is highly desirable that the discernment for the Local Ministry Support Team members be a congregation-wide process rather than one conducted by a smaller group.

The congregation discerns who is called to form the Covenant Group and the roles it feels each person is called to fulfill.

The individuals who are called are invited to prayerfully consider and respond to the call (usually within a specified time of two weeks to a month). The congregation, Ministry Developer and/or Companion, and COM will join in prayer with those identified and be available to listen, talk, explore, etc. during this individual decision time.

FORMING THE COVENANT GROUP

Those who choose to explore their call in greater depth form a Covenant Group.

The Covenant Group develops the commitment (the covenant) they will make; the Team presents that to the congregation for affirmation and, through the Ministry Developer, to the diocese. This generally includes an initial Rule of Life for each individual and the Group, a commitment to study, working norms, accountability, etc.

The Covenant Group identifies the competencies and developmental needs of each Group member and the Group as a whole, using “Skills and Knowledge for Ministry”.

They work with the Ministry Developer and/or Companion to identify what resources are best suited for their on-going formation to help them meet their developmental needs. This will include programs, events, etc. for the entire group as well as for individuals who may need resources tailored to their role or specific needs.

POSTULANCY

The Covenant Group works with the Ministry Developer and/or Companion, COM, and the Vestry to determine when the Group is ready to present to the bishop for acceptance as postulants for licensure, commissioning, and ordination. This presentation includes the following steps.

- The Vestry and a priest’s endorsement of this Group’s readiness :
III:2(c) Whenever the letter of support of a Vestry is required, the letter must be signed and dated by at least two-thirds of all of the members of the Vestry, at a meeting duly convened, and by the Rector or Priest-in-Charge of the Parish, and attested by the Clerk of the Vestry. Should there be no Rector or Priest-in-Charge, the letter shall be signed by a Priest of the Diocese acquainted with the nominee and the Parish, the reason for the substitution being stated in the attesting clause.

The form for this Letter of Support is available in the Appendix.

The Application for Group Postulancy (Appendix) then needs to be completed. The Application consists of the following items:

- The Ministry Contract, a description of how the Group is currently helping others in the congregation identify their ministries, equip them for their ministries, and prepare them for commissioning along with the Group.

The role of the Local Ministry Support Team is to support the ministries of others. The norm is that the Group has prepared others to be commissioned at the same time as the Team (see “A Form of Commitment Christian Service”, BCP, p. 420), so it is clear that this is a *congregational commitment to ministry* and not a matter of replacing a single clergy person with a team which will still do the ministry on behalf of the people.

- A description of the Group’s assessment of where the congregation is in their journey.
- A description of the Group’s plan for its ongoing formation, including their individual and Group’s Rule of Life.
- Also included are all the usual things that are normally required for postulants:
 - Evidence of baptism and confirmation
 - Each individual’s spiritual autobiography of no more than 3 pages
 - The Vestry’s Letter of Support (see Appendix)
 - Evidence of Safe Church training within Province 1
 - Evidence of diocesan anti-racism training
 - Evidence of educational background
(high school diploma, GED, technical school certification, college transcripts, etc.)

The Group works with the COM and Ministry Developer and/or Companion to plan a way to assess its academic preparation using the portfolio model. This plan is shared with the bishop. The COM works with the Group to ensure that the plan will prepare them to be certified in the seven canonical areas as specified in Title III:8(5):

1. The Holy Scriptures
2. Church History, including the Ecumenical Movement
3. Christian Theology, including Missionary Theology and Missiology
4. Christian Ethics and Moral Theology
5. Studies in contemporary society, including racial and minority groups
6. Liturgics and Church Music, Christian Worship and Music according to the contents and use of the Book of Common Prayer and the Hymnal, and authorized supplemental texts
7. Theory and Practice of Ministry.

All members of the Group are expected to have basic understanding of these areas and to have particular knowledge of how these areas are foundational to their specific ministries.

- The bishop will meet with the Group and together decide whether to go forward.
- The Group members undertake the medical exam and both an individual and a group psychological exam.
- The bishop makes the decision on whether to refer the Group to the COM for the postulancy interview or if other actions, time, etc. are needed at this point.

- When the Group is referred to the COM, the COM sends a few members to the congregation to do its assessment. This site visit provides a broad diocesan assessment of the readiness of the Group and congregation.
- The COM makes its recommendation to the bishop.
- The bishop decides on postulancy: yes, no, maybe.
- If yes, the Covenant Group implements its continuing formation plan which is developed and reviewed in an ongoing conversation with the COM.
- During the postulancy period, the members of the Covenant Group will meet with the Standing Committee to develop relationships and build community.

CANDIDACY

After no less than six months the Group applies to the bishop for Candidacy. This application includes the following:

- An endorsement by the Vestry and a priest, Canon III: 8 (4.2). The form for this Letter is available in the Appendix.
- An updated plan for next steps, continuing formation, work with the congregation, and progress on the plan for its work in the seven canonical areas.

After the bishop receives the above, the following takes place:

- A second visit by the COM to assess the Group's readiness for Candidacy.
- The COM makes its recommendation to the bishop.
- The bishop decides whether to accept the Group as "Candidates for Ordination, Licensure and Commissioning" or if other actions, time, etc. are needed at this point.

AFFIRMATION AND CELEBRATION OF MINISTRY

After no less than six months, the Group applies to the bishop for ordination, licensing and commissioning. This application includes a report and a plan addressing the following:

- How the Group is currently helping others in the congregation identify their ministries, equip them for their ministries, and prepare them for commissioning along with the Group.
- How the Group is deepening its own understanding and practice of baptismal ministry (its ongoing formation).
- How the Group is leading the congregation in deepening its understanding and practice of baptismal ministry.
- How the Group and congregation are bringing new members into their community.
- The Group's assessment of where the congregation is in their journey.

