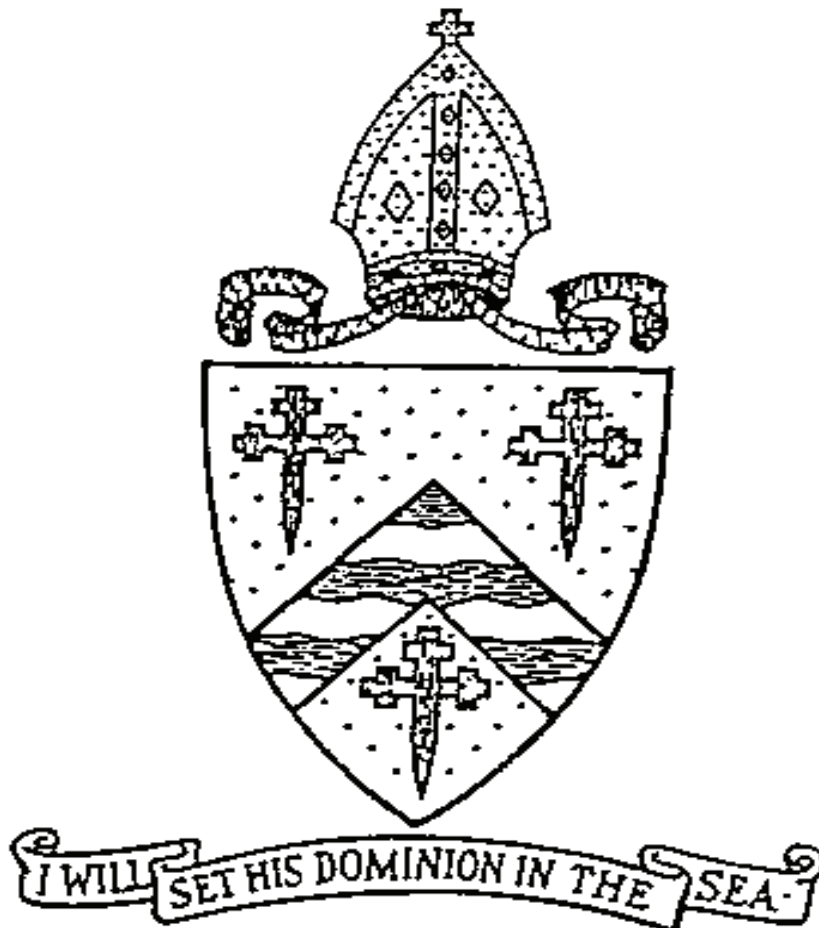


THE GIFTS OF GOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

**PARISH DISCERNMENT MANUAL 2 OF BAPTISMAL MINISTRIES
IN THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF LONG ISLAND:
CONTINUING DISCERNMENT FOR LICENSED LAY MINISTRY**



**DIOCESAN COMMISSION ON MINISTRY
DISCERNMENT SUB-COMMITTEE**

SEPTEMBER 2006

BISHOP WALKER'S INTRODUCTION TO THE DISCERNMENT MANUALS

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

What do we mean when we speak of a “call to ministry”? In 2003 and now in 2006, our General Convention began and continues the putting into effect of a process to help each of us in our understanding of ministry and our own particular call to ministry.

Through baptism, every Christian becomes a member of the Church, the Body of Christ, and participates in the ministry of Jesus through the Church. When we say the words of the Baptismal Covenant, we affirm that by our baptism we are joined into the Church to “continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers,” to “persevere in resisting evil,” to “seek and serve Christ in all persons” and to “strive for justice and peace among all people.” This ministry is ours, whatever our age or gender, whatever our skills or training, whatever our role, large or small, and whether we are lay or ordained. We all share a common ministry.

This common ministry takes diverse forms. As St. Paul teaches, there are both many roles to be performed within the Church and the world and many gifts dispersed among us that may equip us to perform those roles. Each of us, then, if we make the effort to become aware of our gifts and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may discover that we have been given specific ways through which we can live out our part in this common ministry.

With the publication of this manual, our Commission on Ministry continues the foundational program of discernment for baptismal ministry that began with the *Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening* manual. In *The Gifts of God for the People of God*, the seeker continues, on the local parish level to again spiritually and communally listen to God’s call with particular emphasis on licensed lay ministry.

