

**ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD IN
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN ARKANSAS**

(Revised June 2016)

ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

The church calls people who will work as a pastor, priest, and teacher. This ministry can take several forms. One form is for the person so called to receive a degree from a seminary or similar graduate level program and then serve in congregations as a full-time vocation, usually as a rector, vicar, or assisting priest in a congregation.

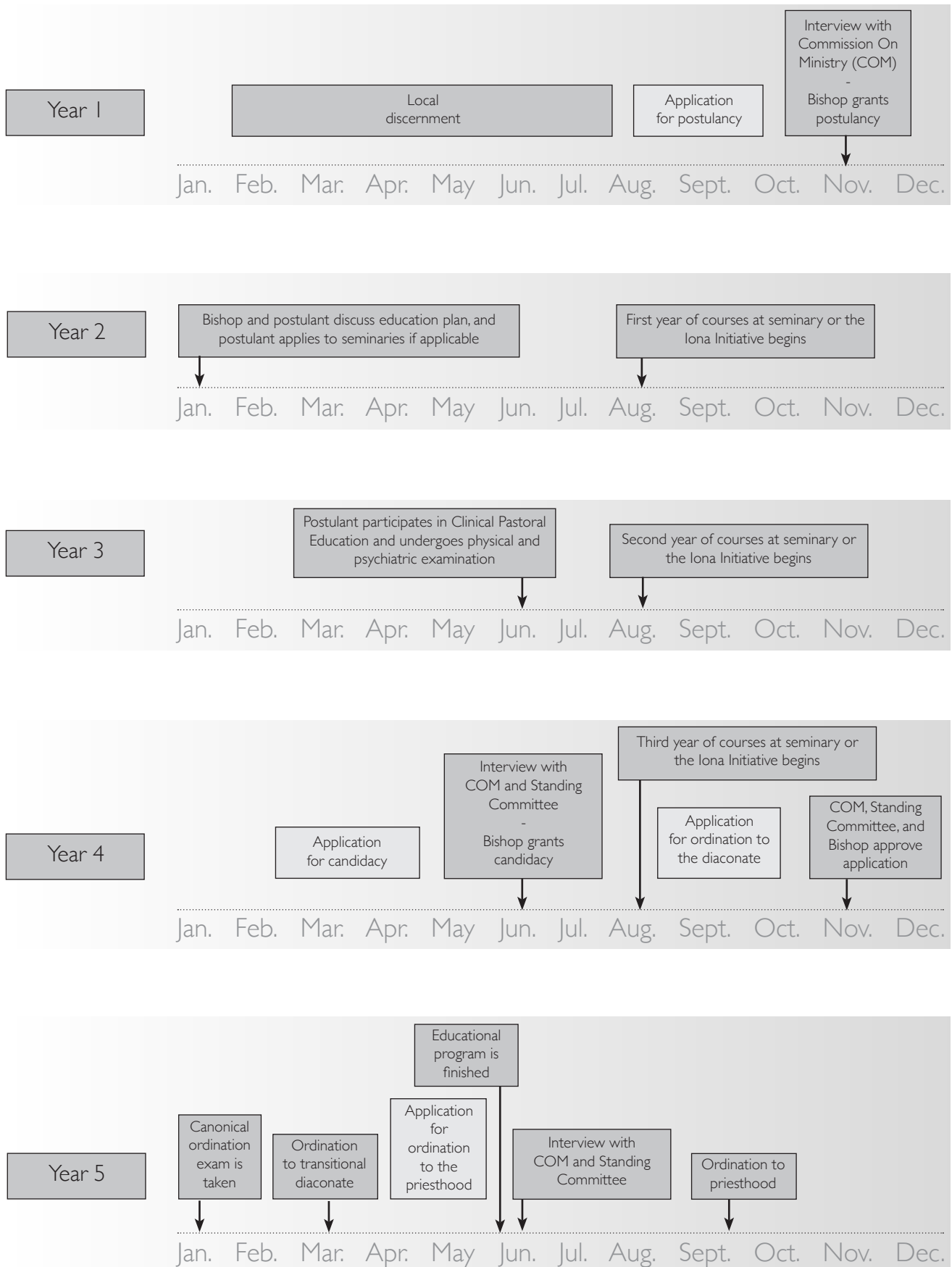
Another form this ministry can take is as a diocesan-trained priest, that is, someone who works full-time in (or is retired from) a secular career, and serves one or more congregations for minimal pay, often in rural parts of the state. To train for this focused ministry, the person attends classes in a focused formation program designed by the office of the bishop.

