



# **Saskatchewan Synod, ELCIC**

## **Discernment of Call Workbook**

This booklet has been put together to aid you in your journey and process of discerning and deciding your particular form of ministry as a child of God baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All baptized Christians have the ministry of reconciliation – the one ministry of Jesus Christ: preaching, teaching, and caring for people in their needs. But every baptized Christian has different gifts for doing ministry. Your task is to discern whether you have gifts and abilities that will enable you to do the **public ministry** of Pastoral Word and Sacrament or of Diaconal Word and Service.

**Public ministry** means that you are called by the church. The Holy Spirit has put stirrings in your heart and questions in your mind, but your call will not be your individual decision. God works through the **church** to call you, ordain or consecrate you, and send you out to do the ministry of reconciliation in a particular place. Therefore, your process of discernment is not yours alone; it must include what God is saying to you in your baptism, in Scripture, in worship, through people who know you and some who don't, through Christians and even non-Christians, through family and friends, and even through significant (and maybe some not so significant) events in your life.

Discernment means being open to discovering God's call in every dimension of your life. Jesus said, "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another." (John 15:16-17) To discern God's call is to discover what God has already decided – that you are chosen in baptism to bring God's redeeming Word to the world. The **call** to share in the one ministry of Jesus Christ is fundamental, but it must include insights into **abilities and qualities** that may be needed. Be open to both forms of ministry – both diaconal and pastoral. Listen to God, listen to your heart, and listen to people and events in your life.

Use this booklet to guide you on your journey of discernment and discovery and decision. Don't be afraid to ask questions or talk about the process with someone you trust.

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Discernment is a lifelong process of seeking God's guidance.

It requires time: take time to be quiet, to listen, let your heart be open to hear God, to become aware of your motives and fears, your healthy and unhealthy patterns, your feelings and your longings.

It takes faithfulness: to paying attention, to prayer, and to self-reflection. It means learning to respond to life from the core of your being, not just reacting to things around you.

It means seeking God's will: having a desire to see God more clearly and a desire to love and follow God's guiding.

Discernment is relational: it is not only between you and God, but it is also in relationship, dialogue and conversation with others.

It is bigger than decision-making: it can help you grow and deepen your relationship with God.

It helps you look at more than one choice and ask which is more in line with what God wants you to do. Honor both your feelings and your reason, your heart and your head, and ask, *"Does this make sense?"* and *"How do I feel?"*

Pay attention to your feelings and your thoughts. What might your feelings mean as you explore this decision?

## How can I tell if God is calling me?

Some things that indicate that God may be calling you to public ministry are:

- A. **Sense of calling**: a yearning or stirring toward reaching out to others with God's Word and Sacraments or by serving people in the world in their deep needs. You begin to identify this as a calling from God.
- B. **Comments from others**: they may comment about certain talents they see in you that they think point to a vocation in ministry.
- C. **Inner feelings**: you have both a sense of excitement and anxiety as you consider a new direction in your life. As thoughts and feelings surface, you may begin to identify them as movements of the Spirit.
- D. **Willingness and interest**: ready to make this a life-long journey of learning and serving the Lord in public ministry.

## The Worshipping Community Will Help With Discernment!

God speaks through worship. The Word, sacraments, liturgy, prayers of the community and hymns are ways that you might hear God speaking to your life. The people you worship with may know you well enough to recognize your gifts for ministry in the way you participate in the congregation and the way you relate to others and support them.

- Congregational worship gives you the means of grace – Word and Sacrament – which offer forgiveness of sins.
- The lectionary for liturgical seasons may create rhythms in your life to help you focus on the creating and sustaining love of the Father, the redemptive life and work of Jesus Christ, and the calling, gathering and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit for you.
- God’s Word comes to you through Scripture, sermon and song.
- You may offer praise, prayer and thanksgiving to God through hymns and offering.
- The prayers of the church give you opportunity to pray in and for a community of believers, for others and for the world, a reminder that God is active and present in the midst of God’s people.
- And you are sent in peace to serve the Lord by serving others in your daily life.

## Begin to keep notes in a journal

1. What symbols, pictures or colors do you notice in worship? How might God use visual arts to speak to you?
2. What are your favorite hymns or songs? How might God use music to speak to you?
3. What senses do you use as part of worship? How can God use what you touch, taste, see, hear, or smell in order to speak to you?

## Listening to God Through Your Individual Prayer

There are many ways to approach God in prayer: some people prefer to speak aloud to God and others prefer to listen to God through silent prayer. Some use specific words and phrases, while others let the thoughts of their hearts flow. Still other people find it useful to use prayers written by others. Some prefer a quiet corner for prayer, others pray as they walk or while doing some other activity. Prayer is the place where you meet God and where God may speak to you.

Included here are some suggestions for individual prayer to help you get into “listening for God,” and there are reflection questions to help guide your thinking. Or use your own form of prayer along with the reflection questions.

