



Vocations Process Updates

with the Rev. Dr. Sarah Kye Price, Vocations Minister

Clergy Call February 2024

Background

- We all bring our own stories of “The Process” into our work with those experiencing God’s call in their lives.
- We are balancing pastoral response, informed by our own experience and canonical process as lived out in the unique setting of our diocese.
- The Diocese of Virginia is large and has a correspondingly large vocations process (but we still follow the Canons!)
- We’ve made some adjustments to our Vocations Process to be canonically adherent while also respecting the unique flow and composition of our Diocese of Virginia structure.
- Everything we will talk about today has been discussed with the various Committees involved, as well as at our joint Bishop’s Office, Standing Committee and Commission on Ministry retreat held on January 27.

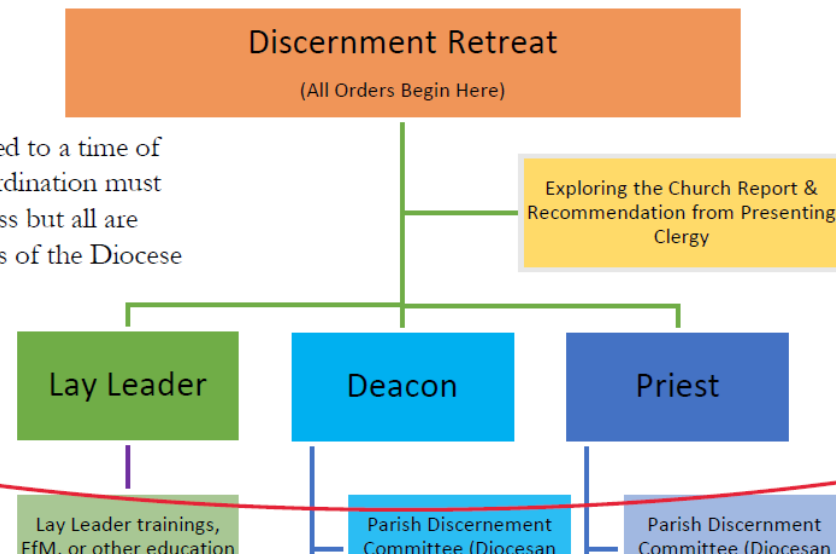


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Everything starts with Discernment (and Discernment never ends!)

Vocations Process Flow Chart

Following the discernment retreat, all are encouraged to a time of prayer and reflection. Those who are discerning Ordination must complete the Exploring the Church formal process but all are encouraged to use this time to expand their awareness of the Diocese and the wider Church



Vocational Process
Terms and Titles

Discernment –
“Seeker”

Highlights – Discernment Processes

- **Diocesan Discernment Retreats** are the first step for all seekers discerning God’s call in their lives (lay leaders, deacons, priests) and are scheduled 3 times/year.
- **Exploring the Church** is now recommended for all orders of ministry and should be focused on seeing/exploring the range of worshipping communities and ministries in our diocese.
 - Structured process for diaconate and priesthood; may be topically targeted for lay ministry
- **Meeting with COM Committees during Exploring the Church:** Those discerning for the diaconate will meet informally with the Committee on Diaconate; those discerning for priesthood will meet informally with the Committee on Priesthood. This takes place BEFORE a parish discernment committee is formed
- **The Exploring the Church Report** should be shared with the Presenting Priest AND the Vocations Minister for feedback before a Parish Discernment Committee is formed
- **Parish/Diocesan Discernment Committee:** Discernment for the Diaconate and Priesthood require a Diocesan Facilitated Parish Discernment Committee; this is an optional (but still recommended!) step for discernment of call to lay ministry. PDC’s will form, train and meet over several months.



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Raising up Lay Ministry

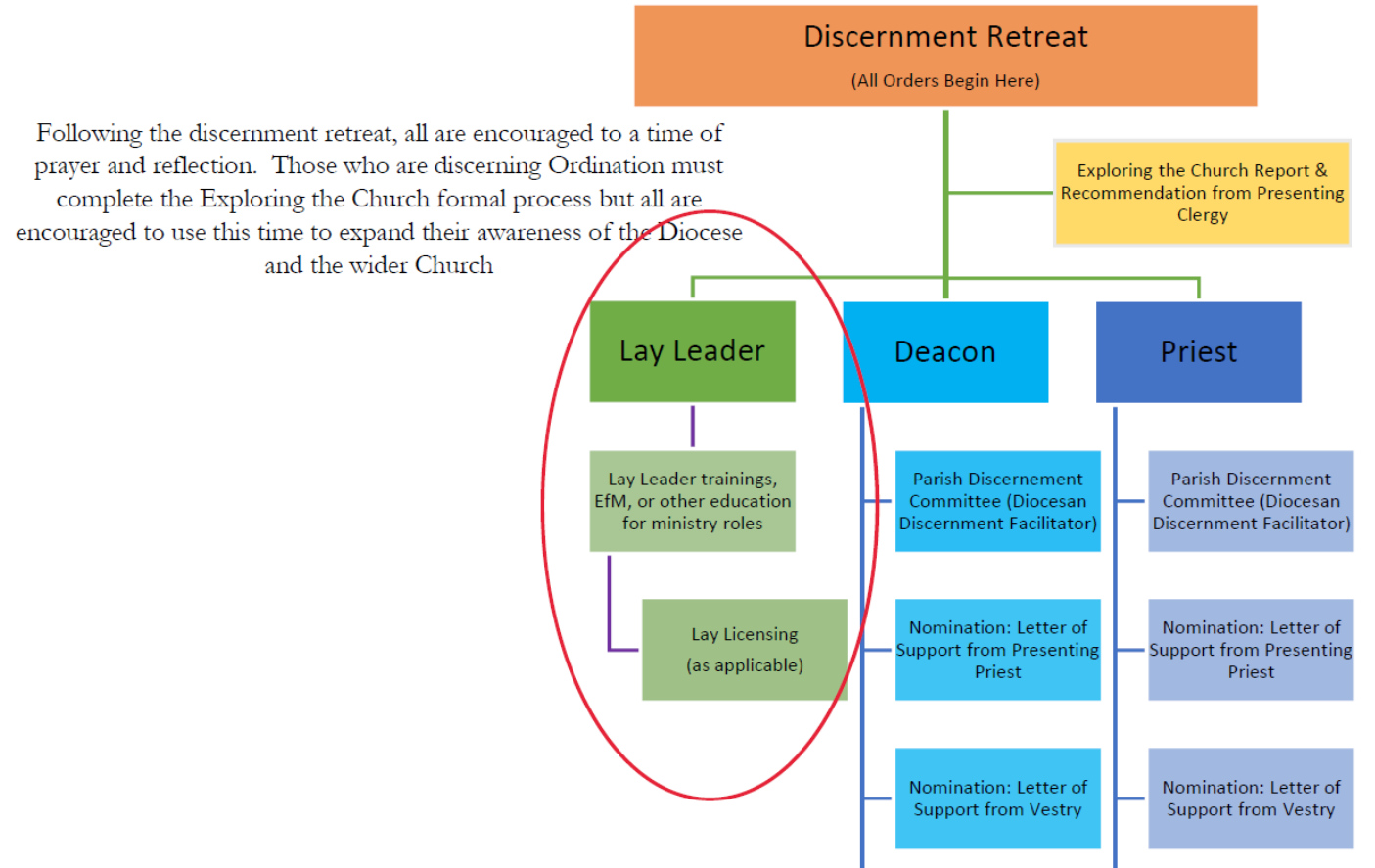
Lay Leadership is a vital call to ministry much needed in the church!