Individuals are discerned to be called to ordination by the bishop (taking into account the recommendation of the Commission on Ministry), the congregation from which they come, and the Standing Committee, in addition to their personal discernment that they are called to ordination.

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THE ORDINATION PROCESS

In consultation with the bishop, this timeline may be adjusted based on an individual's situation.



Discernment, Nomination, and Postulancy

“A confirmed adult communicant in good standing may be nominated for ordination to the Priesthood by the person’s congregation or other community of faith.” (III.8.2)

NOTES

A person interested in Holy Orders should begin conversations with the priest in charge of that person’s local congregation. That person and the priest would then meet with the bishop, who would then approve the formation of a discernment committee to ascertain the validity of the person’s call. This committee, typically made up of parishioners from the local congregations usually meets for six to eight months, at which time it gives its report to the person’s local vestry. *

- The discernment committee submits a report to the vestry. **(Form E1)**
- The vestry nominates the person for ordination. **(Form A1)**
- The person accepts the nomination and applies for postulancy. This application includes a spiritual autobiography or timeline, completed during work with the discernment committee, and transcripts of academic work. **(Form A2)**
- The nominee meets with the Commission on Ministry, which then makes a recommendation to the bishop regarding postulancy. **(Form A3)**

Upon receipt of the recommendation, the bishop determines whether or not to continue the ordination process and grant postulancy. If the decision is to proceed, meetings with the postulant then take place to plan for the required training.

Postulants preparing for seminary training will decide, in consultation with the bishop, which seminary to attend. In most cases the postulant will need to interview at the seminary before being accepted. The seminaries of the Episcopal Church are three-year residential programs, all of which are located outside of Arkansas. The seminary education for most postulants will also include field work during the academic year and often during the summer as well.

“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 the Priesthood.” (III.8.3)

- A medical examination, psychological evaluation, and background check will be conducted sometime between nomination and candidacy. **(Form E2)**

* The individual in the ordination process is responsible for completing the application forms and the forms necessary for the medical examination and psychological evaluation **(Form E2)**. All forms, including the discernment committee manual, are available for download: <http://episcopalarkansas.org/ordination>.

Education

The canons of The Episcopal Church require that, “formation shall include theological training, practical experience, emotional development, and spiritual formation.” Theological education will include study of the seven canonical areas (III.8.5g).

Canons also require training in the following areas:

- Prevention of Sexual Misconduct
- Mandatory Reporting Laws
- Anti-Racism Training
- The Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church

The postulant engages in pastoral and personal skill training. Postulants will work with the diocesan office on appropriate counseling or group therapy in order to develop satisfactory pastoral and personal skills for ministry. This training may involve participation in programs such as Clinical Pastoral Education or Community of Hope.

Postulants trained at the diocesan level will attend the Iona Initiative. The curriculum of the Iona Initiative is designed to provide students proficiency in the seven canonical areas. Time is also devoted to community building and spiritual formation. The curriculum is three years, consisting of six semesters--ten weekends (Friday evening through Sunday morning) each year.

Each weekend at the Iona Initiative is structured to engage the student in both academic and practical education. During year one, for example, students study the Bible, learn to use different methods of Biblical criticism, and also study topics such as clergy vesture, parish polity, and homiletics.

In the second year of the three-year training program at the Iona Initiative, the postulant begins serving as a licensed worship leader, Eucharistic visitor, Eucharistic minister, and lay pastor in the congregation(s) to which he or she will likely eventually be assigned. This work occupies three Sundays each month, with the fourth Sunday being the weekend spent at the Iona Initiative training class. The work continues in the summer as well (with appropriate absences for vacation) when the Iona Initiative classes are not meeting.

“Each Postulant or Candidate for ordination to the Priesthood shall communicate with the Bishop in person or by letter, four times a year, in the Ember Weeks, reflecting on the Candidate’s academic experience and personal and spiritual development.” (III.8.5i)

The Ember Days are traditionally observed on the Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays after the First Sunday in Lent, the Day of Pentecost, Holy Cross Day, and December 13.

NOTES

Candidacy

“Candidacy is a time of education and formation in preparation for ordination to the Priesthood, established by a formal commitment by the Candidate, the Bishop, the Commission, the Standing Committee, and the congregation or other community of faith.” (III.8.4)

NOTES

Postulants and Candidates are expected to remain in communication with their sponsoring clergy and communities of faith during formation. It may be appropriate for a postulant or candidate to meet with the vestry of his or her community of faith prior to the vestry submitting a letter of support.