Please remember that God is calling you, right now, into ministry. That call might be to be a leader in socially oriented outreach ministries for the poor and destitute, visiting the sick, helping with youth programs, lay leadership on the parish or diocesan level; it might be as a Eucharistic Minister or Visitor, Greeter, Acolyte, Altar Guild, Preacher, Evangelist, Catechist, Receptionist, Hospitality, or Parish Administrator. The list is endless, because God’s gifts are without end.

God’s mission is a continuous unfolding, always changing and yet always the same. I thank God each day for the capacity we have as a Diocese to BE the Body of Christ here in the Lord’s Dominion on Long Island. Jesus’ mission, our mission, is too important to be compromised by present controversies. God will ask us on that great day — “Were you faithful in spreading the Good News?”

In response to the Canons of the Church, this manual — *The Gifts of God for the People of God* — helps someone to discern a call to licensed lay ministry and to seek a further formation in that ministry. The Commission on Ministry—Discernment Process Committee (DCOM-DP) has developed this tool to enable parishes to play a role, formally, in helping individuals in the congregation discover their own “call to ministry.” In theory, a discernment committee works with any member of the parish to help that individual discern the nature of his/her particular calling, whether it might be to lay or ordained ministry.

What does *discernment* involve? How do we recognize or perceive the gifts of someone to be used for the building up of the Body of Christ? What we do in Parish Discernment Committees is attempt to recognize the will of God for the Church and for individuals within the Church. Attempting to discern the will of God is bold and risky. It is the same as when we are “bold to pray” the Lord’s Prayer. So any discernment process is, and

should always be, an exercise in prayer, careful listening and waiting to gain clarity about the nature of a particular person's calling from God.

Since the early days of the Church, spiritual leaders have been identified and put forward by the community. When someone in a congregation begins to sense that she or he is called to ministry, we look not to the individual or to the priest or even to the bishop alone to discern; we look to the community — the congregation — to affirm or not any calling. For this reason, anyone willing to put him/herself forward for any ministry in the church should be first and foremost an active member of a parish community.

When a faithful church member approaches his/her clergy person and the members of a Parish Discernment Committee, that person is offering to make him/herself vulnerable by inviting others to consider some of the very deepest hopes, thoughts, works, gifts and limitations of his/her life. Making such an offering takes great courage, and the person who does so must be treated with the utmost respect and care.

These Parish Discernment Committees give us the opportunity, through the telling of our own faith stories and spiritual journeys, important opportunities to witness to our faith first with those inside our congregations, thus building them up in Christ to be more effective witnesses to our mission: to proclaim to all the world the Good News of God's reconciling love in Jesus Christ. In these discernment encounters, all members are asked to identify gifts of individuals and to consider how those gifts can be used to empower the church — not just for today, but for the future, for we believe God is calling all of us to participate in building up the Body.

We are the Church which the Holy Spirit has called to serve God's mission. Let us use these tools of *Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening* and *The Gifts of God for the People of God*, to discern our role in this Great Commission as lay minister so we can get on with what God has for us to do.

Members of the DCOM-DP will be available to help you in the establishment of these canonically mandated committees which I believe will help each parish grow in its life in the Holy Spirit and enrich the diocese and the greater Church as well.

Let us listen to the Lord; let us offer our spiritual gifts for God's people; and let us serve in the Love of Christ,

With my prayers and care in Christ,

The Rt. Rev. Orris G. Walker, Jr.
The Bishop of Long Island

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INTRODUCTION & WELCOME

BAPTIZED CHRISTIANS

We are all Christian ministers by virtue of our Baptism. We are all called to share in Christ's eternal Priesthood. Thus the ministry of the laity is the foundation upon which the Church was established, the structure which gives it strength throughout its history. We emphasize the importance of lay ministry to the lives of individual faith communities and the larger Church. Every Baptized Christian is called upon to bring the presence of Christ into the home, workplace, and the community. We celebrate the gifts that members of the laity bring to the Church, and we recognize that celebration of individual ministry need not, and usually does not, lead to a call to ordination.