While canonical vocations processes apply specifically to formation for Holy Orders, we want to lift up opportunities among all the baptized!



Diocesan Discipleship ministries can be a support for lay leadership development

Vocations Process Flow Chart



Next Steps for Discerning Holy Orders

- Following the PDC, the **Seeker** is responsible for initiating a meeting with the Presenting Priest. The Diocesan Facilitator contacts the Vocations Minister to convey that the committee has completed their work.
- If the PDC process reveals to the Seeker a continued call to discern ministry as a deacon or priest, then the Seeker, presenting priest and congregation can discern together the appropriateness and timing for Nomination.
- Narrative Guidelines are provided along with the flow chart to walk Presenting Priests through both Discernment and Nomination processes.
 - Stay tuned for Discernment Reflection guidelines for Seekers/Presenting Priests



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Nomination

Canonical Steps for Deacons and Priests

You may be wondering:
Can the Seeker start applying to seminary or St. Phoebe School while this is happening?

Answer:
NOT YET!!

Diaconate

Nomination: Letter of Support from Presenting Priest

Nomination: Letter of Support from Vestry

Application for Postulancy/COD Contact Assigned

Postulancy Interviews with Committee on Diaconate and Bishop

Priesthood

Nomination: Letter of Support from Presenting Priest

Nomination: Letter of Support from Vestry

Application for Postulancy/COP Contact Assigned

Postulancy Interviews with Committee on Priesthood and Bishop

Note: there is a Nomination form on the new website with these reminders! Submit the form, your letter and the Vestry's letter to the Vocations Minister

Highlights – Nomination Processes

- Nomination is a separately defined (and very important!) step in the Vocations Process, as outlined in Canon III.6.2 (deacons) and Canon III.8.2 (priests)
- Nomination occurs **after** the Parish/Diocesan Discernment Committee completes their work
 - The seeker and Presenting Priest meet to discuss the consensus from the PDC
 - The Presenting Priest & Vestry have their own opportunity to discern with the Seeker:
 - Letter of Support from Presenting Priest (you discern the person is ready for nomination)
 - Letter of Support from Vestry (the vestry discerns the person is ready for nomination)
- **After** the presenting priest and vestry nominations are received, the Vocations Minister sends a link to the Nominee to complete the Initial Application to the Commission on Ministry where Evidence of Baptism and Confirmation must be provided before the nomination is finalized.
- Once all these steps are completed, the Nomination will be acknowledged (and this Date of Nomination will begin the Ordination timeline).
- A member of the COM Committee (Diaconate or Priesthood) will be assigned to help prepare the Postulancy application materials & prepare for the interview



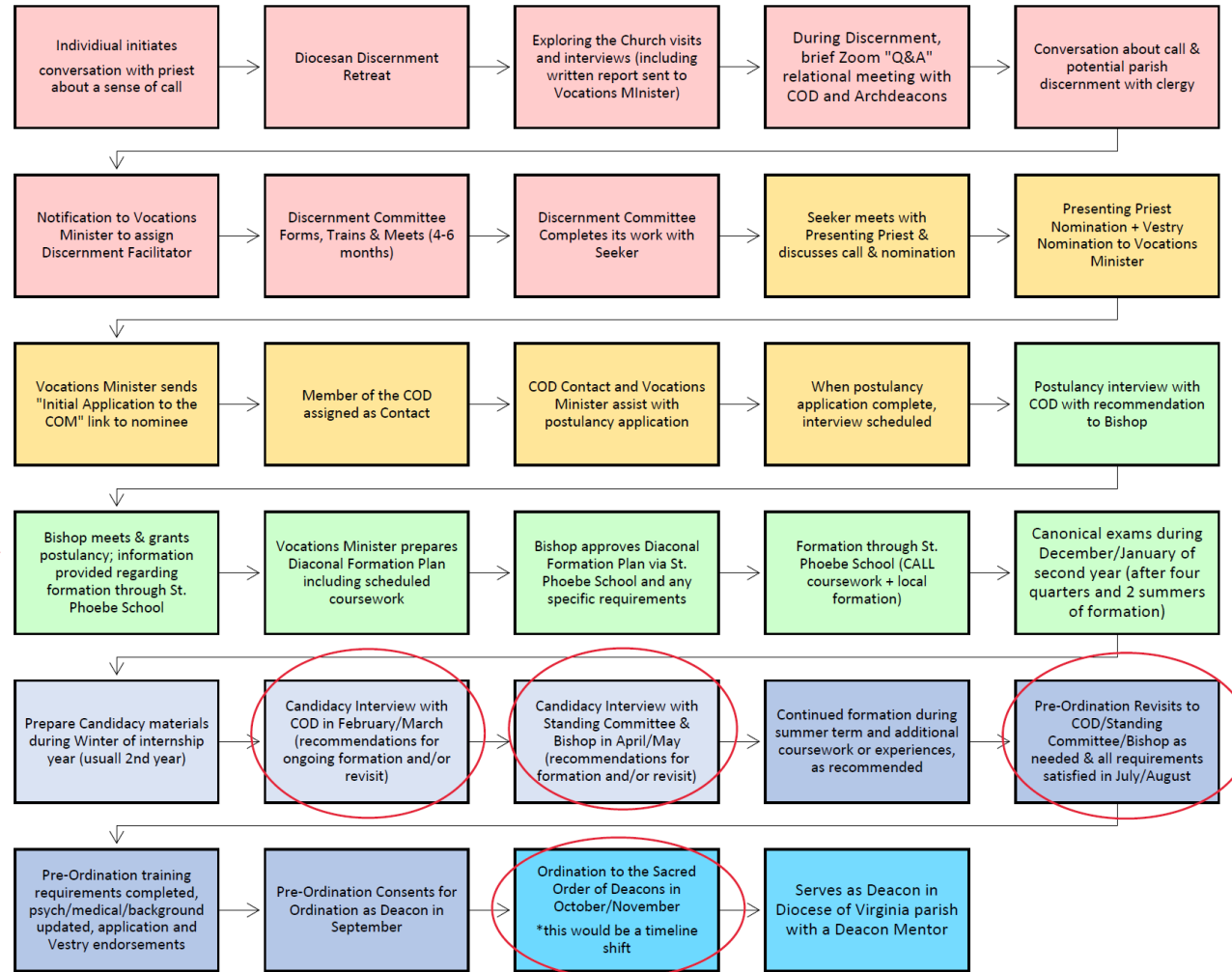
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Deacon Formation