- The postulant applies for candidacy. **(Form B1)**
- The vestry of the sponsoring congregation submits a letter of support. **(Form B2)**
- The postulant meets with the Commission on Ministry **(Form B3)** and the Standing Committee (Form B4), which review evaluations of the postulant’s educational work, and attest to the continuing formation of the postulant.

The Commission on Ministry makes a recommendation to the bishop regarding candidacy and the Standing Committee submits its approval. Upon receipt of the recommendation and approval, the bishop may grant candidacy.

- Candidates take an ordination examination (based on competencies as required by Canon III.8.5) usually during the third year of their formation program.

Ordination to the Transitional Diaconate

The bishop always makes the final determination of whether or not ordination occurs following the completion of the education process. Ordination will not occur immediately following the completion of the academic work if there are no openings in congregations available at the time.

- The candidate applies for ordination to the diaconate. **(Form C1)**
- The vestry of the sponsoring congregation submits a letter of support. **(Form C2)**
- The Commission on Ministry **(Form C3)** and the Standing Committee **(Form C4)**, review evaluations of the postulant’s educational work and make recommendations to the bishop about the candidate’s preparedness for ordination. The candidate is not expected to attend this meeting.

Ordination to the Priesthood

“A person may be ordained Priest after at least six months since ordination as a Deacon under this Canon and eighteen months from the time of acceptance of nomination by the Nominee as provided in III.8.2b, and upon attainment of at least twenty-four years of age, and if the medical evaluation, psychological evaluation, and background check have taken place or been updated within thirty-six months prior to ordination as a Priest.” (III.8.7a)

- The candidate applies for ordination to the priesthood. **(Form D1)**
- The vestry of the sponsoring congregation submits a letter of support. **(Form D2)**
- The deacon meets with the Commission on Ministry **(Form C3)** which reviews evaluations of the postulant's educational work and makes a recommendation to the bishop about the candidate's preparedness for ordination to the priesthood. The Standing Committee **(Form D4)** submits its approval.

NOTES

If, after ordination, a diocesan-trained priest decides that he or she has a calling to a full-time vocational ministry, additional discernment will be necessary and the completion of an academic degree at a seminary or similar institution will be required.

THE COST OF EDUCATION

For Seminarians

Attending seminary includes a significant financial commitment. For this reason, people who have significant existing debt may be told to work toward paying down their debt before being allowed to attend seminary. Seminarians must decide if the debt they incur in seminary can be repaid when they become employed in the church.

The diocesan budget normally reserves scholarship aid money for people attending seminary in full-time or part-time programs. The amount varies from year to year. The seminaries also provide varying amounts of financial aid, either in the form of scholarships or loans. The congregation from which the seminarian comes is expected to offer significant financial support as well.

The current amount of full-time residential seminary scholarship aid from the diocesan budget is \$2,000 per year, per student, to be reserved and given as debt relief following seminary, if needed.

For Iona Initiative Participants

Participating in the Iona Initiative requires a commitment of both time and money. Participants agree to attend classes in Little Rock one weekend each month (Friday evening through Sunday afternoon, September through June), as well as participate in reading and writing assignments between classes. During the latter part of their training, participants will be assigned a congregation in which to serve as a lay chaplain.

The cost of education and preparation for ordination includes tuition costs for the classes, housing, and transportation to and from the class meeting site, textbooks, and vestments. **The tuition for the academic year is \$2,000. Other expense amounts include approximately \$200 for textbooks, \$700 for vestments, and the cost of accommodations for the two weekend nights each month that the student is in Little Rock.** Students are expected to have internet connections in order to participate in on-line discussions between classes.

The costs of education and preparation for ordination should be shared by the student and the sponsoring congregation.

THE MINISTRY OF DIOCESAN TRAINED PRIESTS

NOTES

A diocesan-trained priest is called to the particular ministry of sacramental and pastoral oversight in a congregation that, due to limited financial resources, has unique opportunities and challenges. The diocesan-trained priest must have the ability to support him or herself financially without depending on a stipend, beyond a supply fee, from a congregation. The diocesan-trained priest also understands that he or she will serve in a congregation as priest-in-charge or vicar under the supervision of the bishop, not as a rector, and the congregation may or may not be located in the town or city in which the candidate lives.

- The assignment to a specific location and the duration of the assignment is the decision of the bishop.
- Priests participating in this training program are not eligible to be considered as rector of a congregation.
- The priest commits to continuing education under the guidance of the bishop.
- The bishop, the vestry of the local congregation to which the priest is assigned, and the priest will sign a letter of agreement detailing the scope of the work expected of the priest.