Lay ministers with special gifts often need encouragement to allow these gifts to develop. This diocese is committed to helping our laity exercise their ministry. We strongly oppose the view that a lay member with serious commitment to ministry can have that devotion recognized or fulfilled only through ordination. Academic accomplishment, a life of caring and compassion, a history of personal struggle and courage, a strong personal sense of being called, are all valuable assets, but they do not of themselves mean a call to ordination. This diocese seeks ways to affirm and continue to raise up strong, vibrant lay ministers.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The structure and content of this discernment process grew out of our concern that a call to lay ministry be treated with as much respect and careful decision making as a call to ordained ministry. We began by considering the call to ministry that we all share as expressed in the baptismal covenant. Our baptismal vows, the sections of the catechism and canons that relate to ministry, and the ordination vows provided the template for nearly all of the areas of inquiry in this discernment process.

Historically in the Church, spiritual direction and discernment have been experienced primarily as occurring in the context of a relationship between a spiritual director and his/her directee. Yet the Church calls upon groups of people throughout the ordination process to participate in deciding whether or not an individual is being called into ordained ministry. Those with a call to lay ministry have received much less attention, honor, and scrutiny in the past. Such individuals would most likely work through a process of vocational discernment alone, with his/her parish priest, with a spiritual director, or with a few trusted friends. Therefore it was necessary to find a means of equally attending to, honoring, and diligently examining apparent calls to either lay or ordained vocations in a community setting. We turned for wisdom and historical experience to the established discernment practices of our Christian Tradition.

The principles of discernment that are the foundation of this process are as follows:

1. The discernment process must be entered as an act of free will by each member of the discernment group. You are offering the gift to God and to one another of your lives for a substantial period of time.
2. The habit of noticing, and reflecting upon what has been noticed, is a central dynamic in discernment. The exercises use scripture, experience, and imagination in order to explore God's call to each Seeker.
3. What has been noticed and reflected upon is shared in order to seek the benefit of others' perceptions, observations, and suggestions. This discernment process includes the use of reason in seeking a clearer understanding of God's call.

4. Discernment involves the search for clarity in identifying the source of each Seeker's sense of call, as well as the future direction of each Seeker's response.
5. Through using a structure or pattern for discernment, and by sharing the discernment process with others, we may arrive at a decision which is less self-motivated than might otherwise be the case.
6. Accurate discernment should bring with it a profound sense of peace and "rightness" for each Seeker and for his/her Companions. There should be a general consensus, even if there are varying opinions about some minor aspects of the Seeker's call.

The principles of discernment outlined above serve as a structure, or vessel, for the actual content of this discernment process. The content of the process consists of prayer, scripture, discussions, activities, ministry experiences, shared reflections, and evaluation. The focus in all sessions should be the Seeker's experience of life, ministry, and spirituality, not abstract ideas about them.

Each session contains a list of suggested readings or activities and *Questions For Reflection*. These are to be engaged by each Seeker prior to meeting with his/her Companions as a group. When the group meets they will engage the *Topics For Discussion*. All members of the group are expected to participate in, and contribute to, the discussions. At the end of each session are *Questions Toward Discernment*. These are to be answered individually by the Seeker and the Companions as soon as possible after each session. The purpose of *Questions Toward Discernment* is to capture the observations, responses, and thoughts of each group member while still fresh in order that they might serve as memory joggers when the time comes to write the formal *Discernment Reflections and Narratives*.

The discernment process outlined in this workbook, *The Gifts of God for the People of God*, is divided into five sessions of discernment. The focus here is on each Seeker and his/ her perceived call to a licensed lay ministry. In *The Gifts of God for the People of God* the group consists of one Seeker and her/his Companions. Ideally, the group of Companions will consist of: a Facilitator who is trained and approved for this process by the DCOM-DP, two members of the Seeker's congregation who are chosen in consultation with his/her clergy-person (at least one of these two should be a member of the Vestry), one Companion from the *Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening*, group, and one person (not a close friend or family member) who knows the Seeker from a context other than Church.

The *Gifts of God for the People of God* discernment group will meet a total of at least five times, probably in two hour sessions, to discuss together the experiences and observations made during the individual *Questions For Reflection*. Using the notes made in responding to the *Questions Toward Discernment* at the end of each session, the final meeting will focus on the writing of the *Discernment Narrative*.

HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL

This manual is presented to you in a three-ring binder format. We hope that you will enjoy the flexibility and freedom that this format offers. Write or draw in this notebook. Add pages if you need more space. When you run across photographs, poetry, art or anything that speaks to your heart, add it to these pages. This, like the discernment process in which you are about to engage, is a work of creation in progress. God will speak to your soul at unexpected times in the coming months, and this notebook will provide you with a place to notice and reflect upon those moments.

This manual is a private space for you. What you write here belongs to you and to God. From this notebook and your experiences, you may share what you wish with your Companions. This notebook will not be "turned in" like homework. It is a workroom, a studio, for your soul. Use it in whatever way enhances the discernment

process for you. Feel free to read ahead. This will allow you to anticipate activities that will provide greater depth to the discernment process. Develop the habit of setting aside time regularly to spend with the *Questions For Reflection*. This part of the process requires substantial time in order to adequately experience the exercise and reflect upon it prior to meetings of the group. When you meet together, *Topics For Discussion* will provide the focus for your time. We suggest regularly scheduled meetings, every two to three weeks is ideal but you should gather at least once per month. Set a beginning and an ending time and honor it.

Remember to pray for one another throughout this time of discernment. You are all Seekers and you are all Companions on what is perhaps the most important journey we take in our lives; the journey into God.

The format for each section and session is as follows:

THE GIFTS OF GOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

SESSION I: HERE IN THE LABYRINTH

SESSION II: DEVISES & DESIRES

SESSION III: TRUTH & CONSEQUENCES

SESSION IV: POWER FROM ON HIGH

SESSION V: WHAT WE HAVE SEEN & HEARD

GUIDELINES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: THE SEEKERS AND COMPANIONS

You have been invited to be part of a discernment group. Your role in the group is dual. You, along with each other member of the group, will be a Seeker. You will inquire and listen with your Companions for God's whispered desires for you and for your ministry. You will also be a Companion to every other member of the group as they, too, seek a clearer understanding of God's call in their lives. You need each other's prayers, wisdom, observations, honesty, and compassion. It is important that you enter this relationship out of your own free will. Your time is a gift to both God and to each other. You will be committing yourself to engage the discernment process individually and with the group over the course of approximately six to eight months. Trust that God's Holy Spirit will be at work throughout this process. Try to maintain an attitude of openness toward God and what God might be saying to you through the observations and insights of your Companions. They are giving you the gift of their lives.

If you genuinely engage the process and give of your time in reflection and discussion, the most important contribution you can then make to the discernment process is your compassion and honesty. Pray for one another when together and between gatherings of the group. Be faithful with your presence and participation. And finally, honor the sacredness of one another's life stories. Nothing that is shared with the group should be revealed or discussed with anyone who is not a member of the group, not even a spouse or partner. Remember, you may share your own story freely, but you may not share the stories of others. This is a sacred journey. Honor it.

GUIDELINES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: THE CLERGY

A member of your congregation has embarked upon a process of licensed lay ministry discernment. During the discernment process provided in *The Gifts of God for the People of God* your role will continue to be primarily pastoral. The members of the discernment group have accepted the responsibility for doing the work of discernment together. A Resource Team, consisting of a lay person and a cleric from DCOM-DP, who are skilled in this process, will meet regularly with the group to help facilitate and guide the group with its discernment process. This frees you from the necessity of managing or administering the discernment process.

Your role will be to pray for the members of the discernment group regularly; and to provide pastoral care and counsel if that should be necessary. You should meet at least three times with the participant from your congregation during the course of *The Gifts of God for the People of God*. At the conclusion of *The Gifts of God for the People of God* the discernment group will share with you with the results of their discernment.

The Gifts of God for the People of God offers a guide for the deeper exploration and discernment of licensed ministry in the lay order. Should your parishioner continue in the discernment process through *The Gifts of God for the People of God* process, s/he should meet with you at least three times during the course of those group meetings. This will allow you to have a sense of how the process is going and to see that, where appropriate, the Vestry is able to adequately understand and prepare for the possible responsibility of endorsing or contributing to the financial support of your parishioner's "next step in faithfulness" - seeking appropriate education to enter this licensed lay ministry. There are formation program at the Mercer School to help the individual achieve that education.

