

Frequently Asked Questions:
The Episcopal Ministry Discernment Process
for the Diocese of Northern Michigan

1. What is “discernment”?

The Episcopal Ministry Discernment Team (EMDT) is using a discernment process to identify people to fill the roles of Bishop/Ministry Developer and the regional membership of the Episcopal Ministry Support Team. This discernment embodies much more than Webster’s definition which reads: to detect with the eyes: distinguish: discriminate: to come to know or recognize mentally. For the people of this diocese, discernment also implies intent to consider all aspects of an individual’s being (or presence) looking at external and internal characteristics on an intimate level, much as one would use when looking for a mate or lifelong partner. **We are not just hiring someone.** We are looking for someone with whom we can establish, nurture, and sustain a true and intimate relationship; someone who we can care deeply about and someone who will care deeply about the people of this diocese; someone who will embrace the vision of mutual ministry which we currently hold, and continue to build the vision, in equal partnership and with mutual accountability.

2. Who was/is eligible for discernment as Bishop/Ministry Developer?

The basic requirements for a person to be considered are:

- The person must be an adult baptized member of Christ’s church. In addition, the individual cannot be ordained and consecrated Bishop until s/he has attained 32 years of age. (Ref: Article II, Sec.2of the Constitution and Canons of the General Convention.) The individual must also be less than 72 years old. (Ref: Article II, Sec. 9 of the Constitution and Canons of the General Convention).
- The individual should possess the generally desirable characteristics and skills as published in the diocesan profile.
- The individual must have been discerned by someone else who knows the individual well, has become familiar with the generally desirable characteristics we are seeking, and has prayerfully considered if that person would be a “good fit” for the role of Bishop/Ministry Developer.

3. Has this ever been done before? Is it historical?

Yes, it is actually historical. All ministry in the early church was corporate or shared among the people. Early origins of the Episcopacy were collegial. “An ‘overseer’ (episkopos in Greek) was chosen as needed from among a group of presbyters who formed a sort of council. Even then this function was more fluid than fixed.” (Urban Holmes, 1978)

The Diocese of South Carolina recently presented one person for election at their Special Convention. He was elected Diocesan Bishop at that Special Convention.

The Presiding Bishop Speaks About “Effective” Ministry

“Ministry grows out of the Body of Christ. We may not agree on the language to use in talking about that ministry—we hear terms like total ministry, mutual ministry, and ministry of all the baptized, it has to recognize the connectedness of that Body, and express that awareness in collaboration....A baptismal ecclesiology begins in the belief that every member of this church is gifted for, and called to, ministry. It asserts that no ministry is more important than another, but that all are equally valued expressions of members of the Body of Christ.” (Katharine Jefferts Schori, *A Wing and a Prayer*, 2007)

4. What/Who is driving this process?

Following the death of Bishop Jim Kelsey in June of 2007, the diocese as a whole took the time to mourn our loss, and eventually began to consider our options as we looked towards calling a new bishop. At the annual Diocesan Convention held in Sault Ste. Marie in October 2007, the delegates to convention shared conversations in an attempt to move toward that end. Table discussions led to development of some basic questions, which were later put to each congregation in the diocese at either special or annual meetings. The questions were as follows:

- a) Who are we as a diocese, and what do we value?
- b) Given who we are and what we value, what is your vision of Episcopal ministry?
- c) How might we make that vision happen? What will it take to make that vision happen?

We believe the people in each congregation clearly and succinctly outlined what they valued and what they wanted. “We have a vision of a shared episcopate modeled upon Mutual Ministry in which the

Bishop/Ministry Developer's primary focus is pastoral, relational and canonical in full partnership with an Episcopal Ministry Support Team. They also outlined some key points to make that vision happen.

- Continue to build on the organizational structures that are in place to support the life and ministry of the diocese.
- Identify an Episcopal Ministry Support Team that includes the Bishop.
- Make greater use of technology to facilitate communication.
- Strive to increase an understanding of Mutual Ministry throughout the diocese.
- Be realistic and responsible about our finances.
- Determine what an Episcopal Ministry Support Team may do.

The Diocesan Council and Standing Committee listened to the wishes of the people of this diocese and began the process.

5. Is the process we are using in accordance with the Canons?

Canon III.11.1 provides:

“Discernment of vocation to be a Bishop occurs through a process of election in accordance with the rules prescribed by the Convention of the Diocese and pursuant to the provisions of the Constitution and Canons of this church.”

After review, I find no other specific requirements as to the election of a Bishop by the diocese (regarding either the number of nominees or the nominating procedure) within either Constitution or Canons. Patricia Micklow, Chancellor

6. Is it a “closed” process? In other words, have we seriously considered input from outside of this diocese?

This has been an open process. We have asked for and received names from our contacts within the diocese, from outside of the diocese, and outside of the Continental United States. In addition to asking for recommendations from established contacts, we have also invited members of each congregation within the diocese to submit names of persons who they have discerned to meet the requirements, in accordance with the published guidelines.