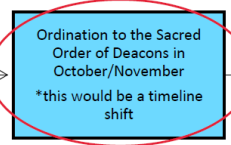
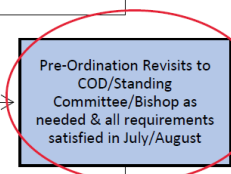
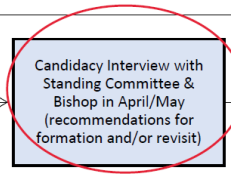
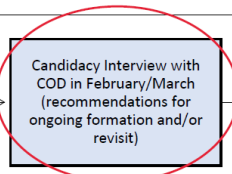
Highlights of Process and
Timeline Shifts



Ordination Process & Timeline from Discernment to Ordination: Diaconal Track (St. Phoebe School)



Discussion Starts Here



Highlights – Deacon Formation (Vocational)

- **Postulancy Interviews** will be held with the COD in Winter/Spring
- **St. Phoebe School** is the formation pathway for those preparing to be Deacons in the Diocese of Virginia (partnership with the Episcopal Diocese of Southwestern Virginia)
- **Formation Pathway** for the diaconate is a minimum of two years beginning in June/July, including three summer retreats (2 - 3 years is normative)
- **Candidacy and Canonical Exams:** deacons-in-formation take canonical area exams after completing at least 2/3 of their coursework and apply for candidacy after exams.
- **Candidate Review Prior to Ordination:** Candidates will have the opportunity to revisit the COD and/or Standing Committee before Ordination to ensure that any recommended formation following Candidacy is complete.
- **Ordination of Deacons** (Vocational) normative timeline will shift from summer to Fall allowing more time for formation without rushing/pinching the time for internships.



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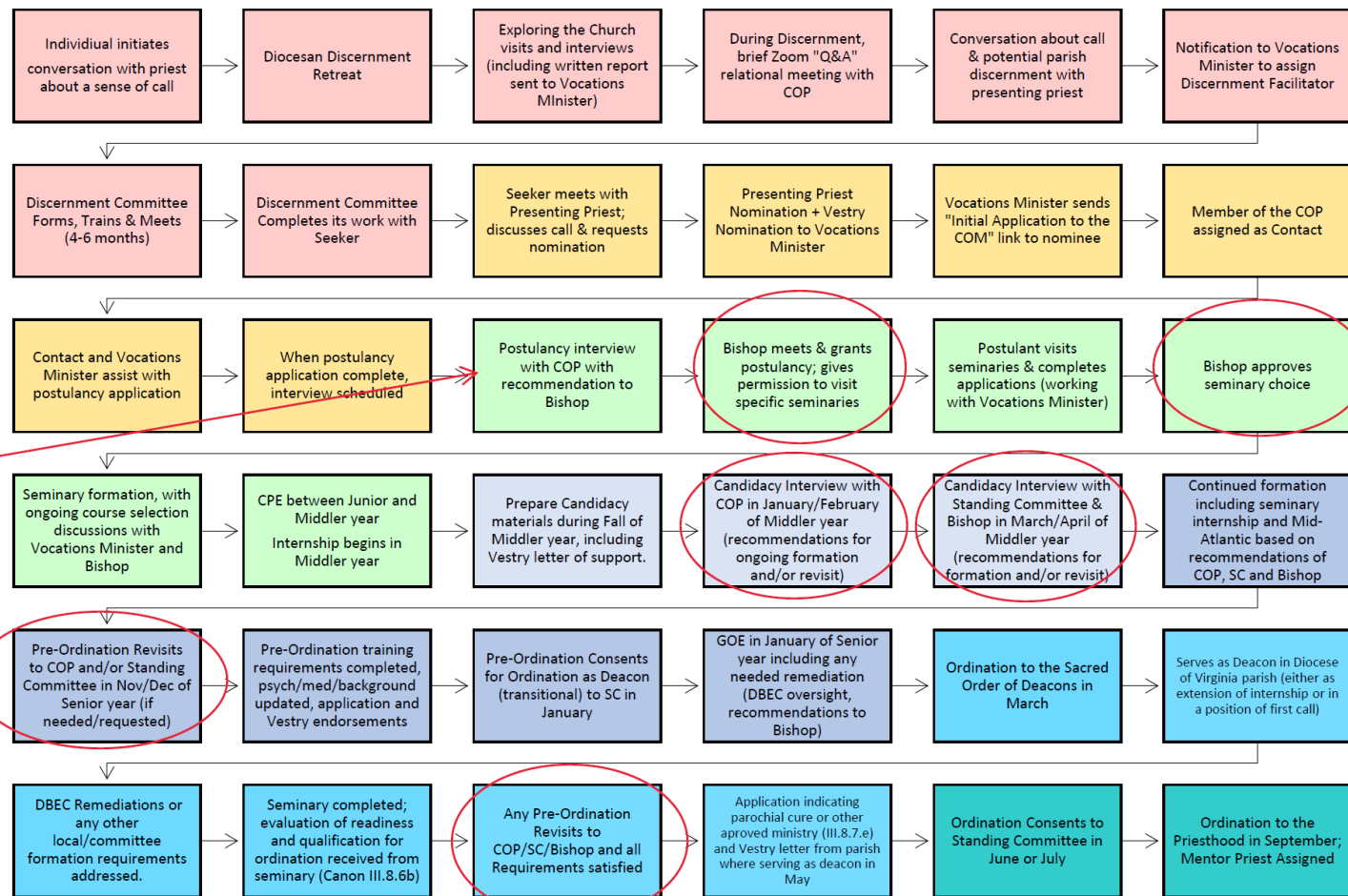
Saint Phoebe
School for Deacons



Priest Formation

Highlights for Traditional (3 year) Timeline
(and a quick peek at alternative pathways)

Ordination Process & Timeline from Discernment to Ordination: Priesthood track with traditional 3 year seminary formation



Discussion starts here

Highlights – Priestly Formation

- **Postulancy** granted by the Bishop is a requirement *before* applying to seminary. Postulancy interviews are held in Spring or Fall for the following year of seminary.
- **Three Year Episcopal Residential Seminary** is the recommended formation pathway for priesthood, with exceptions to that discussed and discerned with the Bishop
- **Exceptional Situations** such as those entering diocesan process when already in seminary have an outlined vocations timeline and process that likely will require time beyond seminary graduation for completion
- **Candidacy** interviews will typically occur during the Spring of Middler year of seminary (or 2/3 of the way through formation in exceptional situations)
- **Candidate Review Prior to Ordination:** Candidates will have the opportunity to revisit the COP and/or Standing Committee before Ordination to ensure that any recommended formation following Candidacy is complete.
- **Ordination** for traditional timeline seminarians would be March of their senior year (deacon) and September (priesthood). For those with extended formation or exceptional situations, the July/January ordination cycle will be used as needed.



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Additional Priesthood Tracks

- There are similar vocations process timelines for the unique cases we encounter in the Vocations process, including:
 - Entering canonical process while already in seminary (i.e. “Pathways to Ministry” at VTS or similar programs)
 - Entering canonical process with an MDiv from a non-Episcopal seminary and/or ordination in another tradition
 - Entering canonical process through the Young Priest Initiative (an option for those who are under age 30 to discern with a community of peers and mentored internship experience)
- Common expectations, even in exceptional situations.