DISCERNMENT

*From the time these things were first revealed
I had often wanted to know what was our Lord's meaning.
It was more than fifteen years after that I was answered in my spirit's understanding.
'You would know our Lord's meaning in this thing? Know it well.
Love was his meaning. Who showed it you? Love. What did he show you? Love. Why did he show you it?
For love. Hold on to this and you will know and understand love more and more.
But you will not know or learn anything else -- ever!'*
Julian of Norwich: *Revelations Of Divine Love*

You have engaged to enter a process of inquiry and discernment about baptismal ministry vocation. The process concerns both the question of your own vocation and the discernment of the vocation of your sister or brother in Christ. The process of discerning God's desire for our lives is holy work. In taking up this work, we give the gift of our very selves to God. As the Rite One Eucharistic Prayer puts it, "...we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee." To seek out God's leading in our lives is an act of generosity and love toward God. To be a Companion on such a journey is also a gift to God. Whether in your role as a Seeker or as a Companion, come to the journey with an open heart and an open mind.

We are **all** *imago Dei*. Created in the image of God, we participate in God's presence in the world through all the aspects of our lives. The process of "discernment" or "spiritual direction" draws our participation in God up into consciousness. It is more than "feeling" that God is calling us to a certain task or state of life. Discernment relies on bringing our lives, concerns, and questions into the presence of scripture, reason, and prayer. It continues by noticing and reflecting upon the thoughts and feelings that arise in these times of study and

prayer. Then, in personal and group reflection upon what has been noticed, the path forward comes more clearly into focus.

We have identified several fundamental principles which must be part of a process of discernment:

1. Discernment is set within the established, disciplined life of prayer and meditation (especially upon Scripture) of each discerner (and of each discerning community).
2. The predisposing reality of Discernment is freedom (Ignatius' Indifference; 12 steps' detachment)
3. The purpose of Discernment is a progressive discovery of God's will in all the subtlety and graciousness of that will.
4. Discernment seeks for faithfulness, rather than a particular result or outcome.
5. Discernment acknowledges fully the context in which it takes place.
6. Discernment acknowledges fully the human particulars of the discerner's own circumstances (family, physical limitations, gifts and liabilities, temperament, age, etc.) at this moment.
7. Discernment encompasses the whole of the personal journey of the discerner.
8. Discernment embraces, but is not driven by, the emotions, desires, "baggage" of the discerner.
9. Discernment assumes (or commends) the gift of rigorous insight (self-awareness) as essential for sifting, sorting and distinguishing between temptations and invitations.
10. Discernment is dynamic; it attends to the movements, growth and evolution of the discerners, and it encompasses the redemption of those persons or communities.
11. Discernment takes place within the faith community; presupposes trust, complementarity, synergy and candor.
12. The indicators of appropriate Discernment are peace, consensus, felt rightness and courage.

Building discerning communities is work that takes time and patience. We have learned over the last several decades that there are several critical steps that aid in the process of becoming a discerning community.

1. Discerning communities need to have a clear sense of the nature and importance of the baptismal covenant to their life as a Christian people.
2. Discerning communities function through mutually supportive team leadership.
3. Discerning communities encourage members to explore both individually and corporately the nature of their own spiritual gifts and the ways in which these gifts are complementary to one another.
4. Discerning communities need individuals who have developed their gifts for pastoral care and active listening. These skills are vital building blocks upon which discernment skills are developed.
5. Discerning communities benefit greatly from structured group activities that enable members to explore

their personal faith while receiving support, affirmation, and feedback from others.

6. Discerning communities are positive, affirming environments in which learning, experimentation, and risk taking are encouraged, and failure is allowed.
7. Discerning communities are communities that are process oriented, even when they are seeking to accomplish a task.
8. Discerning communities are communities that value the gift of intercessory prayer, where prayer becomes an active part of the decision making process.
9. Discerning communities are communities that value the gifts, talents and offerings of every single member.
10. Discerning communities are communities that care for and care about new members as well as old members.

The LORD shall watch over your going out and your coming in from this time forth for evermore.
Psalm 121:8

SESSION I

HERE IN THE LABYRINTH

IN PREPARATION:

- Prior to the Group's first meeting the Seeker should:
 1. Review and bring update, if necessary the spiritual autobiography that she/he wrote during the course of *Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening*.
 2. Review the CONTEXT section of *Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening*.
 3. Review the three *Discernment Reflections* from *Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening*.
- Prior to the Group's first meeting, the Seeker should distribute copies of her/his updated spiritual autobiography to the Group as well as copies of the *Discernment Reflection* from the CONTEXT section of *Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening*.

