

Section 1

The Ministry of the Laity

Q. What is the ministry of the laity?

A. The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him 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. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 855)

Discerning the Call to Lay Ministry

In our baptism, we all become ministers in Christ's Church. The word "minister" is the English translation of the Greek word "diakonos" which refers to those who serve. A minister of Christ is literally one who is willing to serve. Most of us remain as laypersons to carry out varied ministries within the church and a host of ministries in and to the world. Unlike the portions of this handbook that deal with preparation for the ordained ministry, this section will outline a somewhat less structured treatment of discerning our call to ministry as lay persons. Just because lay persons are not required to carry out all of the complex steps required of those pursuing holy orders does not mean that the road to discernment is any less important, nor should it be embarked upon with any less reverence or sense of purpose. The discerning of one's role in the mission and ministry of God's church requires the same prayerful, serious self-examination and openness to God's call required of those seeking ordination. There are true stories of persons entering the discernment process for a perceived call to ordination who, at the completion of the process, found their call was for lay ministry in and to the world rather than an ordained ministry. *The goal of discernment, whether individual or congregational, is to be still and listen for the voice and the will of God. It is hoped that every congregation in the diocese will provide opportunities for members to engage in discernment of their ministries.*

How do I discover God's will for me?

A Theology of the Ministry of Lay Persons

The ministry of all the baptized is the primary expression of God's transforming love in the world. As our Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer says, *The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and His Church; to bear witness to Him wherever they may be; and according to the gifts given them, to carry on the work of reconciliation in the*

The Catechism: we are called to represent Christ....

world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church. (p. 855) By listing the ministry of laypersons first, the Catechism gives clear emphasis to this ministry as the frontline of Christian ministry in the world.

The dynamic of lay ministry is outward—a movement to the world that engages the day-to-day struggles of the world around us. Every member has a call to ministry as Christ’s representative in his or her daily life. Our Diocesan Goals empower us to share our joy in Christ as a way of life, equip us to develop people and their gifts, and enrich us to reach out beyond ourselves; they are fitting elaborations of this understanding of ministry.

What we learn through our participation in the regular worship of our Church community is how the biblical narrative views all of life as ministry. We learn that

The Bible: God’s love is the driving force in our ministries.

God showers us with an extravagant and abundant redemptive grace—the love and blessing that shines on us from all of creation, and in the communities and families that nurture us in the healing and reconciling love of God. In our baptism, we are called to

respond to this great love with a life of service in Christ’s name—a life of ministry. Our response to Jesus’ call to follow him shapes the way we live our lives and practice our vocations.

In his parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1 -23,) Jesus shared the startling reality of God’s abundant love. God scatters the word—God’s grace, blessing and love—upon everyone. A practical farmer would recognize that good seed is rare and plant it only in fertile soil where he would have the best chance of a bountiful harvest. In contrast to the farmer whose seed is scarce, God’s grace is so abundant that it can be broadcast indiscriminately over all of creation: on the path, among the stones, with the weeds and, perhaps last of all, in good soil. God will not ration grace, even if the chance of a good harvest is slim. God seeks to penetrate every heart with love.

From time to time we find ourselves warmed by an awareness of the abundance of God’s love and our hearts stir within. God reaches out to us in love, and we extend our hands to respond with thanksgiving. This response to God is faith. While Jesus calls us to be childlike in our faith, we acknowledge that our faith will wax and wane, grow and change throughout the journey of our lives. Saint Paul describes this as a journey in which we are always moving closer to God, and in so doing, growing in faith, hope and love. (1 Cor. 13)

Saint Paul also reminds us the natural outgrowth of our faith is love—love the verb.

Faith is not passive. Faith urges a response. Faith without action is incomplete. James encourages us to express and demonstrate our faith by taking up God’s work of compassion and love in the world. (James 2:14 – 17) God fills us with the light of love, a light that we must not

Faith without action is incomplete.

hide—a love that must be active. We know God’s love through Jesus, and Jesus calls us to make God’s transforming love visible by the good works that God has prepared for us to do in the world around us. This is our ministry.

