

The Faith Community & Individual Discernment: The Assessment of Readiness for Formal Discernment



Introduction

To the Rector/Priest-in-Charge/Ministry Developer:

This **Covenant Process** has been designed to provide the Faith Community a spiritual, structured, and collaborative way to identify individuals within their community to discern possible vocations to the ordained life in the Episcopal Church. It also gives the Faith Community and the Discerner an opportunity to enter into a Covenant of prayer, support, and guidance.

A call to ministry, or vocation, is much wider than the ordination of a priest or deacon. Everyone is called to something - to be engaged in some sort of ministry to others. This Covenant Process is the first step to understanding one's call. *Some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.* [Ephesians 4:11-12] There is much work to do in building up the body of Christ and the discernment for ministry — both lay and ordained — is a critical step for a faith community to explore with those wondering how God may be calling them to use their gifts for engaging God's mission.

This Covenant Process takes place at the very genesis of a person's discernment process, soon after the individual has indicated his/her desire to the Ministry Developer to pursue such a call from God. It happens within the context of the Discerner's Faith Community, which is, and should always continue to be, a nurturing people who pray to God for whatever is best for the Discerner and God's Church.

When someone from your Faith Community comes forward seeking discernment, a meeting of a group of individuals representing the diversity of your Faith Community should be called. This meeting, known as "**The Assembly**", will include:

The **Discerner/Individual** is a person from your faith community who is expressing an interest in discerning for a possible vocation to ordained life in the Episcopal Church.

The **Rector/Priest-in-Charge/Ministry Developer** serves at the Discerner's Faith Community and will become the **Sponsoring Priest** if the Individual is recommended to take part in Discernment in Community in the Episcopal Church in Minnesota. The Sponsoring Priest must be willing to guide the Individual through a Leadership Project, the writing of his/her Spiritual Autobiography and Sense of Call Statement, and generally serve as a spiritual guide and advisor throughout the process of discernment and formation.

The **Vestry Members** represent the Faith Community in a leadership role; people who have been recognized for their good judgment, management skills, and dedication to the Church. As such, they have a unique role in helping to discern for a spiritual vocation. It is preferable that the entire Vestry take part in The Assembly, but if this is not possible, a good showing of the Vestry of the Faith Community, plus the Senior Warden is desired.

The **Companion** is a member of the Faith Community who agrees to walk with the Discerner through Discernment, serving as confidant and guide, one who both supports and challenges the Individual.

THE DISCERNMENT WHEEL

*What should I do? Who should I be?
How can I integrate my faith and my understanding
of what God wants of me with what I do?*

Each of us is created, unique, in God's image. Each of us came into this world with God-given specific gifts, passions, values, and skills. Each of us has developed skills and has been called on to perform certain tasks repeatedly, simply because we are good at them.