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Questions and Next Steps

- Are you the presenting priest for someone already in the vocations process and wonder how it impacts them?

Reach out to Sarah, let's talk!

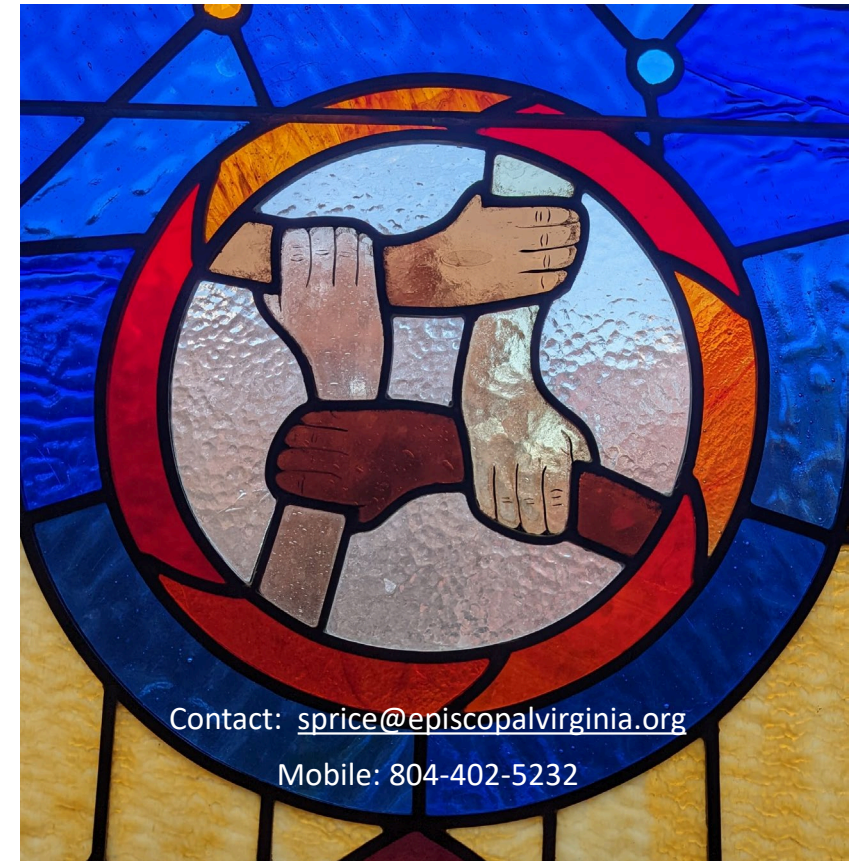
- Do you know someone discerning a call (or sense someone who might be called to new ministry) and are unsure of the next step?

Registration is open for the next Diocesan Discernment Retreat March 8-10 at Roslyn

The new diocesan website will link to all this information (and the flow chart/guidelines, too)

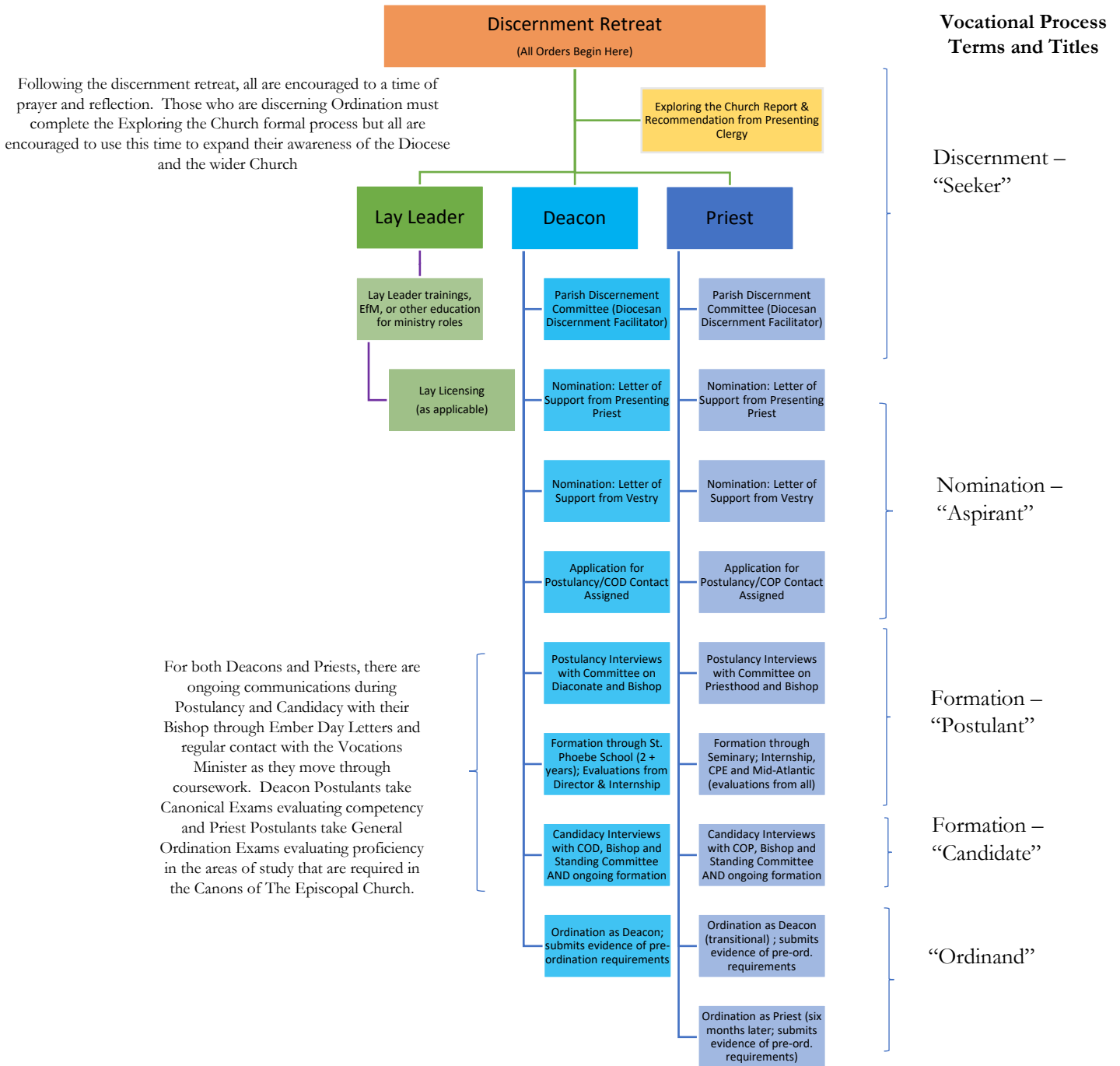
- Do you have questions and thoughts on this process and want to talk more than our time today allows?