Ministry is simply the work we do and the action we take when serving others in the power of God’s love. Saint Paul asserts that in accepting the grace of God, we embrace a new way of life, a central feature of which is ministry—the good works that God has prepared for us. (Eph. 2:10) Although ministry may take many forms, the goal is: *To restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ*, (BCP p.855) by sharing the reconciling and healing love of God with all beings, so they too are invited to live into the Good News of the Gospel. Jesus gives some specific examples: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit the prisoner. More broadly, Jesus calls us to show compassion and to respond to the material and relational needs of those whom we encounter. In so doing, we join in God’s mission to radically transform the kingdom of this world into a kingdom of love.

This goal may seem daunting, particularly in the modern world where business, cares and responsibilities tempt us away from our calling as ministers of God’s love. But God has provided each of us with tools for the work to which we are called. Along with the grace we have received, God has infused us with gifts to help us bring God’s healing and reconciling love to the world—to the public square, to our neighborhoods, through our daily work, our families and all of our relationships. Saint Paul identifies some of these gifts: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, speaking and interpreting tongues, evangelism, pastoral care, and teaching. (Rom 12:6-8; I Cor. 12:27-28; Eph. 4:11-12) In this global and instant communication world, laypersons are at the forefront of re-interpreting these gifts. The touchstone is that our gifts become spiritual when we use them for the common good rather than simply for our own gain or aggrandizement. When used to bring healing and reconciliation, our gifts become extensions of God, imbued with the power to transform.

We are all given gifts to use as we offer Christ’s compassion to the world.

God calls each of us into ministry, perhaps in a dramatic way or perhaps in a whisper. The Church recognizes we cannot respond fully to this call without tools and practical guidance. To empower all of the baptized as ministers, the Church is called to equip and acknowledge the gifts we bring to our lives in ministry. In the

Episcopal tradition, we recognize four kinds of ministry: Lay, Deacon, Priest and Bishop. Each has its own role and responsibilities within the church and wider world. At our baptism, by water and the Holy Spirit, we are anointed for our

The Church’s role is to equip and empower us to use our gifts.

vocation as Christian ministers with holy oil. Note again that the Laity is mentioned first among those called to ministry. Laity is the largest segment of our membership that is called specifically to saturate the world in God's love. The sequence of charges for lay ministry in our Catechism is not accidental. As members of the Laity, we are called to minister wherever we are, foremost in the world where we live our lives, have our vocation and serve our communities; secondarily, the Laity work within the Church.

Our Baptismal Covenant provides a more specific blueprint with which to pattern our ministry. During our baptism—what some have called the primary ordination—we vow to *seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving (our) neighbors as (ourselves), (and) to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.* (BCP p. 305) Against this we can easily measure the work we are called to do in the world. When we have feasted at the Lord's table, we acknowledge, with gratitude, that God welcomes us into unity with Christ. In response to this welcome, we ask for strength to love and serve God. The form that our service takes will be as varied and individual as each one of us. When we open ourselves to the love of God through the Holy Spirit, the details of our unique ministries grow naturally from our faith. Therefore, in responding to our call, we are invited by the Church into prayerful and thoughtful discernment of our gifts and ministry. This takes place in private meditation and in dialog with trusted guides and in community. The only requirement is to remain open to God's call, and ready to put our gifts to work transforming the world in the image of love.

Models for Discerning Gifts of Ministry

Discernment, by definition elsewhere in this manual, is the deliberate, prayerful and self-conscious seeking of God's will for our lives. It is not limited to those seeking

Begin by listening to the Spirit of God in community.

Holy Orders, but is a tool for anyone desiring to become more fully engaged in the life and work of Christ's Church in the world. Engagement in discernment, whether for ordination or for lay ministry (either individual or congregational), must be undertaken in community. It is in collectively listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit that we are best able to perceive the answer to *what's next for me?* free from our own individual pre-conceived ideas about what God may or may not be saying to us. The discernment group should consist of 3 – 5 persons (perhaps suggested by the rector or an established Parish Discernment Committee) as well as the person seeking clarification of his/her call.