Find a quiet time and place for yourself. Center yourself. Try some of these ways to pray.

One form of silent, individual prayer:

- Sit quietly for a time. Calm your body. Pay attention to your breathing.
- Recall that you are God’s child. Allow yourself to rest in God’s presence.
- Ask God to open your eyes and heart to see how God’s Spirit has been present during the day.
- After some time, speak to God about what you noticed. Ask forgiveness for your sins and give thanks to God for this time together.
- Writing your experience in a journal might help you see things more clearly.

Read: Begin by reading small portions of Scripture or other spiritual resources. Allow yourself to reflect on the words in silence.

Keep a journal: Write your thoughts and feelings as you try this type of prayer. You might also want to include pictures, works of art, music or other non-verbal responses to your prayer.

Move to more specific questions: Focus on your calling to ministry. Consider how your decision will affect the people you care about. Attend to the details of what it might take for you to participate in the education and formation process of ministry.

## Resources for Individual Prayer and Reflection

*Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*, by Parker J. Palmer, Jossey-Bass Inc., 2000. This is an invitation to listen to your inner self and follow its leading to a sense of meaning and purpose in your life. Stories of darkness and depression, fulfillment and joy lead toward the true calling of one's life. The book teaches how to listen to and accept one's "true self" with limits as well as potentials.

*Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, by Marjorie Thompson, Westminster John Knox Press, 1995. This book gives a variety of ways to become involved in prayer and Christian spirituality. It is intended to be a catalyst for your own thinking, imagining, feeling, intuiting, willing, and experiencing in relation to your faith.

*LifeKeys*, by Jane A.G. Kise, David Stark and Sandra Kerbs Hirsh, Bethany House Publishers, 1996. A workbook which gives you the "keys" to help you consider your particular skills and preferences for ministry, and may help identify areas in which you would like to grow.

*Do I Belong in Seminary?* by Ronald E. Parker, The Alban Institute, Inc., 1998. This book takes a more practical approach to the decision about enrolling in seminary for theological studies. It's written from a non-denominational perspective and is appropriate whether a person is considering ordained or diaconal ministry or general theological studies.

## A Time for Reflection

This kind of discernment/reflection takes time, so please take the time you need. Your reflections will be helpful as you move through the discernment and application process. This is a good place to use your journal.

**Reflecting on your history:** How have you experienced God's movement throughout your life?

1. **Your faith growth.** Write about your faith journey, from as young as you remember until now. What, who, and how was your faith influenced? How did you experience God's movement through your journey?
2. **Your family life.** Write about your family – the one in which you grew up and your family now. Describe major relationships, events, turning points, etc. Reflect the role your family has had in shaping the person you are today.
  - Who were/are the people in your family? Tell about your relationship with each of them.
  - Describe any experiences in your family life that helped you understand pain and suffering.
  - What characteristics of your family strengthen(ed) you for ministry?
  - What characteristics detract(ed) you from your ability to minister?
3. **Significant life experiences.** Reflect on any life experiences that were significant for you. How did you feel God's presence – or absence – during these experiences?
4. **Your prayer life.** Write about some of your experiences with prayer. How has your prayer life changed since you were a child? What strengthens your prayer life? What hinders it?
5. **Your spiritual life.** Write about your spiritual life, indicating those persons and resources that were particularly significant for you. How did they help you? How would you be able to do for others what these people did for you?
6. **Your ministering life.** Write about some Christian ministry you have done, and what you learned. Describe some people who have been touched by your ministry/service. What did they gain from your ministry? What did you learn from them? Describe a person you know well who is a model of a ministering/serving person. What are her/his characteristics? How are you like that person?
7. **Be attentive** to times when you were particularly aware of the presence of God. Think about your past. Think about your current situation.
  - Is there an invitation from God for you?
  - Does this awareness give you insight about your direction?

## Listening to God Through Scripture

### Read Psalm 139

You might use one verse at a time.

Or you might read short portions: vs. 1-6, vs. 7-12, vs. 13-16, vs. 17-18, vs. 23-24.

Sit quietly with the Scripture. Take the words into yourself. Let the words touch your heart.

- What words or phrases have special attraction for you?
- Is there an invitation for you in this passage?
- How might the passage sound if God were saying it to you?

You may wish to revisit this Psalm several times as you are listening for God's voice in your life now.

### Read these scripture passages for those that have meaning for you:

Isaiah 6:1-8

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Jeremiah 1:4-8

Luke 4:1-21

Matthew 4:18-22

Matthew 14:22-32

Mark 10:42-45

Luke 22:24-27

John 1:35-51

Acts 6:1-7

Luke 24:28-34

Your favourite...

Read the passage aloud. Pause. Read it again, and stop when a word or phrase has special attraction for you.

Think about how God might be speaking to you in this passage. Write your thoughts in your journal. If you have time, read more.