Drop your email in the chat and I'll be in touch to schedule a group follow-up session



Vocations Process Flow Chart and Timelines Referenced in Presentation

Vocations Process Flow Chart



Narrative Description of Steps from Discernment through Postulancy:

- Individual discernment (personal contemplation/prayer/spiritual direction)
- Conversation with clergy about discernment of call
- Clergy/parish sponsors discernment retreat participation (held 3 times/year)
- Individual attends diocesan discernment retreat (now called “Seeker”)
- Following the retreat, seeker completes “Exploring the Church” visits and interviews; for those on the ordination track this includes a conversational/relational meeting with members of the Committee on the Diaconate and/or Committee on Priesthood (this process is to be completed thoughtfully over 4-6 months)
- Seeker prepares Exploring the Church report and discussed with presenting priest and Vocations Minister who may offer feedback and suggestions.
- Final Exploring the Church report sent to Vocations Minister along with a recommendation/request from presenting priest to form a discernment committee
- Vocations Minister contacts/assigns a Diocesan Discernment Facilitator to work with Parish, Priest & Seeker on a Parish Discernment Committee (PDC) [note: in smaller parishes this may also include committee members beyond the parish or form as a regional discernment committee...we still call this a “PDC”]
- PDC forms and engages their work. The work is to assist the seeker in listening for, wrestling with and articulating what they perceive as their call to ministry.
- PDC finishes their work through reaching consensus with the *seeker* about their next steps; the diocesan discernment facilitator completes a descriptive report that consensus was reached and sends to Vocations Minister. *The nature of this report is not evaluative, and the report does not “endorse” or “affirm” a particular call.*
- Seeker and Presenting Priest meet to discuss the work and consensus of the PDC.

If the call is to lay ministry:

- Presenting priest and seeker discuss formation and training for lay ministry including licensing, if needed
- Vocations Minister as well as Canon for Discipleship can be resources

If the call is to ordained ministry:

- Presenting priest and seeker discuss nomination for Postulancy and proceed when the presenting priest feels that the seeker is ready to do so, and the parish is ready to support them.
- Presenting priest prepares a letter of support & nomination for Postulancy

- Vestry discerns their support and provides a letter of nomination/support for postulancy (the Vestry may engage in their own interviews & discernment with the seeker before signing the letter of support)
- Nomination for Postulancy is made by sending the nomination form along with presenting priest & vestry letters to the Vocations Minister, who will initiate the electronic Initial Application to the Commission on Ministry form to the seeker.
- For ordained ministry, the Vocations Minister assigns a contact person from the Committee on Diaconate or Committee on Priesthood to shepherd the process.
- The Vocations Minister and the Contact Person help the Aspirant [the seeker, now nominated] prepare the Postulancy Application.
- When Postulancy Application is complete and reviewed by the Contact Person from the Committee, a date for Postulancy Interview with Committee on Priesthood or Diaconate is scheduled
- Committee on Diaconate or Priesthood meets with the Aspirant and supporters (presenting priest, spouse, member of discernment committee)
- Committee on Diaconate or Priesthood makes a recommendation (supporting or not supporting) postulancy and forwards to the Bishop, along with any formation recommendations from the committee.
- The Bishop then interviews the Aspirant, and determines whether or not to grant Postulancy and what the formation pathway will be
- The new Postulant and the Vocations Minister will meet to formalize the logistics of the formation plan recommended by the committee and approved by the Bishop.

Note for Vestries:

The sponsoring parish vestry has several opportunities to endorse those in vocations process:

Nomination for Postulancy: the very beginning of the process; endorsement of potential

Application for Candidacy: about 2/3 way through formation; endorsement of development

Application for Ordination: after/nearing completion of formation; endorsement of readiness for ministry

*For Ordination to the Priesthood, the parish where the ordinand is serving as a deacon (transitional) is the Vestry that endorses their readiness for ordination as a priest (this could also be the sponsoring parish but it does not need to be)

Ordination Process & Timeline from Discernment to Ordination: Priesthood track with traditional 3 year seminary formation



Notes about each stage on the flow chart:

DISCERNMENT is typically a 12-18 month process with times for conversation, reflection and group discernment. We are recommending that part of discernment is a non-evaluative Zoom “Question and Answer” session with the COM Committee for the appropriate order of ministry. This may be a time when particular committee members identify persons for whom they would be a good point of contact, and for the whole committee to build awareness of and relationship with those in vocations process.

NOMINATION is a formal process (canonically always present but newly formalized in the diocese) where the sponsoring parish priest & vestry formally recommend the seeker for application to the Commission on Ministry for holy orders. There is now a brief form that accompanies the letters from presenting priest and vestry; once received, the Vocations Minister initiates the application process and assigns a contact person. Application for Postulancy is made during the nomination stage.

POSTULANCY is “the time between nomination and candidacy and may initiate the formal preparation for ordination...postulancy involves continued exploration of and decision about the Postulant’s call to priesthood/diaconate.” Postulancy recommendation is initiated by the COM committee and granted by the Bishop. No one is to initiate application to seminary or begin formation until Postulancy is granted.

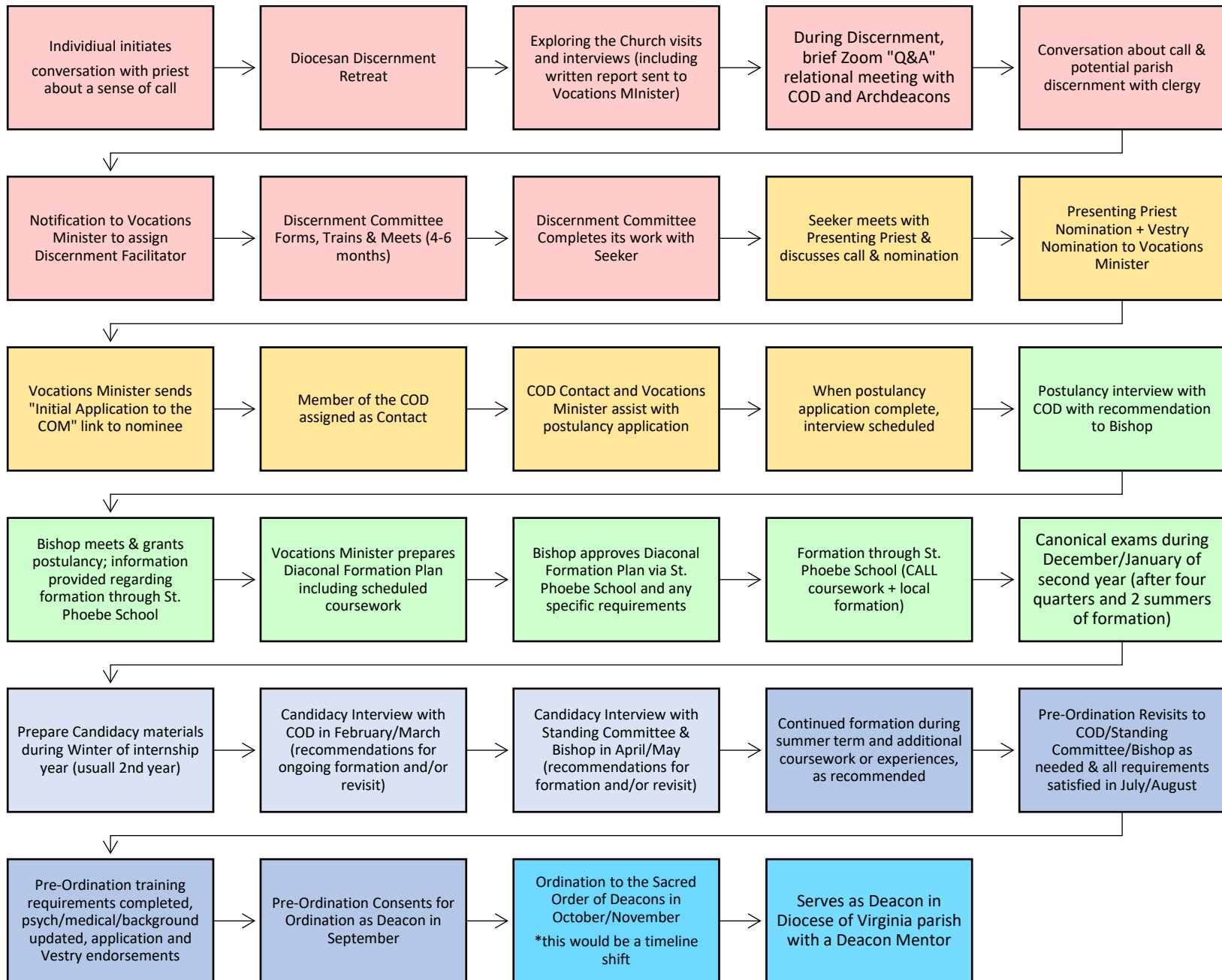
CANDIDACY is “a time of education and formation in preparation for ordination, established by a formal commitment by the Candidate, the Bishop, the Commission, the Standing Committee, and the congregation or other community of faith.” Candidacy involves relational interviews with all those in Vocations process which will occur February – April of the Middler year of seminary. Candidacy is not a guarantee of ordination, and thus we recommend moving these interviews earlier, to disentangle the Candidacy decision from the Ordination decision.