7. Is this driven by finances?

It is a reality in every area of our lives within the Church, the business world and our personal lives that financial concerns impact how we live, how we set our budgets and how we make our vision happen in the context in which we live.

Our financial situation certainly impacts our choice but it is not the only driving force. One of the benefits the congregational conversations brought forth was an opportunity to do something creative with the financial package.

8. How did you arrive at the figure for the compensation package?

We truly want our ministry to reflect the equality and the vision of shared mutual ministry. Therefore, all of our Ministry Developers (including the Bishop/Ministry Developer) will be compensated equally rather than in a traditional hierarchical model.

9. How was the EMDT formed?

The Episcopal Ministry Discernment Team was formed in early 2008 and is composed of twenty-one members, including four members from each region and representatives of the Standing Committee, Diocesan Council, and the Core Team. Two additional members were appointed by the Standing Committee to insure as broad a representation of the diocesan family as possible.

We asked Bishop Tom Ely of Vermont, Bishop Bruce Caldwell of Wyoming and Fredrica Harris Thompsett, Professor at The Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, to be reflectors and we invited Jo Gantzer of the Diocese of Michigan to be our companion to walk with us on our journey of discernment for Episcopal Ministry. These reflectors and our companion have helped to keep the team focused and informed. We are very appreciative of their commitment and assistance.

10. How did you decide the configuration (composition) of the Episcopal Ministry Support Team (EMST)?

We wanted each region to have representation recognizing that these representatives will bring to the team their own giftedness. We also wanted our ministry developers to be full partners in the Episcopal oversight of this diocese as they bring 20 plus years of experience in shared leadership.

11. How do the roles of Diocesan Council and the Episcopal Ministry Support Team compliment each other in the leadership of the diocese?

Diocesan Council functions basically in the same role as the vestry does on the local level. They tend to the finances and the business part of the diocese. The Episcopal Ministry Support Team will provide the setting for a broadly collaborative approach to supporting apostolic ministry in the diocese. The Standing Committee provides a check and balance to that arrangement.

12. How was it decided to present one name for Bishop/Ministry Developer?

In the traditional search process anyone can throw his or her hat into the ring. Someone decides that they want to be a bishop. It is self-selection. We chose to use the discernment process that has served us well in the local congregations for the past twenty plus years. At the congregational level there is often more than one person discerned for the same ministry. The team after much discussion and struggle came to the conclusion that we would try to focus or stay true to what the congregational conversations had revealed. Because there is only one bishop/ministry developer we would try and discern one person that best fit the criteria outlined by the people of this diocese, the person who would most fully encompass these gifts. This person would be able to function as part of a team and truly be able to share the Episcopal leadership in this diocese.

In a traditional election model three or four names are presented for the vote. Usually one person will stand out as a better fit and the others would be "ok." People don't know the candidates well when they come to convention. Our intention is to present one name based on prayerful consideration that is the very best fit for the ministry in this unique diocese. It is our hope that because of the careful, prayerful discernment of the team, one person will become the obvious choice. This one person will be presented to the diocese as the team's best recommendation.

It is our plan that the person who is discerned to be Bishop/Ministry developer will be revealed to the diocese as soon as the discernment process is completed. The people of this diocese will then have the opportunity to meet and/or get to know this person and the rest of the Episcopal Ministry Support Team prior to the Special Convention. It is the team's hope that the people of this diocese will also discern and agree that this person is truly the best fit to share the ministry here in this diocese. At the election a yes vote would affirm the election of the new Bishop/Ministry developer and ministry support team. A no vote would stop that process and we would have to go back to discerning once again. Because of this "yes/no" possibility the team goes forward with some apprehension trusting that God is working in and through us on behalf of the diocese.

13. Why don't we just join another Diocese?

There are geographical limitations as well as financial burdens.

It would be a very big financial undertaking for any other diocese. We live with a different understanding of ministry. But the overwhelming factor made clear to us by the people of this diocese in the congregational conversations was a very strong desire and determination to continue to embrace and live out mutual ministry and live our lives with a new vision of Episcopal ministry.

14. Where is the Bishop/Ministry Developer going to be? Live/work?

That is yet to be determined based on the outcome of the discernment.

15. What happens if the candidate the EMDT has discerned for the role of Bishop/Ministry Developer is NOT elected?

If the people of this diocese are unable to affirm the leadership that is discerned then the Standing Committee will have to decide on how to redefine the process. Thus the Standing Committee will continue as Ecclesiastical Authority of the diocese.