

Formation for ordained ministry

Broadly speaking, formation is that which shapes who we are and how we view the world. When we consider formation for ordained ministry, we are speaking more about an intentional process whereby we are shaped academically, spiritually, and personally in order to live more fully into the demands of ministry. In the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania, this process occurs in community and involves a great number of individuals, all of whom share the privilege of forming effective, transformational leaders for mission.

Academic formation

Academic formation provides the tools and the language necessary to function as a resident theologian in the faith community. Academic work provides the context for discussion and education in any number of formats, including preaching, teaching and pastoral care. It also allows for a more precise language, not for the purpose of overwhelming someone with jargon, but to enable one to present carefully constructed frameworks for working through difficult life issues and ethical choices.

In this diocese, academic formation will occur in community. The norm for those preparing for the priesthood is to complete a three year residential program in an Episcopal seminary. On a case by case basis there may be exceptions based on the ministry needs in a given area. Exceptions will need to be thoroughly discussed and a detailed program of study planned in consultation with the Bishop and the Canon to the Ordinary. That program of study will include the core courses jointly offered by our diocese and the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA. Specifically those courses are: Intro to Scriptures, Old Testament, New Testament, Church History, Ethics, Systematic Theology, and Homiletics. Also required will be several courses covering those things unique to our tradition: Intro to Ministry, Intro to Anglicanism, Liturgics, The Theory and Practice of Ministry, Pastoral Theology, and Contemporary Issues.

Those preparing for the vocational diaconate will be required to satisfactorily complete six core courses which are being offered jointly by our diocese and the Northwestern Pennsylvania Lutheran Synod, ELCA. Those courses are: Intro to Scriptures, Old Testament, New Testament, Church History, Systematic Theology, and Homiletics. Also required will be several courses covering those things unique to our tradition. Among them will be: Intro to Ministry, Intro to Anglicanism, Liturgics, and The Theory and Practice of Ministry.

Spiritual formation

Spiritual formation is the process of developing and supporting our capacity to make connections between what we do and what we believe. Attending to this process provides the groundwork for upholding the vow to pattern our lives in accordance with the teachings of Christ. Prayer, spiritual direction and retreats are all instruments of continuing formation which replenish our spirit. Without continuing spiritual formation, burnout is likely to occur.

In this diocese, spiritual formation consists of several components common both to those aspiring to the priesthood and to those aspiring to the vocational diaconate. First, aspirants are expected to participate in the diocesan Spiritual Development Program. This program is an overview of the many strands of spirituality that find a home in our tradition. It provides a starting point for exploring one's own spiritual leanings. Second, it is expected that aspirants will engage in individual spiritual direction. As a resource, the Diocesan Church Center maintains a list of trained Spiritual Directors located throughout the region.

In addition, spiritual formation in community occurs within the context of working through the various stages of the ordination process. Meeting with one's parish/diocesan discernment committee and attending the bi-annual retreats with the Commission on Ministry and the Standing Committee are very important components of formation. Individual interviews with the COM and Standing Committee at critical transition points are yet another component. At any given time, these points of contact with the clergy and lay leadership of the diocese can be challenging or overwhelming. That is to be expected. Remember, together we are engaged in the process of forming effective, transformational leaders for mission. Therefore, we must be open and vulnerable to our own transformation as well.

Personal Formation

Personal formation is the development of a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the call to ordained ministry. It is the process of submitting ever more completely to the will of God by reorienting ourselves in ways that place more emphasis on the community. Personal formation moves from offering ourselves to God on our own terms to offering ourselves to God on God's terms.

In this diocese, just as we have seen with academic and spiritual formation, personal formation occurs in community. For those aspiring to the priesthood, the main components are Field Education and Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). In both of these venues the individual is challenged to integrate what has been learned academically and spiritually into his or her practical experience with particular attention paid to developing more self awareness in ministry situations. Colloquy is another forum for exploring these issues. During Colloquy, opportunity is provided to take a given event in ministry and theologically reflect on it in a structured way in order to allow insights to emerge.

For those aspiring to the vocational diaconate, both Field Education and Colloquy will be required. Field Education will have a particular emphasis on the diaconal call to be a bridge between the church and the world and to be a servant to all.