CANDIDACY will be earlier and longer when embraced as canonically intended: a deepening time of formation which may include specific formation recommendations that need to be fulfilled either before diaconal ordination and/or before priestly ordination. Earlier routine candidacy interviews also allows the COM Committee, the Standing Committee and/or the Bishop to have time to check-in or meet regarding the completion of formation requirements as well as pre-ordination requirements specified in the canons.

DEACON ordination in the traditional seminary formed timeline for priests will include diaconal service at the parish where they have been serving as an intern, while they finish seminary studies and work with the Vocation/Transition ministry team to secure their first call. Pre-ordination requirements for priesthood are met during the time serving in the diaconate, and all seminary requirements as well as local formation must be completed. Any pre-ordination meeting requests for deacons prior to priesthood would occur in June so that consents may be reviewed in July for September ordination.

PRIEST ordination occurs at a minimum of six months following ordination as deacon. The new priest must specify where they will be exercising the ministry of priest in a parochial or other cure (Canon III.8.7.e)

Ordination Process & Timeline from Discernment to Ordination: Diaconal Track (St. Phoebe School)



Notes about each stage on the flow chart:

DISCERNMENT is typically a 12-18 month process with times for conversation, reflection and group discernment. We are recommending that part of discernment is a non-evaluative Zoom “Question and Answer” session with the COM Committee for the appropriate order of ministry. This may be a time when particular committee members identify persons for whom they would be a good point of contact, and for the whole committee to build awareness of and relationship with those in vocations process.

NOMINATION is a formal process (canonically always present but newly formalized in the diocese) where the sponsoring parish priest & vestry formally recommend the seeker for application to the Commission on Ministry for holy orders. There is now a brief form that accompanies the letters from presenting priest and vestry; once received, the Vocations Minister initiates the application process and assigns a contact person. Application for Postulancy is made during the nomination stage.

POSTULANCY is “the time between nomination and candidacy and may initiate the formal preparation for ordination...postulancy involves continued exploration of and decision about the Postulant’s call to priesthood/diaconate.” Postulancy recommendation is initiated by the COM committee and granted by the Bishop. No one is to initiate application to seminary or begin formation until Postulancy is granted.

CANDIDACY is “a time of education and formation in preparation for ordination, established by a formal commitment by the Candidate, the Bishop, the Commission, the Standing Committee, and the congregation or other community of faith.” Candidacy involves relational interviews after the person has completed four semesters of required coursework and two summers of local formation through St. Phoebe School. Candidacy is not a guarantee of ordination, and thus the timeline reflects an optional second meeting with the COD and/or the Standing Committee that can be scheduled when recommended, to disentangle the Candidacy decision from the Ordination decision.

CANDIDACY will be earlier and longer when embraced as canonically intended: a deepening time of formation which may include specific formation recommendations that need to be fulfilled either before diaconal ordination and/or before priestly ordination. Extending the typical time for diaconal formation allows the COM Committee, the Standing Committee and/or the Bishop to have time to check-in or meet regarding the completion of formation requirements as well as pre-ordination requirements specified in the canons.

DEACON ordination may be scheduled in the Fall which is a slightly extended timeline from what has been occurring (October/November rather than September). This would allow additional time for practical or academic formation requirements to be met. New Deacons are assigned a Mentor Deacon from within the Community of Deacons who will closely support their ongoing development.

Ordination Process & Timeline from Discernment to Ordination: Priesthood track entering while in seminary*

*based on the seminary-discernment model when call is discerned in Junior year with application for Postulancy no later than Middler year



Notes about each stage on the flow chart:

DISCERNMENT is typically a 12-18 month process with times for conversation, reflection and group discernment. Even if someone enters the process while in seminary, discernment of call and exploration of their desire to enter the ordination process in the Diocese of Virginia is vital. We are recommending that part of discernment is a non-evaluative Zoom “Question and Answer” session with the COM Committee for the appropriate order of ministry. This may be a time when particular committee members identify persons for whom they would be a good point of contact, and for the whole committee to build awareness of and relationship with those in vocations process.

NOMINATION is a formal process (canonically always present but newly formalized in the diocese) where the sponsoring parish priest & vestry formally recommend the seeker for application to the Commission on Ministry for holy orders. There is now a brief form that accompanies the letters from presenting priest and vestry; once received, the Vocations Minister initiates the application process and assigns a contact person. Application for Postulancy is made during the nomination stage.

POSTULANCY is “the time between nomination and candidacy and may initiate the formal preparation for ordination...postulancy involves continued exploration of and decision about the Postulant’s call to priesthood/diaconate.” Postulancy recommendation is initiated by the COM committee and granted by the Bishop. For a Postulant who is already enrolled in seminary, formation recommendations might include specific coursework, additional internship, CPE, or other formation specific to the individual which will be noted in a Vocational Development Plan. It should not be assumed that the completion of seminary will be the conclusion of formation; post-seminary formation may be required.