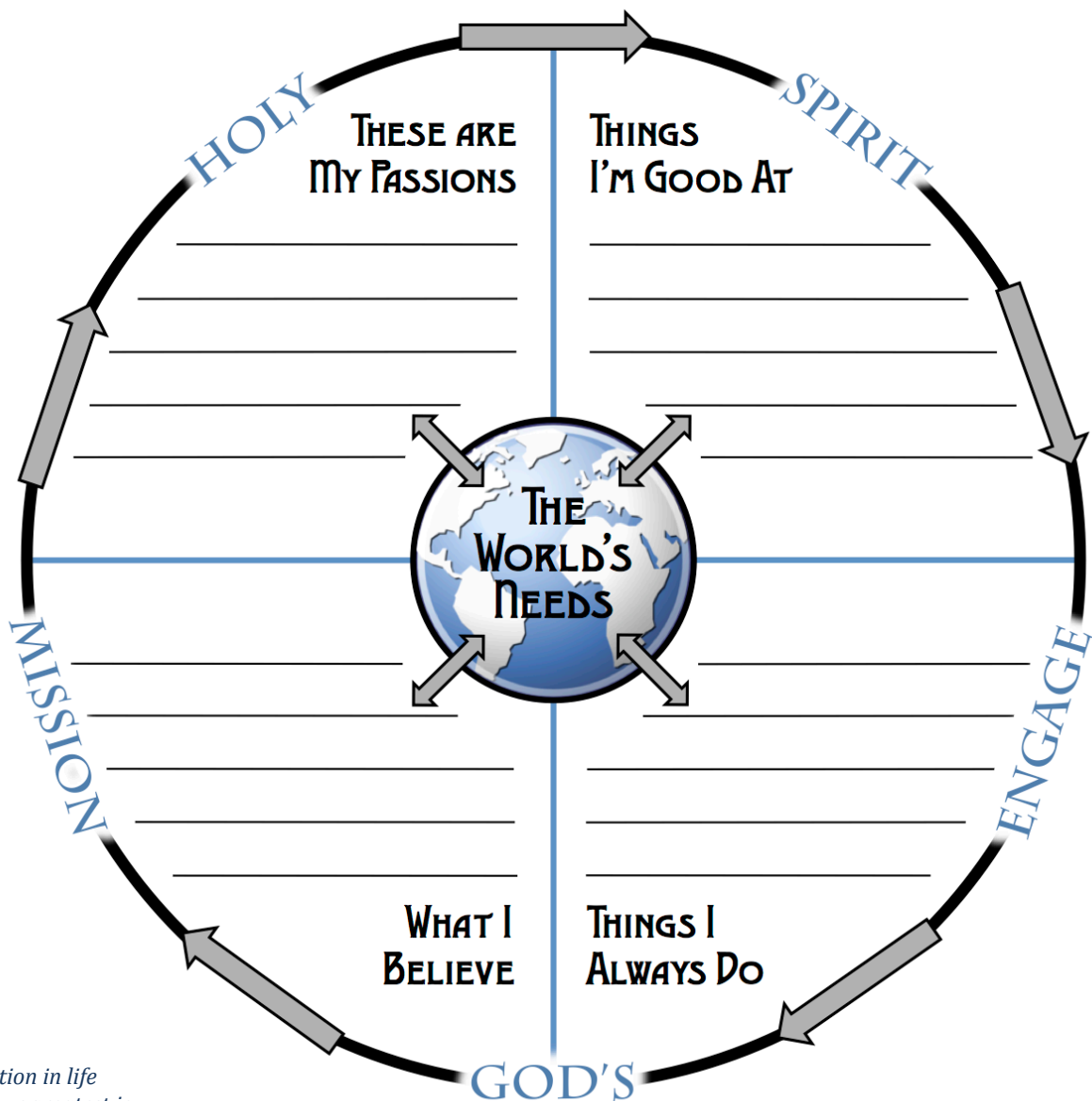
Four simple lenses help to answer the big question:

"What does God want to do with me?"

Ask yourself or others close to you what they observe about you:

- What are you really passionate about? What do you love to do and never tire doing?
- What are you really good at doing? What feels effortless to you?
- What do you find yourself always doing? What do others always ask you to do?
- What do you believe *in your heart of hearts*? What do you truly value in yourself and in others?

The information you gather in this process is an important indicator of the path God might be encouraging you to pursue. Where do your passions, values and that which you always do and are good at meet the world's needs? When the Holy Spirit connects those things, you are experiencing **transformation**. For there, you are truly engaging God's Mission. For there, the Kingdom of God is in the present.



*"Your vocation in life
is where your greatest joy
meets the world's greatest need."
—Frederick Buechner, theologian*

The Assembly

The **Discernment Wheel** exercise (*on page two of this document*) should be sent out in advance to all persons who will participate in The Assembly, so they have adequate time to contemplate the questions, and can give well-thought out answers on behalf of the Discerner.