Opening one's self to the presence of the Spirit, discerning the movement of the Spirit in one's life, seeking to hear the call to ministry – vocational or lay, is nothing

less than the desire to know the answer to that ever-present questions – *why am I here? What is my purpose in life? How can I serve? How does my life and work make the world a better place? How is my life serving the Common Good?* On the most fundamental level, our seeking the Holy through prayer, discernment, gathering in community, as well as the need to withdraw into silence, expresses our heart's desire to connect with and listen to God. As children of God, we are enlivened with that Holy Energy to do the work of bringing forth God's vision of the Kingdom – God's dream, which is our dream, if we dare to dream that big.

Jesus made clear the nature of our charge – to love God with our whole heart, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Envisioning and embracing God's big dream of a planet running on the energy of Love ignites that compassion with which we, as agents of that Love, can effect change and movement toward the peaceable Kingdom. We will recognize the alignment of God's dream with one's own call to ministry by the joy that springs up within, as the very thought is

The discernment group supports with prayer and confidentiality.

revealed in the heart and mind of the discerner, and as is reflected by the discernment group that surrounds him or her. A sense of duty or obligation without that attendant deep sense of joy and alignment is not a call. Here is where some honest soul-searching begins, and where the group can provide some clear reflection.

The process of discerning one's call to ministry is a holy journey to be facilitated by a group of like-minded seekers and a trained leader or mentor who treats the discerning person's inquiry with confidentiality. The prayer of this group opens their hearts and minds, inviting a growing awareness of the movement of the Holy One in the lives of each member, as well as the corporate life of the group in session.

Integrating one's call to be the Body of Christ in the world, in all aspects of our lives, requires that we examine who we are now and who we would like to become. In effect, we are inviting the Spirit to enable us to live into the best self that God created us to be, one that is Christ-like in nature. As children of God, why would we ask for or expect anything less? As we awaken to the understanding that this gift is waiting for us, we may experience a deep sense of humility as peace, joy, and gratitude wash over us. This profound moment of grace can generate a new understanding that we can effect a change in every aspect of our interaction with others. A shift in our perception of what is needed of us in order to be the Body of Christ in both our church community and in the world around us will be manifest. As we grow to embrace this shift in us, we will recognize that we have been empowered to sanctify even the most mundane or ordinary tasks as God's work. This can be the result of the experience of participating in a discernment group, surrounded by a group of folks who are

The end of the journey is joyous service.

listening and watching for the presence of the Spirit in the life of each seeker of guidance.

So, inventorying one's gifts should flow naturally and organically from the discernment group experience. Indeed, it is where the Source of that stream may be revealed.

An outline of a suggested group discernment process can be found in Appendix C.

Resources for the support of lay ministry:

1. Education/Formation

- **Education for Ministry** – a four-year program of theological education and reflection on the practice of faith.
<http://efm.episcopalrochester.org/>
- **Living the Questions** a source of curriculum and media for both seekers and "church alumni/ae" convinced that Christianity still has relevance in the 21st Century.
<http://www.livingthequestions.com/xcart/home.php>
- **Via Media** - is video enhanced curricula designed to proclaim the Good News of God in Christ Jesus and to present the Episcopal Church in a contemporary context.
<http://www.everyvoice.net/html/products/products.htm>
- **The Kerygma Program** – A program designed to facilitate the study of the Bible in the church, which is informed by the following principles:
 1. The biblical story provides the essential foundation of adult Christian education.
 2. The interpretation of biblical materials should take place in the context of the whole canon.
 3. The best tools of critical scholarship should be utilized in such interpretation.
 4. Lay people are willing and able to participate in serious study of the Bible.
 5. The best teaching strategies actively involve adults in their own learning.
 6. The purpose of Bible study in the church is to discern God's word for the contemporary community of faith.
http://www.kerygma.com/mainpages/About_us.html
- **Your Shape for God's Service** aims to enable church members to understand the unique "shape" God has made them, the gifts he has given them and how he might want to use them. This is so that God's Kingdom may be built up as each person finds the ministry to which God is calling them in the Church and in the world. This is a CD program offering pdf files for six sessions. It is from the UK and can be obtained from the Canon

for Vocational and Leadership Development.