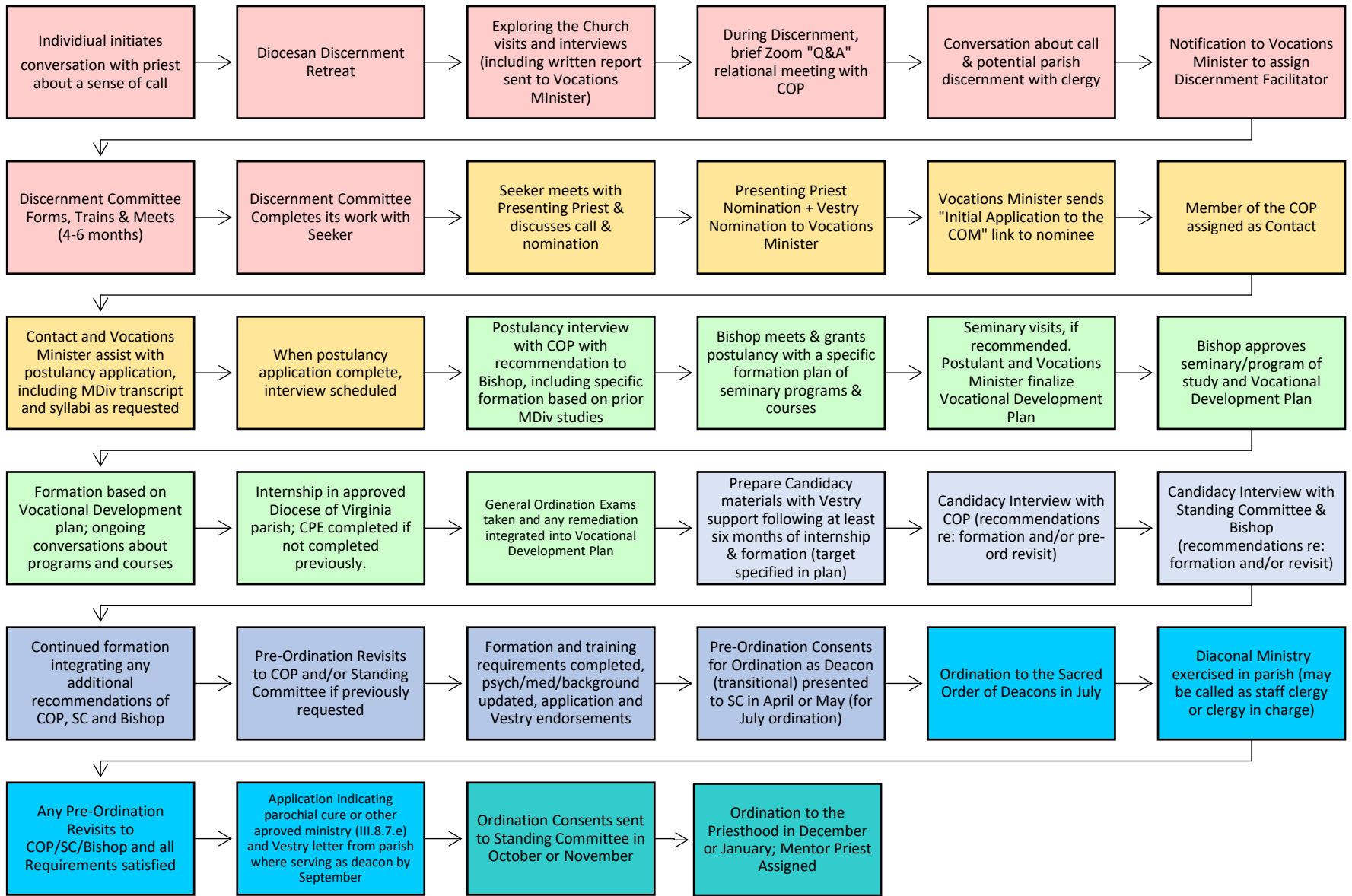
CANDIDACY is “a time of education and formation in preparation for ordination, established by a formal commitment by the Candidate, the Bishop, the Commission, the Standing Committee, and the congregation or other community of faith.” Candidacy involves relational interviews with all those in Vocations process and optimally would occur in the Middler year; since Postulancy may be occurring during the Middler year, the hopeful plan is Candidacy at the beginning of Senior year or after approx.. 6 months of Postulancy to evaluate progress. Candidacy is not a guarantee of ordination, and we should strive to disentangle the Candidacy decision from the Ordination decision.

CANDIDACY requirements for those who enter the process from seminary may include completion of seminary coursework as well as diocesan ordination requirements such as Mid-Atlantic internship and CPE. There may be additional formational learning requirements noted by the COM, Standing Committee or Bishop and/or remediations from GOE’s. Formation takes the time that it takes and the ordination date may shift.

DEACON ordination will likely occur in the June/July cycle. Those entering the process during seminary may have begun working with the Vocation/Transition ministry team to secure their first call during Candidacy in anticipation of diaconal ordination, or they may be completing CPE or Mid-Atlantic first. Any pre-ordination meeting requests for deacons prior to priesthood would occur during this time as well.

PRIEST ordination occurs at a minimum of six months following ordination as deacon, likely in December/January. The new priest must specify where they will be exercising the ministry of priest in a parochial or other cure before priestly ordination (Canon III.8.7.e).

Ordination Process & Timeline from Discernment to Ordination: Priesthood track (prior MDiv/transfer from another tradition)



Notes about each stage on the flow chart:

DISCERNMENT is typically a 12-18 month process with times for conversation, reflection and group discernment. That is no different when someone is coming to TEC from another tradition, which is an important transition to discern well. We are recommending that part of discernment is a non-evaluative Zoom “Question and Answer” session with the COM Committee for the appropriate order of ministry. This may be a time when particular committee members identify persons for whom they would be a good point of contact, and for the whole committee to build awareness of and relationship with those in vocations process.

NOMINATION is a formal process (canonically always present but newly formalized in the diocese) where the sponsoring parish priest & vestry formally recommend the seeker for application to the Commission on Ministry for holy orders. There is now a brief form that accompanies the letters from presenting priest and vestry; once received, the Vocations Minister initiates the application process and assigns a contact person. Application for Postulancy is made during the nomination stage.