## Listening to God Through Praying With Others

- A. Gather a group of people to pray with you about your decision. Ask them to help you discern your calling into ministry.
- Gather people whose spiritual insights you value.
  - Gather some who know you well – people who might challenge you to grow, who can be prayerful with you and will speak the truth to you.
  - Perhaps invite some church leaders, a pastor or diaconal minister.
- B. Use a current group. If you belong to a prayer group or study group, ask if they would be willing to hear about your discernment process and to pray with you about it.
- C. Seek spiritual direction through your bishop or at one of the retreat centers. Some spiritual directors offer spiritual direction in a group setting. A spiritual director is a teacher in the area of practicing the spiritual life, with experience and training in discernment. A spiritual director will listen to you, help you notice things about God's presence, help you respond to God with greater freedom, point you to practical disciplines of spiritual growth, and will pray with you. Some retreat centres have a head director who will help you find the right spiritual director for you.
- D. How to Proceed: Ask the group to make a covenant with you about where to meet, how often, and how many sessions. Ask them to meet with you at least several times until your decision becomes clearer. This will enable them to give you feedback and insight as you listen together for God's direction.

## A guide for conversation and prayer with others:

- Begin with prayer. Ask God to be with you in this conversation.
- Talk to the group about what led to your interest in ministry.
- Share what you know about the kind of ministry for which you are sensing a call – pastoral or diaconal – and the process of preparation for that ministry. Ask others to share information or experience they may have.
- Tell about your sense of calling.
- Ask if anyone has had a similar experience about his/her vocation or sense of calling.
- Ask for feedback about yourself: What gifts do they see in you that would be useful for ministry? What concerns or cautions do they have for you? What other questions should you be asking yourself?
- Close with prayer, and invite others to pray for your decision.
- Thank the group for being with you and praying for you in your time of discernment.

## QUESTIONS

What questions do you have?

What do you need in order to move forward in your process toward ministry preparation?

As you engage in prayer, what thoughts and feelings have helped with your direction? Has your understanding about your call to a vocation changed?

What form of ministry appeals to you? What skills do you have to engage in this type of ministry? What skills do you want to develop?

Are you registered with CTEL? Have you been assigned a relater?

Do you need more information?

Contact:

Saskatchewan Synod ELCIC Office

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## Self-Assessment

Students are asked to enter the process of preparation for ministry with a willingness to learn and to be shaped and to help shape themselves for ministry. Take time to assess yourself in these areas:

- **Spirituality:**

Are you able to engage in a discernment process? Do you have an openness to God? Are you able to explore how your faith shapes and affects your life? As a student you will be expected to strengthen your self-understanding through spiritual nourishment and prayer.

- **Work and Ministry:**

Are you able to identify your gifts for ministry? Are you interested in developing more skills for service to others? Are you familiar with the pastoral and diaconal ministries? As a student you will participate in contextual education which will give you a chance to learn and stretch your skills.

- **Theology/Academic Study:**

Are you able to reflect theologically to see the connections between faith and life? Are you able to engage in academic study? Are you able to attend a Lutheran seminary or, in the case of some diaconal students, a Lutheran college?

- **Lutheran Identity:**

Are you willing to identify yourself as Lutheran? Students preparing for ministry in the ELCIC are expected to be an active member of a Lutheran congregation for two years before they will be endorsed as a candidate for pastoral or diaconal ministry.

- **Family Life:**

Will your family and those you most care about be an asset for you in this process? In preparing for ministry, your primary relationships can be a means of support. You might consider the effects of your decision upon your family and those you care about, particularly in the use of time and resources needed to complete this process.

- **Committee for Theological Education and Leadership (CTEL):**

Are you willing to cooperate with CTEL in providing the necessary information and reports? Will you be willing to stay in communication with your CTEL relater? CTEL is responsible for making sure that you complete all the necessary requirements set out by this church body in order for you to be prepared to do the ministry you feel called to do. Your relater is responsible for communicating this to you.

- **Time:**

Can you make a commitment to the process of discernment and to the process of education and formation for ministry? The discernment process will take several months. The education and formation process will take four years for pastoral students and at least two years for diaconal students.

- **Cost:**

Are you able to find resources to meet your expenses in this process? Consider every cost: tuition, books, travel, housing, meals, recreation and emergency expenses. Ask your home congregation to help you think of resources and options for financial aid.

- **Expectations of the Outcome:**

Are you able to enter this process as a vocational journey without restricted expectations about jobs or specific areas of ministry? Will you be open to ministry, wherever it may lead you? This process will likely be transformational. You may discover new paths for yourself as the process unfolds. And new paths may lead to new possibilities for your ministry.

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
Who, though in the form of God,  
Did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form, Jesus humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.*

*Therefore, God also highly exalted Jesus,  
giving him the name that is above every other name,  
so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.                      Philippians 2:5-11*