The Assembly should be led by the Ministry Developer. Begin The Assembly by taking time for prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to descend upon those gathered.

1. If not done beforehand, all participants fill out the Discernment Wheel. The Discerner fills out the Wheel in the first person [of his/her own talents, etc.], while all the others in The Assembly fill out the Wheel with a focus on what they see in the Discerner. Study and discuss each member's findings.
2. Someone in The Assembly will ask the Discerner, "How and where have you experienced 'The Holy' in your life?" The Discerner will then be asked to describe a particular Spiritual Experience in his/her life.

[The Discerner is excused from the room at this point.]

3. Examine the question: "How is the Discerner living out his/her Baptismal Vows both inside and outside the Faith Community context?"
4. In what ways does this individual manifest a spiritual presence in this Faith Community?

At the end of all discussion concerning the Individual, all of the Discernment Wheels will be collected and kept by the Ministry Developer. The Ministry Developer then gives his/her assessment of the Individual's readiness to advance to the Discernment in Community for the Episcopal Church in Minnesota. This simple format may be used to record this assessment:

- We recommend this person for Discernment in Community for the Episcopal Church in Minnesota.
- We recommend this person continue to be an active member in this Faith Community for a time. While doing so, we expect this individual to meet regularly with a spiritual director, and engage in a Leadership Project commissioned by the Ministry Developer. We will meet again on behalf of this person in _____ months.

If it is determined that this person **is** recommended to advance to the Discernment in Community, then proceed with the Sealing of the Covenant Service (*below*).

Note: **Discernment in Community** takes place in small groups throughout the ECMN for about nine months each calendar year. Each small group is made up of a priest, a deacon, a spiritual director, a lay leader, and usually 2-4 discerners. At the end of Discernment in Community, an assessment is made of the Individual's readiness to advance to Formation for an ordained vocation.

Sealing of the Covenant Service

Representatives of the Faith Community and the Discerner sign the Covenant (*page 4*). Close The Assembly with prayer, and a blessing of the Discerner by the now-Sponsoring Priest.

Suggested Scripture & Prayers from the BCP for the Sealing of the Covenant Service:

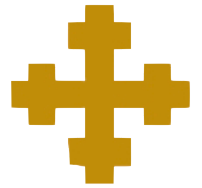
The Calling of Samuel
1 Samuel 3:1-10
Jesus sends the 70 disciples
Luke 10:1-20
You are the Light of the World
Matt. 5:14-16

A Collect for Guidance (p. 100)
Mission Prayer I (p. 100)
General Thanksgiving (p. 101)
Fit Persons for Ministry (p. 256)
All Christian Vocations (p. 256)
57. For Guidance (p. 832)

58. For Guidance (p. 832)
61. Of Self-Dedication (p. 832)
62. Peace Prayer (p. 833)
A Litany of Thanksgiving (p. 837)

A Covenant

Form A



“We Promise”

In the Discernment of [PRINT NAME] _____ ,

This Faith Community, [NAME] _____ , commits itself to:

- pray for, and in all other ways support and encourage this Discerner as she/he pursues a possible vocation to ordained life in the Episcopal Church;
- work with the Discerner on a Leadership Project within the Faith Community;
- [under the coaching of the Sponsoring Priest,] engage in an intentional prayer, scripture and reflection process with a small group of members of this faith community, from time to time;
- assist the Discerner financially by paying a portion of the Evaluations, and any other costs that may be agreed upon by this Faith Community and the Discerner.

I, [SIGNATURE] _____ , identify this person for discernment,
and will commit to being her/his **Sponsoring Priest**.

I, [SIGNATURE] _____ , identify this person for discernment,
in a supportive manner, in my role as **Vestry Member**.

I, [SIGNATURE] _____ , identify this person for discernment,
and will commit to walk beside her/him as her/his **Companion**.

Signature of the Discerner: _____

Date: _____ .

+ *May God's Will Be Done* +