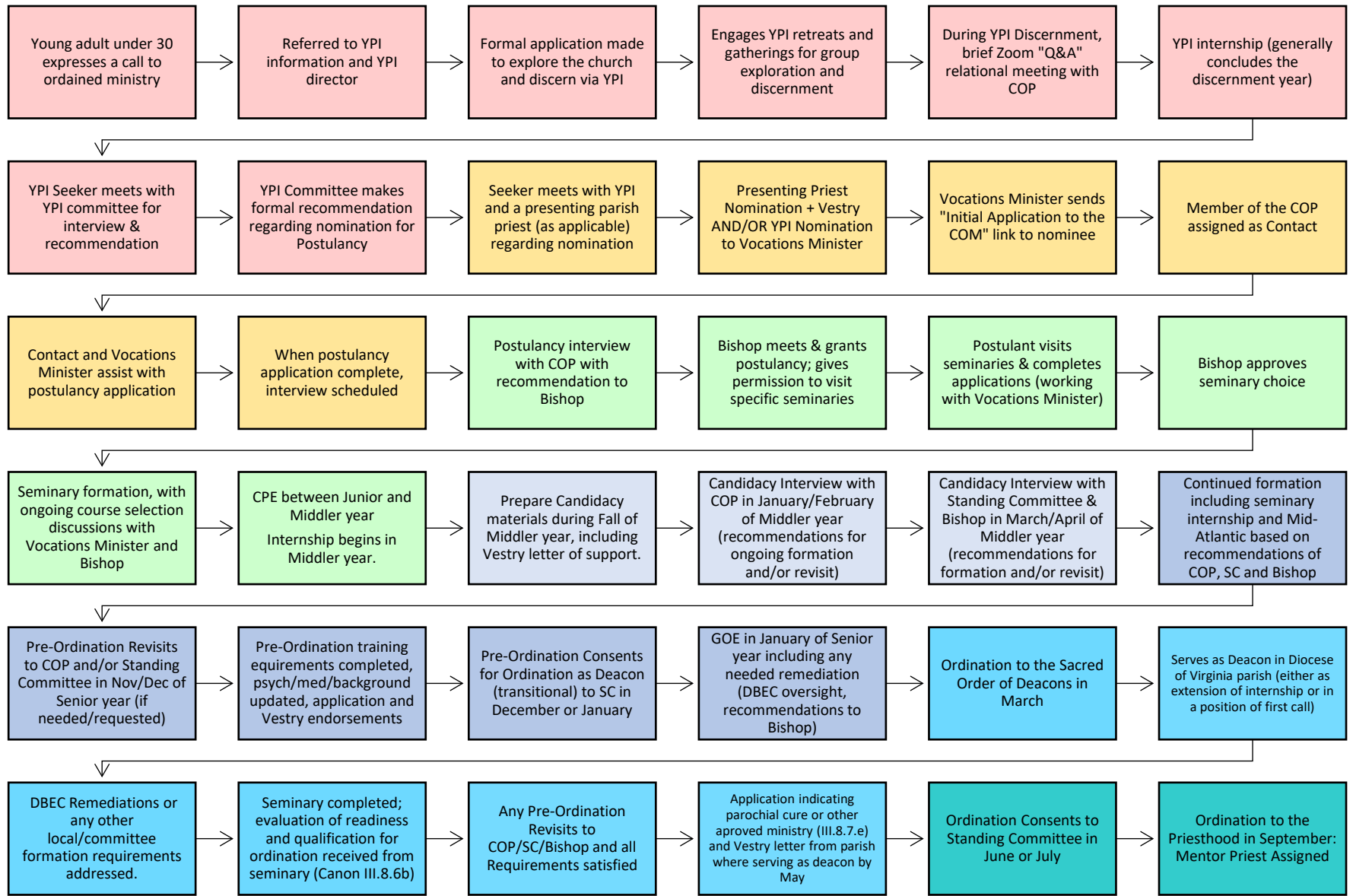
POSTULANCY is “the time between nomination and candidacy and may initiate the formal preparation for ordination...postulancy involves continued exploration of and decision about the Postulant’s call to priesthood/diaconate.” Postulancy and formation recommendations are initiated by the COM committee and granted by the Bishop. No one is to initiate a program of formation (or assume what format that formation will take) until Postulancy is granted by the Bishop.

CANDIDACY is “a time of education and formation in preparation for ordination, established by a formal commitment by the Candidate, the Bishop, the Commission, the Standing Committee, and the congregation or other community of faith.” Candidacy involves relational interviews with all those in Vocations process which will evaluate the formation to date and lead into a deepening time of formation. For those coming from another tradition, we recommend at least six months of internship and engagement of formation recommendations before Candidacy. GOE’s may be taken during postulancy or candidacy, depending on timing, but are a source of data for further formation recommendations. At the Candidacy interview, the COP or Standing Committee may request a follow up meeting or check-in be scheduled prior to ordination consent.

DEACON ordination for those coming from another tradition is the point at which they may pursue a call as a clergy staff member or clergy-in-charge with intent to become priest-in-charge (as appropriate). Ordination is typically scheduled in June or July. If there are any additional formation requirements or pre-ordination meeting requests prior to *priesthood*, these would occur during the time serving as deacon.

PRIEST ordination occurs at a minimum of six months following ordination as deacon. The new priest must specify where they will be exercising the ministry of priest in a parochial or other cure (Canon III.8.7.e)

Ordination Process & Timeline from Discernment to Ordination: Priesthood track through Young Priest Initiative (YPI)



Notes about each stage on the flow chart:

DISCERNMENT is typically a 12-18 month process with YPI that includes group discernment, exploring the church and internship. We are recommending that part of discernment is a non-evaluative Zoom “Question and Answer” session with the COM Committee for the appropriate order of ministry. This may be a time when particular committee members identify persons for whom they would be a good point of contact, and for the whole committee to build awareness of and relationship with those in vocations process.

NOMINATION is a formal process (canonically always present but newly formalized in the diocese) where the sponsoring parish priest & vestry formally recommend the seeker for application to the Commission on Ministry for holy orders. For YPI, an important step in this process is the nominee’s movement from YPI to a parish/presenting priest relationship. While not required, this is often a role of the internship site. It is important to establish this so that it is clear who the ordination sponsor will be, along with YPI. Once the nomination is received, the Vocations Minister initiates the application process and assigns a contact person. Application for Postulancy is made during the nomination stage.

POSTULANCY is “the time between nomination and candidacy and may initiate the formal preparation for ordination...postulancy involves continued exploration of and decision about the Postulant’s call to priesthood/diaconate.” Postulancy recommendation is initiated by the COM committee and granted by the Bishop. No one is to initiate application to seminary or begin formation until Postulancy is granted. For some in the YPI process, postulancy may include a service year or other exploration of their call prior to starting seminary.

CANDIDACY is “a time of education and formation in preparation for ordination, established by a formal commitment by the Candidate, the Bishop, the Commission, the Standing Committee, and the congregation or other community of faith.” Candidacy involves relational interviews with all those in Vocations process which will occur February – April of the Middler year of seminary.

CANDIDACY will be earlier and longer when embraced as canonically intended: a deepening time of formation which may include specific formation recommendations that need to be fulfilled either before diaconal ordination and/or before priestly ordination. Earlier routine candidacy interviews also allows the COM Committee, the Standing Committee and/or the Bishop to have time to check-in or meet regarding the completion of formation requirements as well as pre-ordination requirements specified in the canons.

DEACON ordination in the traditional seminary formed timeline for priests will include diaconal service at the parish where they have been serving as an intern, while they finish seminary studies and work with the Vocation/Transition ministry team to secure their first call. Pre-ordination requirements for priesthood are met during the time serving in the diaconate, and all seminary requirements as well as local formation must be completed. Any pre-ordination meeting requests for deacons prior to priesthood would occur in June so that consents may be reviewed in July for September ordination.

PRIEST ordination occurs at a minimum of six months following ordination as deacon. The new priest must specify where they will be exercising the ministry of priest in a parochial or other cure (Canon III.8.7.e)