



ANGLICAN MISSION IN THE AMERICAS

Department of Leadership Development

Aspirant Discernment Guide

Overview

Aspirant Discernment is the process the church goes through to confirm or refute a person's call to ordained ministry within the Anglican Mission. This process most often takes place within a local parish where the aspirant is known and the fruit of their life and ministry can be best evaluated. In some situations this discernment may take place in a missionary network or by a Bishop.

Through prayer, a series of conversations and under the direction of the Holy Spirit the church seeks to verify an evident call to ordained ministry. We see this type of confirmation throughout scripture. Samuel anointed David at the leading of the Holy Spirit in I Samuel 16; in Acts 6 we read of 7 men being chosen for ministry and Paul giving instruction to appoint elders in Titus 1:5ff. The desired outcome is expressed best by the words of Acts 15:28, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us".

Those assigned to the discernment process have a twofold responsibility. First, they are to discern if the person is called to ordained ministry. Second, they are to support the individual in the discernment process through prayer, counsel, and honest reflection on gifting, temperament and ability.

It is important that those involved in the discernment process recognize that some aspirants may not be confirmed in the process. The commitment to be open to that possible outcome is important. God's words to Samuel in I Samuel 16 serve as a guide; "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." The committee should seek to know the mind of Christ in regard to the individual's call to ordained ministry with the Anglican Mission in the Americas.

In the case of a parish discernment committee, it is recommended that they commit to meet with the aspirant between 3-6 times over the course of 3-6 months with opportunities for the committee to have honest and open conversation after each meeting. The format of the meetings should be conversational and provide the aspirant with open ended questions that give the committee a good feel and understanding of the aspirant's heart and mind on a particular topic.

After sufficient time to meet with the aspirant and discern the mind of the Lord, (typically no more than 6 months.) the committee should end the interview process and make a recommendation to the Rector, Network Leader or other appropriate person. A copy of the recommendation should be sent to the Department of Leadership Development. In their recommendation they may confirm or refute the aspirants call to ordained ministry. In either case they should supply sufficient written response to validate their findings.

Preparation for Ministry

It is important to understand that God typically has aspirants in a shaping process as He prepares them for ministry. The following information and chart show typical components of that process. While an aspirant may not have gone through each of these, they are none the less fairly typical and are helpful in identifying God’s hand at work in the aspirant.

Most younger emerging leaders in their initial exuberance for ministry feel they are accomplishing much. But in fact, God is doing much more in them than through them. The first years in ministry are tremendous learning years for a young leader who is sensitive to God’s working in his/her life. God works on character first, even before a leader moves into full time leadership. Table 1 lists four major shaping processes dealing with character and four major shaping processes dealing with early ministry.¹

Table 1. Early Shaping Processes Identified and Defined

Type	Name	Explanation/ Biblical Example
Character	Integrity Check	A shaping process to test heart intent and consistency of inner beliefs and outward practice. / Daniel 1:3,4.
Character	Obedience Check	A shaping process to test a leader’s will for obedience to God. / See Abraham, Genesis 22.
Character	Word Check	A shaping process to test a leader’s ability to hear from God. / See 1 Samuel 3.
Character	Ministry Task	A shaping process to test a leader’s faithfulness in performing ministry. / See Titus, Corinth trip (references in both 1,2Co).
Foundational Ministry	Leadership Committal	A shaping process, part of Guidance, to recruit a leader into ministry and to continue to engage that leader along the ministry path destined for him/her. / See Paul, Acts 9, 22, 26.
Foundational Ministry	Authority Insights	A shaping process to help leaders learn how to deal with leaders over them and folks under them. / See Ac 13 Barnabas and Paul.
Foundational Ministry	Giftedness Discovery	A shaping process in which a leader learns about natural abilities, acquired skills, and spiritual gifts that God wants to use through that leader./ See Phillip, Acts 8.
Long Term Ministry	Guidance	A shaping process in which God intervenes in the life of a leader at critical points to direct that leader along the ministry path destined for him/her. / See Paul, Acts 16.

¹ Dr. J. Robert Clinton. “God’s Shaping Process with Leaders.” J. Robert Clinton Institute, 2007.

Discussion Questions

Sovereign Foundations

- By way of introduction tell us about yourself, your family situation, educational background, church experience, etc.
- How would you describe your childhood and adolescence? How would you describe your understanding of God in this period of your life?
- What was the single most shaping event of your childhood or adolescence?
- Describe your relationship and walk with Jesus Christ. At what point did you begin to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ? How has that relationship grown and developed over the years?
- At what point did you begin to realize that you might be “called” to ordained ministry? Describe how you came to that awareness. Was it through a single event, a series of events or a general growing awareness?
- How do you seek to keep your relationship with Jesus Christ vibrant and growing? What have been the obstacles and struggles in your walk with Christ?
- What has been the most significant spiritual growth or development you have experienced in the last year?

Character Development

- Describe a time when your integrity was put to the test? How did you respond to the challenge? On what basis did you choose your response? Do you think you responded in a biblical or Christ-like manner?
- Describe a time when you feel that you were tested in your obedience to God. How did you respond? On what basis did you choose your response?
- Have you ever had a time in which you believed that God was giving you direction? Describe that experience? What brought you to conclude it was God? What was your response?
- Give an example of a time when you were given a ministry task and you successfully completed it. Have you ever been given a ministry task that you did not complete? If so, for what reason?
- Have you ever had the opportunity to faithfully serve under another person in ministry? What about that was difficult? What about that was easy? How would you describe the experience?

Giftedness and Spiritual Maturity

- What do you believe are spiritual gifts? How have you had an opportunity to use them? Have you ever had others confirm those areas of giftedness?
- How would you describe your devotional life? To what degree have you spent time reading and studying the Bible on your own? What portions of Scripture have been particularly meaningful or impactful on your spiritual formation?
- In what way do you consider yourself a worshiper? Describe what that means and how that looks to you.
- What brings you joy in your life? Have you ever experienced a time in which you felt God took pleasure in you? If so, describe that?

Call to Holy Orders

- Why are you seeking Holy Orders?
- To the best of your knowledge, how would you describe the difference between a Deacon and a Priest?
- Which order of ministry do you feel called to, Deacon or Priest (Presbyter)?
- What has led you to seek ordination with the Anglican Mission?
- If you were unable to be ordained with the Anglican Mission what effect would that have on your involvement in ministry?
- If you are ordained where do you see yourself in five years?