- **The Story** - In this six-session video study, pastor and bestselling author Max Lucado reveals how your life story is part of a grand, overarching narrative, helping you see between the lines to witness God's hand at work. With contemporary anecdotes and New Testament stories, *God's Story, Your Story* traces the Savior's unchanging, loving pursuit of you through the chaos of life. <http://www.thestory.com/Store/ProductDetail.aspx?pid=549ADEC1F9ECB7D8> - overview

2. Discernment of Gifts

The world in which we live is in many ways radically different from the world of Jesus and the apostles. Conversely, in some fundamental ways, it has changed very little. There are still the poor, the hungry, the sick, the social outcasts and the disenfranchised, to name a few examples. Our call to ministry invites us to focus on serving those most in need of God's love and our compassion, understanding and assistance. The tools or gifts we bring to bear in this work will help guide us to those most likely to benefit from our efforts. Our ministry will likely be revealed at the point where our passion, our gifts and the world's needs coincide. Any process of discernment requires a serious, prayerful examination of each of these individual components.

An inventory of gifts is a vital component of the discernment process and should be undertaken, as with any other area of the process, prayerfully and in community. The purpose of this section is not to list all of the possible gifts which could be identified for ministry, but rather to begin thinking about who we are, what skills, talents or gifts we possess, and how they might be used to bring the transformative power of Christ's love to the world in which we live. Often, one can be unaware of a talent or gift that he/she possesses though it may be obvious to others. We may be familiar with the gifts of the spirit as described in I Corinthians 12:4 – 11 (*wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues and interpretation*) and those referred to in Ephesians 4:11 (*apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers.*) Any inventory ought to include an assessment of those gifts in our own lives. The makeup of the modern world and its needs, however, may lead to the identification of other individual skills, talents or gifts which could inform an effective personal ministry. These other gifts can be separated into two categories, 'Vocational' and perhaps 'Personal' gifts.

Vocational gifts. These are our professional, career or job related gifts or talents. What would our day-to-day occupation look like if we

viewed our work as ministry? It is easy to see how health care workers could identify what they do as ministry. How, on the other hand, could an architect, or building contractor, or retail merchant, or janitor, or assembly line worker, or software engineer, or a member of our armed forces, see their work as ministry? The possibilities are as varied as are the occupations. The career or occupation itself might be considered or just one facet of the job could be identified as a channel for outreach. If each of us prayerfully considered how, in our day to day work, we could be a vehicle for bringing God's love to those we encounter, what effect could that have on the world, on the lives we touch or on ourselves? The Shakers operated under the credo of 'Hands to work, hearts to God'. Every task, however menial, was considered a gift to God and for the common good. We would do well to adopt a similar attitude.

Personal gifts are those skill sets, talents and/or personal attributes that constitute the rest of the resource pool of the inventory. Some of these may be talents or attributes that can be applied as easily to both the vocational and the non-vocational arenas and some may be totally separate and related to those interests or activities that might constitute a hobby or an avocation. These gifts may be as wide ranging as organizational skills, sewing, gardening, artistic ability, musical talent or even reading. The list of possibilities is endless. In the identification of these gifts, thinking 'outside the box' should be highly encouraged. Nothing should be exempt from consideration. Any gift, however small or seemingly insignificant, used in service to God is valuable. Just as there are no unimportant ministries, there are no unimportant gifts.

In compiling an inventory of gifts for ministry, the group ought to consider prayerfully the gifts of each of the members. It is a good exercise to seek to identify skills, gifts and talents in others as a tool to assist in self-examination and assessment. As the process unfolds, avenues for service and ministry may be revealed. Just because a gift is identified doesn't mean our path to ministry lies along those lines. The discernment process is designed to identify our gifts and interests, reveal the needs of the world around us, and by listening, discovering where God is calling us. It is a process that is at once challenging, fun and revelatory.