The priest commits to:

- Preside at worship each Sunday, Christmas and other Principal Feasts, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday, with a commitment to be present at least 46 Sundays per year.
- Offer the other sacraments of the church in the assigned congregation, including officiating at Holy Matrimony, Ministration to the Sick, and Reconciliation of a Penitent.
- Make hospital visits on Sunday to parishioners.
- Officiate at the burial of parishioners as possible, considering the secular employment of the priest.
- Teach Christian formation classes and classes focused on preparation for Confirmation, as detailed in a letter of agreement with the bishop and vestry.
- Lead or attend vestry meetings, as detailed in a letter of agreement with the bishop and vestry.
- Attend clergy conferences as offered by the diocesan office.
- Attend the annual diocesan convention of the Diocese of Arkansas.

The congregation commits to:

- Pay the supply fee and travel expenses of the priest, including for such services as Holy Matrimony and the Burial Office, and pastoral care visits.
- Contribute to the continuing education of the priest as detailed in a letter of agreement with the bishop and vestry.
- Find supply clergy as needed when the assigned priest is not available.
- Participate in training opportunities for the laity that promote congregational development and health.

* FOR MORE INFORMATION

Call The Rev. Canon Jason Alexander at the diocesan office at 501-372-2168 or email him at jalexander@episcopalarkansas.org.

Application for Postulancy
Title III, Canon 8, Section 2(b)

To the Right Reverend Larry R. Benfield
Bishop of The Diocese of Arkansas

I HEREBY accept nomination for ordination to the Priesthood and make application to be admitted by you as a POSTULANT FOR HOLY ORDERS.

1. a. My full name is _____
b. I was born on _____
2. I have resided in the Diocese of Arkansas since _____
3. I was baptized in _____ Church, _____,
on _____ by _____
4. I was confirmed in _____ Church, _____,
on _____ by the Right Rev. _____, Bishop of _____
5. I have () have not () previously applied for admission as a POSTULANT FOR HOLY ORDERS. (If the answer is positive, state full details)

6. I am moved to seek HOLY ORDERS because

7. Education:

- a. Full transcript of all academic work is completed and attached to this application.
- b. Highest level attained _____
- c. Degrees earned, if any _____
- d. Areas of specialization _____

8. My spiritual autobiography has been () will be () submitted.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

[Nominee]

* Provide your sponsoring congregation's vestry with **Form A1** so it may formally indicate its support for you to pursue Holy Orders . It and all other forms may be downloaded from <http://episcopalarkansas.org/ordination>.

Application for Candidacy
Title III, Canon 8, Section 4(a)

To the Right Reverend Larry R. Benfield
Bishop of The Diocese of Arkansas

I HEREBY make application to be admitted by you as a CANDIDATE FOR HOLY ORDERS.

1. I was admitted as a Postulant in the Diocese of Arkansas on _____
2. I have never before:
 - a. applied for admission as a CANDIDATE FOR HOLY ORDERS in any Diocese;
 - b. been refused admission as a CANDIDATE;
 - c. ceased to be a CANDIDATE in any Diocese, except: (if any exception is made, give full details)

Signed: _____ Date: _____

[Postulant]

* Provide your sponsoring congregation's vestry with **Form B2** so it may formally indicate its support for your continuation in the ordination process. It and all other forms may be downloaded from <http://episcopalarkansas.org/ordination>.

Application for
Ordination to the Diaconate
Title III, Canon 8, Section 6(c)



Form C1

To the Right Reverend Larry R. Benfield
Bishop of The Diocese of Arkansas

I HEREBY make application to be ORDAINED A DEACON under Canon III.8.

1. I was admitted as a Candidate in the Diocese of Arkansas on _____
2. My date of birth is _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

[Candidate]

* Provide your sponsoring congregation's vestry with **Form C2** so it may formally indicate its support for your ordination to the diaconate.

Application for
Ordination to the Priesthood
Title III, Canon 8, Section 7(b)



Form D1

To the Right Reverend Larry R. Benfield
Bishop of The Diocese of Arkansas

I HEREBY make application to be ORDAINED A PRIEST.

1. I was admitted as a Postulant in the Diocese of Arkansas on _____
2. I was admitted as a Candidate in the Diocese of Arkansas on _____
3. I was ordained a Deacon in the Diocese of Arkansas on _____
4. My date of birth is _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

[Deacon]

* Provide your sponsoring congregation's vestry with **Form D2** so it may formally indicate its support for your ordination to the priesthood.