READINGS:

... and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." Luke 24:46-49

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:6-8

Read the Baptismal Vows found in *The Book of Common Prayer* on pages 302-305.

Read those portions of the Catechism concerning the mission of the Church and ministry, found in *The Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 855-856.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

In light of the above readings, review and reflect on your spiritual autobiography and on your responses throughout the CONTEXT section of *Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening*.

1. How many of the things/places/people/activities that energize you and give you deep satisfaction are a regular part of your life? Which ones? How often?

7. How did that ministry come to be a part of your life?

QUESTIONS TOWARD DISCERNMENT

1. What was the process like?

2. What emerged for the Seeker during this part of the discernment process?

3. How did you experience the Seeker during this part of the discernment process?

SESSION II

DEVISES & DESIRES

READINGS:

*“How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me? ...”* Psalm 13

*“My, God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest. ...”* Psalm 22

“... When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; ...” Luke 24:28-35

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” Romans 8:26-27

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. When and how often do you pray?

2. How do you pray?

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

The Seeker shares with the Companions her/his observations in response to the following questions:

- Through what activity or relationship in your life do you find the deepest soul satisfaction?

- Why?

As you consider the Seeker's observations,

- How does the Seeker's response fit with what she/he learned in the CONTEXT section of *Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening*?

The Seeker shares with the Companions her/his observations in response to the following questions:

- How many of the things/places/people/activities that energize you and give you deep satisfaction are a regular part of your life?

- Which ones?

- How often?

As you consider the Seeker's responses in the CONTEXT section of *Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening* and in the above *Questions For Reflection*

- Are there commonalities among the places, people, things, or activities?

- Are there similarities in the skills/talents used or the role/s played?

As you consider the Seeker's life in the context of home, church, work, community, play, rest and restoration,

- Where do you see need and/or opportunity to draw upon the Seeker's interests, gifts, and skills in those areas that also energize and nurture the Seeker?

QUESTIONS TOWARD DISCERNMENT

1. What was the process like?

2. What emerged for the Seeker during this part of the discernment process?

3. How did you experience the Seeker during this part of the discernment process?

SESSION III

TRUTH & CONSEQUENCES

IN PREPARATION

If at all possible, invite one or more of your Companions to join you in doing one or more of those activities which feed, energize, and nurture you.

BIBLICAL SOURCES

"...Jesus said to them, "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" They said to him, "Twelve." And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" And they said to him, "Seven." Then he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?" Mark 8:17b-21

"... When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' ... When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' ... Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.' ..." Luke 5:1-11

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Luke 12:32-34

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What would need to happen in order for you to incorporate more of those energizing, nurturing experiences into your life on a regular (or even daily) basis?

What would be required of you?

What would be required of others?

What would be required of God?

2. What might be the consequences for your life of such change/s?

3. What would such change/s mean for your family or household?

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Share with one another the results of your reflections on the above *Questions for Reflection*.
2. However silly, useless, overwhelming, frightening, joyful, or “too good to be true” it may seem to you, what do you believe God may be calling the Seeker to do? To believe? To become?

As you reflect on the following questions, consider your responses in all areas of life: financial, emotional, physical, spiritual, etc. Remember to consider how your responses might change over time (now, in ten years, in old age).

3. What might be the blessings and costs for the Seeker in saying “yes” to God’s present call in her/his life?

3. How did you experience the Seeker during this part of the discernment process?

3. Are any of God's desires for your life emerging now? Which ones?

4. Are any of God's desires for your life not yet visible? Which ones?

5. How might God be calling you to make the reign of Christ manifest?

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Begin this session by sharing with one another what emerged for you in the *Questions for Reflection*.

1. Is a change being called for in the Seeker's life?

2. If so, is the change being called for primarily internal or external?

3. What is the needful thing that must happen in order for the Seeker to take the next step in faithfulness?

QUESTIONS TOWARD DISCERNMENT

1. What was the process like?

2. What emerged for the Seeker during this part of the discernment process?

3. How did you experience the Seeker during this part of the discernment process?

SESSION V

WHAT WE HAVE SEEN & HEARD

BEFORE YOU BEGIN...PRAYER, RECOLLECTION, & REFLECTION

Both the Companions and the Seeker will need to set aside a significant amount of time to prepare for the last session of *The Gifts of God for the People of God*. Settle down in a comfortable and quiet place with your Bible, your *Questions Toward Discernment* responses, any other notes you may have made over the course of the group meetings, pen or pencil, and a blank notepad.