This plan will become the basis for the mutual ministry review in future and will continue to be reviewed and updated annually.

Other steps now happen:

- The Group works with the COM to assess its academic preparation under the canons using the portfolios.
- The COM certifies the Group's readiness to the bishop and Standing Committee.
- The bishop presents the Group to the Standing Committee for its approval.

If there are members of the Group who are called to the priesthood, ordination to the transitional diaconate needs to take place. So, upon approval from the Standing Committee, the Group and the bishop hold a liturgical re-affirmation of the commitment to the ministries to which the Group has been called by the congregation. In this context, transitional deacons are ordained. In the next six months, the Group plans and works on its transition to their new ministry roles and also how they will develop and support the ministries of the congregation. Some Groups may choose to have this six month transitional period, regardless of transitional deacons, in order to prepare for their new ministries and what lies beyond the affirmation and celebration service.

When approved, or following the six month transition period, the Group works with the Ministry Developer, Companion, the COM, and congregation to plan a service that will appropriately celebrate the new ministry. This will include a simultaneous ordination and commissioning of Local Ministry Support Team members and a reaffirmation by the congregation of their baptismal ministry. Individuals in the congregation may also celebrate a new or renewed Commitment to Christian Service. It is appropriate that members of surrounding congregations and the diocese be invited to celebrate with the congregation.

ONGOING DEVELOPMENT OF MINISTRY

After the service, the new Local Ministry Support Team implements its continuing formation plan which is developed and reviewed in an ongoing conversation with the Ministry Developer (generally every six months or so).

As required by canon, the Team reports annually to the bishop on their continuing education. They also submit a progress report and baptismal ministry action plan. An annual mutual ministry review is conducted with a Ministry Developer or Companion, and a covenant of mutual expectations for ministry is renewed with the congregation and presented to the bishop.

The Team schedules additional opportunities for members of the congregation to make a Commitment to Christian Service at an appropriately celebratory service (e.g. the bishop's visit or celebration of All Saints).

To support its developing mission, the congregation may need to create new Covenant Groups in future years.

APPENDIX

Letter of Support for Postulancy of a Covenant Group	page 11
Application for Postulancy of a Covenant Group Member	pages 12--13
Letter of Support for Candidacy of a Covenant Group	page 14



Letter of Support for Postulancy of a Covenant Group

Date:

Sponsoring congregation/faith community:

The Right Reverend Thomas C. Ely
Bishop of Vermont
5 Rock Point Road
Burlington, VT 05401-2735

Dear Bishop Ely:

We, the undersigned communicants of name of congregation, in the community of name of town, pledge our support to the following persons in a Covenant Group who are hereby nominated for Postulancy leading toward formation of a Local Ministry Support Team.

List here the names of persons and their identified ministries

We pledge our commitment to continue our discernment ministry with the aforementioned persons, and we pledge our commitment to continue our discernment ministry with these Nominees. We will endeavor to involve our entire faith community in our responsibility to help these persons who are preparing for commissioning, licensing, and ordination.

Faithfully,

Signatures of the Vestry
Signature of the Member of the Clergy who has oversight



Application for Postulancy of a Covenant Group Member

Full Name of Nominee _____

[Include any other names you have used or have been known by]

Length of time in the Diocese of Vermont _____

Sponsoring congregation/faith community _____

Date of Baptism _____

Date of Confirmation _____

attach certificates of baptism and confirmation to this form

PREVIOUS APPLICATION

Have you ever applied for Postulancy, in this diocese or another diocese?

Yes No

If yes, explain circumstances and outcome, using the reverse side.

PREVIOUS NOMINATION

Have you ever been nominated for Postulancy in another diocese?

Yes No

If yes, explain circumstances and outcome, using the reverse side.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Please check the type of educational experiences and degrees/ certifications you have.

Attach copies of the diplomas, certificates, transcripts, etc. to this form.

high school diploma or GED
name the institution or program and date of completion

technical school certification
name the institution or program and date of completion

college degree
name the institution or program and date of completion

graduate school or other professional degrees
name the institution or program and date of completion

APPLICATION FOR POSTULANCY, PAGE 2

ADDITIONAL FORMS

Please attach to this form the following documentation for the individual applicant:

- A spiritual autobiography of no more than three pages
- Transcripts from all post-secondary educational institutions
- Evidence of Safe Church training within Province One
- Evidence of diocesan anti-racism training
- Evidence of educational background
(high school diploma, GED, technical school certification, college transcripts, etc.)

The following documentation is to be submitted collectively as a Group:

- The Vestry's narrative description of the discernment process
- The Ministry Contract
- A description of the Group's assessment of where the congregation is in their journey.
- A description of the Group's plan for its ongoing formation, including their individual and Group's Rule of Life.

SIGNATURE

Please consider this request for admission to Postulancy as a member of a Covenant Group.

Signature _____

Date _____

Please send all Applications and supporting documentation both for the Group and the individuals as one package.



Letter of Support for Candidacy of a Covenant Group

Date:

Sponsoring congregation/faith community:

The Right Reverend Thomas C. Ely
Bishop of Vermont
5 Rock Point Road
Burlington, VT 05401-2735

Dear Bishop Ely:

We, the undersigned communicants of name of congregation, in the community of name of town, pledge our support to the following persons in a Covenant Group who are Postulants.

List here the names of persons and their identified ministries

Furthermore, we pledge our commitment to continue our discernment, and we will endeavor to involve our entire faith community in our responsibility to help these persons prepare for commissioning, licensing, and ordination.

Faithfully,

*Signatures of the Vestry
Signature of the Member of the Clergy who has oversight*