Here are some resources to assist you to begin this journey of discovery. While you may begin this journey in personal reflection the role of the community is central to the confirmation of these gifts.

- **Gifts Inventory** - A very useful resource is the Self-Assessment Inventory created by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and found at: <http://www.elca.org/en/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices/Assessment-Tools> .

3. Training/Workshop Opportunities

- **Disciples of Christ in Community** – a congregation-based Christian formation program for adults that builds community while encouraging individual spiritual growth. It offers a step-by-step journey into the heart and soul of Christianity. Originally hosted at the National Cathedral, the program can now be obtained on-line from Trinity Episcopal Church, New Orleans, <http://www.trinitynola.com/docc>
- **Seeing my Vocation as a Response to God** – In our fast-paced, noisy, and restless world, it is no wonder many people are looking for some chances to slow the pace, to see the world and their daily work more fully, and to understand the conflicts that emerge in the workplace and in their own lives with more clarity. These sessions are/have been created as a means of bringing people together in a peaceful and prayer-filled environment where we will look at the work we do and find a way—as teachers, doctors, factory workers, housekeepers, crossing guards—to see our work as truly a vocation, an offering to God. *For more information please contact Dave Galleher at <mailto:DGALLEHER@rochester.rr.com>*
- **The Bible Challenge** -Most vibrant and growing churches share one thing in common – they have a strong commitment to teaching and reading the Bible. There is a vast difference between attending church and listening to a portion of the Bible being read aloud and actually reading the Bible on your own. Understanding how the entire Word of God coheres and what God is saying to you daily through Holy Scripture is a transformational experience. It also makes worship come more alive. It is like the difference between riding a car as a passenger and not paying close attention to the route being taken versus driving the car and learning the roads that get you to your destination. <http://thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org/what-is-the-bible-challenge/>

4. Liturgical Suggestions

- Hold a Diocesan wide “Ministry Sunday” when the primary focus of the liturgy is of the ministry of all the baptized.
- Include different vocations in the Prayers of the People.
- Adapt the Offertory to include the offering of our daily work and vocations, e.g. invite members of the congregation to complete a card that says, “In thanksgiving to God I offer my work as a _____ to the glory of God.”

- Have Rector/Priest-in-Charge hold a Eucharist at the end of the discernment journey and plan to celebrate this in a regular Sunday morning service.

5. Helpful brochures/publications by the Committee on the Laity *(to be updated regularly)*

- We are working on a welcoming brochure that assists people to identify ways in which they might access/or gain a point of entry into “life as ministry” through their local church.

6. Books that members have found helpful in connecting ministry and daily life and work:

Banks, R. (1993). Faith Goes to Work: Reflections from the Marketplace. Washington, DC, Alban Institute.

While this book is limited to conversations around "white collar" workers it succeeds in laying a foundation for the connection between God's work and ours by exploring how to live out our discipleship in the work place. Each chapter includes a Questions for Discussion section.

Childs, J. M., Jr. (1995). Ethics in Business, Faith at Work. Minneapolis, Fortress.

The author is concerned to discover ways in which values shaped in the faith community can be applied in the work situation. He wants to move the conversation beyond a dualism which sees a radical separation between faith based values and ethics in business to one of a dialogue where Christians in the work place have a legitimate and important voice in shaping business practices.

Farnham, Suzanne G., Gill, Joseph P., McLean, R. Taylor, Ward, Susan M. Listening Hearts. Harrisburg: Morehouse Barlow, 2003 revised edition.

Farnham, Suzanne G., Hull, Stephanie A., McLean, R. Taylor. Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations. Harrisburg: Morehouse Barlow, 1999.

These two books offer brief introductions to the practice of discernment and the role of discernment groups. The first book sets out a simple description of discernment and the underlying spiritual foundations. In addition to extensive source notes, a useful annotated bibliography is included. The second offers practical assistance in setting up a group for discernment. *They are the currently required reading for local discernment groups in the diocese.*

Forrester, W. R. (1953). Christian Vocation: Studies in Faith and Work. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.

How can we re-discover the sense of vocation in our daily work? By tracing the history of the sense of calling Forrester offers a counter to the post-industrial world of work simply as a means of production.