Close your eyes and breathe deeply in a relaxed manner, neither forcing the air in or out. Remember that in Hebrew, *ruah* is translated as Spirit, breath, and life. Let yourself experience God's *ruah* in you as you continue to breathe. When you feel gathered, centered, in a place of stillness and inner peace, ask God to guide your recollections and reflections as you consider the vocation of your brother or sister in Christ.

Session by session, reread your responses to the *Questions Toward Discernment* and then spend some time reflecting on that session and its revelations in the greater light of the sessions taken as a whole. Use your notepad to jot down any insights, images, thoughts, concerns, etc. that arise as you remember and reflect on each session in turn. If a phrase or a passage of scripture comes into your mind, find it in your Bible and spend some time asking how the passage might be related to the discernment work at hand. At all times, try to do this work with an attitude of complete openness to God's possibilities for the Seeker.

Once you have completed your work of recollection and reflection, stop for a moment and notice your inner state. You may want to set the work aside for a day before continuing your preparation work. When you are ready, you may turn to the questions that will guide the group through the process of writing the Discernment Narrative.

Take your time in responding to each of the questions. After you have written your response to each one, stop to notice your inner state. Is there a sense of peace and rightness about what you have written? Is it complete/whole or does something more need to be written?

When you have completed writing your responses to the Discernment Narrative questions, set your papers aside. Think of each member of the *The Gifts of God for the People of God* group and give thanks for their gift to you and to the group.

When you gather for the final meeting, bring along your responses to the Discernment Narrative questions, along with your responses to the *Questions Toward Discernment* and the *The Gifts of God for the People of God* notebook. The group's facilitator may find it helpful to use newsprint as a means of capturing the consensus or divergence of the group as you move through each of the Discernment Narrative questions in turn.

Following this meeting, the facilitator will type up one final copy of the Discernment Narrative. The Discernment Narrative will be given to the Seeker within two weeks of the group's final meeting. She/he will be responsible for providing future copies of the Discernment Narrative, as may be required, by the clergy in charge of the congregation, Vestry, DCOM-DP, or the Bishop.

Since the *The Gifts of God for the People of God* group disbands following the writing of the Discernment Narrative, the group needs to be intentional about bringing a sense of closure to the group and its work. Possibilities include sharing a simple meal together, perhaps with a Eucharist. There should also be an opportunity for each member of the group to say "thank you" to each other member of the group for the gift of their companionship throughout the discernment process.

6. Describe the Seeker's spiritual life and relationship with Christ; its maturity, depth, change over time, discipline (its form, content, and "personality"). **Please be specific.**

7. Are there other things you would like to report?

8. What does the Group believe are next steps in faithfulness for the Seeker?

WHAT NEXT?

At the conclusion of this series of discernment sessions you should share with the priest of your congregation the results of this process. If a call to any particular licensed a lay ministry was discerned that choice should clearly be shared with your priest. It is then up to the priest of your congregation to make sure you are prepared appropriately to undertake that ministry.

The Diocese of Long Island through the Mercer School of Theology has a program that offers many of the courses needed for the various licensed ministries that the Church lifts up as examples of lay ministry leadership. Your priest should contact the Director of the Mercer School to enroll you in the appropriate set of classes that will prepare you to carry on the ministry God has given you to do in the name of Jesus Christ.

If the Mercer School does not presently offer course work in the area you would like to pursue the school is set up in such a way that those courses can be developed and trained faculty can be called upon to offer the courses you will need.

Once the course work is completed the Diocese will offer the appropriate license. In some cases where a whole year or more are required for the license the Mercer School will also offer a Certificate in that Ministry to the individual who successfully completes the required work.

Be proactive and call the Mercer School at 516-248-4800 ext. 40 or 37 to receive course offerings in your particular area. You can also access this information through the web link for the Mercer School of Theology on the Diocesan Website: www.dioceseli.org

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