

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF THE SOUTH  
**Guidelines for the Priest Candidate's Retreat**

**The Nature and Purpose of the Retreat**

For several months you have been engaged in diaconal ministry. Almost certainly it has been a time of spiritual growth: challenging, rewarding, encouraging, and frustrating. You have exalted Christ and humbled self. You have led and you have served, and you have experienced the mystery and tension that hold leadership and service together. You have prayed – perhaps more than ever before because you now have souls in your care. And you may have wept for your own insufficiency and for the Lord's abundant strength and mercy. Such is the diaconate.

Now, the moment of transition to the priesthood nears. It is time to rest for a moment – physically, mentally, and spiritually – and to come away by yourself to be with Jesus.

<sup>31</sup> And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat (Mk 6:31, ESV throughout unless otherwise noted).

It is time to cease being anxious and troubled about many things – even the wonderful things of diaconal ministry – and to seek the one thing necessary.

<sup>38</sup> Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. <sup>39</sup> And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. <sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." <sup>41</sup> But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, <sup>42</sup> but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her" (Lk 10:38-42).

The priest candidate's retreat is not a requirement to be satisfied; it is an invitation to be accepted – an invitation not just from the bishop, but from Jesus himself: come away and rest awhile. There is nothing you must do except to spend time with Jesus. There is nothing you must accomplish but to choose the one thing necessary.

**The Structure of the Retreat**

ADOTS suggests a one or two day personal retreat before ordination. The structure of that retreat will vary based upon duration, location, and the individual needs and interests of the candidate. Above all, the retreat should occur in the context of prayer,

worship, and presence, nourished by solitude, silence, and rest. Select a place free from distraction and noise. Unplug and disconnect. Take a nap and take a walk. Listen to the birds in the morning and the cicadas in the evening and sing God's praise with them. Be carefree in the care of God (Eugene Peterson).

What else should you do? Following are suggested activities for drawing into Christ's presence and for remaining there with him – suggestions that may prove useful at this moment of transition and also throughout your priestly ministry. Adapt these as appropriate.

### **Prayer**

Immerse yourself in the structure and rhythm of the daily office, with Morning and Evening Prayer as a minimum. These prayers are the cornerstone of Anglican spirituality and have formed generations of faithful priests.

Pray the Psalms. Reflect upon those that speak to you of priestly ministry, e.g., Psalm 26.

- 6 I will wash my hands in innocence, O LORD, \*  
that I may go in procession round your altar,
- 7 Singing aloud a song of thanksgiving \*  
and recounting all your wonderful deeds.
- 8 LORD, I love the house in which you dwell \*  
and the place where your glory abides (Ps 26:6-8, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1979, hereafter *BCP*).

Seek a new or fresh manner of prayer: centering prayer, breath prayer (e.g. the Jesus Prayer), *lectio divina*, Anglican rosary, etc.

Pray the Great Litany (*BCP* 148-155); the collects for the ministry (*BCP* 256); the prayers for the church (*BCP* 816-817), for guidance, quiet confidence, and self-dedication (*BCP* 832-833).

### **Scripture**

Spend time and prayer in the readings appointed for the ordination of a priest:

Isaiah 6:1-8

Psalm 119:33-40

Ephesians 4:7-13 or Philippians 4:4-9

Luke 10:1-9 or John 10:1-16

### **Liturgy**

Read and meditate upon the “Form and Manner of Ordaining a Priest” in *The Ordinal of the Anglican Church in North America*.<sup>1</sup> Consider carefully and prayerfully the vows you are soon to take and the blessings and responsibilities of the priesthood.

Read and reflect on the “Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion, commonly called The Holy Eucharist” in *Texts For Common Prayer*. Practice the service aloud with manual actions. Internalize the prayers, not only through memorization, but also through meditation.

Read “The Reconciliation of a Penitent” *BCP*, 446-452. Notice and reflect upon the different forms of the pronouncement of absolution and upon the awful ministry of reconciliation soon to be yours.

### **Journaling**

Write a summary of your diaconate. Where, when, and how was God most apparent in that ministry? What were the challenges of the transition from laity to clergy? What were your greatest fears and disappointments, your greatest joys and blessings? What surprised you most and what did you learn that will inform your priesthood?

Write a spiritual autobiography, and then read it as if it were another’s story. Note the wonderfully grace-filled, patient yet inexorable ways God formed this person and led him to the priesthood. Pray your way through that written life listening for God to speak in and through its events and circumstances.

If you do not currently have a rule of life, begin prayerfully to write one, focusing on those structures, practices, and patterns which will support and sustain your priestly vocation. If you have a rule, reconsider it – and revise it as necessary – in light of your changing ministry, to ensure its relevance to the priesthood. Write a summary of the most important principles of your rule sufficiently concise to fit on an index card, and use these as points of daily examen.

Write your eulogy focusing on what you pray will be said about your priesthood.

Write a letter to those who have supported you throughout the process of ordination. Thank them

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<sup>1</sup> The **Ordinal** may be accessed at [http://www.anglican church.net/?/main/texts\\_for\\_common\\_prayer](http://www.anglican church.net/?/main/texts_for_common_prayer).

Write a letter to your family describing the challenges and blessing you anticipate the priesthood will present your family relations. Thank them.

### **Reading**

Reading can be either hindrance or help on retreat. It is a hindrance if used to fill time, to distract you from the one necessary thing – spending time in the presence of God. It is a help if it ushers you into God’s presence and leaves you there. Take a few books, if you will, and read selections from them sparingly – slowly and prayerfully – until you hear God’s voice. Then, put the books away and listen.<sup>2</sup>

### **Topics for Reflection**

There is a fourfold pattern to the Eucharist, four verbs which characterize its rhythm: taken, blessed, broken, and given away. You have been taken, called by God to the priesthood. Soon you will be blessed bishop and by fellow priests as you are ordained to that ministry. Now, ponder your brokenness – that which already has occurred and that which yet must surely occur in your ministry before you can be fully given away for the sake of the souls entrusted to your care. Ponder the giving itself. Are there yet treasures held in reserve, things held tightly which must be relinquished?

Three gifts of ministry distinguish the priesthood from the diaconate: absolution, blessing, and consecration. Reflect on the theological meaning and pastoral significance of each. How will you exercise reconciliation, not just in the “confessional,” but in your home, parish, and community? How will you not only pronounce blessing, but become blessing to those you serve? How will you consecrate not just bread and wine, but every moment of every day of your priesthood? How will you be a priest, not only in the sanctuary, but in the world?

### **Summary**

None of these activities is necessary; retreat is gift, not task. If you listen for and to God, spend time delighting in his presence, and give yourself unreservedly to him – in whatever manner best suits you – you have done the one necessary thing.

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<sup>2</sup> You almost certainly have favorite books which have nurtured your relationship with Christ through the years. As you approach ordination you might also find the following helpful: *The Christian Priest Today* (Michael Ramsey), *The Contemplative Pastor* (Eugene Peterson), *Life Together* (Dietrich Bonhoeffer), *Now and Then* (Frederick Buechner), *Pastor* (Eugene Peterson), and *Pastor* (William Willimon).

## **Retreat Blessing**

May the Holy Spirit be your retreat director and guide you into all truth. May the Lord Jesus abide in you as you abide in him. May God the Father, who created and called you, strengthen and sustain you in the priesthood.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your heart and mind in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you, and remain with you always.+ Amen.