Guder, D. L. (2005). "Worthy Living: Work and Witness from the Perspective of Missional Church Theology." Word & World 25:4(Fall 2005): 424-432.

If Christendom is dead, witness is not merely one of several things Christians are called to do; it is the definition of being Christian. Our work is our witness, so building a lay apostolate merits our full attention.

http://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/25-4_Work_and_Witness/25-4_Guder.pdf.

L'Engle, Madeleine, (1972). A Circle of Quiet, New York, Harper.

(1974) The Summer of the Great-Grandmother, New York, Harper.

(1984) The Irrational Season, New York, Harper

(1989) Two-Part Invention: The Story of a Marriage, New York, Harper

Lucado, M. (2010). Outlive Your Life: You Were Made to Make a Difference. Nashville, Thomas Nelson.

The author outlines, in very fundamental and easy to understand ways, how we can impact our world in our daily lives and work. These simple acts of kindness and compassion can have a ripple effect far beyond the present situation and impact many more lives than the one with which one is currently engaged.

Palmer, P. J. (2000). Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

In this intensely personal work the author wants to move our sense of vocation from a call that comes from outside to a call that "is a gift to be received." By exploring his own struggles with teaching and the institutions in which he worked he came to recognize the elemental part of all discernment is being true to oneself and the God who calls us into fullness of life in whatever calling we follow.

Portaro, S. (2008). Transforming Vocation. New York, Church Publishing, Inc.

Sam Portaro was for many years the chaplain to the University of Chicago. In this ministry he enabled many to discover their gifts and exercise their ministries. In this book he grounds all vocational awareness in the account of the Creator who invites all of creation to come into the fullness of being. All vocation, he says, "is grounded in a relationship of loving mutuality set within a context of "letting be"--respecting each and every partner" in the conversation. (38) Sam writes as a gay man who in his own journey has experienced in profound ways God's "letting be" and in doing so has written a book with profound insight to the processes of vocational discernment applicable to both individual and congregational discernment.

Stevens, R. P. (2012). Work that Matters: Lessons from Scripture. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans.

By exploring several biblical narratives the author teases out a number of insights into the way in which faith shapes how we work and live into the promise of God's unfolding purpose of renewing all of creation.

Thompsett, F. H. (1993). Courageous Incarnation : In Intimacy, Work, Childhood, and Aging.

Thompsett explores a central doctrine of the Anglican tradition, the Incarnation by which God enters the material world of humankind and in this way sanctifies all forms of work and labor.

Trumbauer, Jean M., (1999). Created and Called: Discovering Our Gifts for Abundant Living.

Celebrate the great diversity of gifts among members of your congregation with *Created and Called: Discovering Our Gifts for Abundant Living*, a new, comprehensive approach to gifts-based ministry. Explore the reality of the interrelationship between God's creation in us. Discover the mission and ministry we do both as individuals and as a community of faith.

Volf, M. (1991, 2001). Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work. Eugene, Wipf and Stock Publishers.

For those who want to delve deep into the theology of work Volf traces worker alienation from both the writings of Karl Marx and Adam Smith and the socioeconomic systems to which they gave birth. In contrast he considers how in God's providence it is the gift of the Spirit that enables us to live into work that cooperates with God in the preservation and transformation of the world.

Wuthnow, R. (1996). Poor Richard's Principle: Rediscovering the American Dream Through the Moral Dimension of Work, Business, and Money. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

In this important work the author traces current dissatisfactions with the untrammelled practices of consumer capitalism and the deeply held suspicion that human worth is more than possessions and economic success.

7. Web resources:

Faith at Work – founded by an Episcopal Priest, Samuel Shoemaker, in 1929 and has now evolved into an ecumenical network of people who understand that our primary ministry is in the work place. <http://www.faith-at-work.net/About.aspx>

Faith & Work Initiative -- The study of religion often investigates beliefs, rituals, and practices, and how they manifest themselves in various spheres of life. <http://www.princeton.edu/csr/current-research/faith-and-work/>