



# THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

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## **Episcopal Diocese of Maryland Commission on Ministry**

### **Handbook**

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## **What is the role of the Commission on Ministry?**

The ministry of the Commission on Ministry (COM) is a sacred trust and a holy opportunity to share in discernment and formation with those seeking to be ordained in The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland and the greater church. As members of the COM, we discover with joy the privilege of sharing in people's faith journeys. This sharing is often moving and sometimes painful, and the work is taken by each member with the utmost seriousness and in confidentiality.

The COM is established by church canons (laws) and cooperates with the bishop in discerning whether or not people are called to ordained ministry in the church. The COM is tasked with providing oversight and support for recruitment, discernment, and formation of those discerners who feel called to lay, diaconal, and priestly ministries as well as those exploring religious orders. The COM supports people as they discern their own sense of God's call. Members of the COM discern together, through a formal process, about whether or not to confirm each discerner's sense of calling. In other words, once a discerner has clarity about what they sense God is calling them to do, the COM discerns on behalf of the Episcopal Church whether to confirm, or not, a discerner's sense of calling.

The COM actively recruits people to enter our process of discernment, formation, and ordination through diocesan workshops, personal invitations, and other means. The first step for anyone wanting to enter the process is to meet with their rector and then contact Eve Wayne (Administrative Assistant to the COM) in the Diocesan office. Eve will send the applicant a letter that states requirements for applying, including:

- resume
- photo
- application
- letter from rector and vestry
- psychological examination report
- interview with Bishop Ihloff

Discerners accepted into the process must also choose a spiritual director within the first month of the discernment and formation process and must also notify Eve Wayne if they have changed spiritual directors. A spiritual director cannot be a discerner's rector or 12-step program sponsor. The COM has developed a list of qualified spiritual directors for the use of discerners, and that list is available from Eve.

Eve Wayne will develop and maintain files on all discerners in the diocesan discernment and formation process for future reference and for the use of the COM.

COM applicants are interviewed first and foremost by the bishop. The bishop has the discretion to accept people into the process and then direct them to the next steps, whatever they may be, in the discernment and formation process. Normally, discerners will be instructed to participate in the six-month Exploring Baptismal Ministry (EBM) program. Following the completion of EBM, some discerners will be accepted into the six-month Discerning Ordained Vocations (DOV) program. COM applicants are also expected to undertake a psychological evaluation immediately upon acceptance into the discernment process.

Those discerners who feel called to active lay ministry or other religious orders will be guided by the COM as they seek formation and ministry opportunities that will be a good fit for their calling. The COM believes that if someone is discerning the will of the Holy Spirit with regard to call, it is NOT a failure to discern a call to lay discipleship. Indeed, it is a blessing to discern what one's true call actually is, in whatever order of ministry in the Body of Christ.

Those who are continuing in the process of discerning ordained vocations will then apply to the COM for **postulancy**. After the sponsoring congregation, bishop, EBM Mentors, DOV Mentors, and internship supervisors have recommended that a discerner may have a call to ministry as a deacon or priest, the Commission on Ministry members read the discerner's confidential files, interview these discerners, and make a recommendation to the bishop, who shares in the COM discussion about discerners after their interviews. The COM votes on advancing discerners to postulancy for holy orders, or may recommend specific requirements before granting postulancy, or may vote not to further the person in the ordination process.

Postulancy is the stage when discerners begin their formal programs for formation as either deacons or priests. Those seeking to become deacons will begin the Deacon Formation Program that is overseen by the archdeacon for formation. Those seeking to become priests will start seminary, and/or other approved formation programs.

After serving as a postulant for a minimum of one year, and when various supervisors confirm that a discerner is ready, the discerner may apply to the COM for **candidacy**. The COM reads new documents in the files and interviews the postulant in order to consider whether or not to advance them to candidacy. Again, a vote is taken and the candidate, if approved, will be notified by the bishop. Candidacy lasts a minimum of six months and is a time of further formation for ministry and also at the initial stage of Candidacy, the discerner will have a conversation with the Standing Committee.

When candidates are thought to be prepared by those who are serving as their supervisors, mentors, and teachers, they may apply to the COM, Standing Committee, and bishop for **ordination**. At this point, during the Application for Ordination, the role of the COM is to certify and confirm for the Standing Committee that the candidate has successfully completed all of the requirements in the ordination process. The COM does not interview at this stage. Instead, the COM

provides a written certificate to the Standing Committee. Then the Standing Committee and bishop will formally approve them for ordination.

In accordance with the canons, the Commission on Ministry believes that no person shall be denied access to the discernment and formation process for any ministry, lay or ordained, in this Church because of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disabilities or age.

Since members of the Commission on Ministry are required to carry out our process of recruitment, discernment, and formation in accordance with the canons, please take some time to read through the canons specifically Constitutions & Canons, Title III, pages 99-131. Click on the following link:

<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/23914>

### **What is the Standing Committee's Role in the Discernment and Formation Process?**

The Standing Committee is the body of lay and clergy members of the diocese elected at the annual Diocesan Convention and authorized by the canons of the Episcopal Church as the Bishop's council of advice. If there is no bishop canonically authorized to act, the Standing Committee becomes the ecclesiastical authority of the diocese for all purposes declared by General Convention.

In addition to this, the canons of the Diocese of Maryland provide that the **Standing Committee advises the bishop** or gives consent in matters of the disposition of property, ecclesiastical discipline, the election and consecration of bishops, and **in matters involving candidates for ordained ministry**. The election of members and the terms and conditions of their office are defined by these canons.

The Standing Committee enters the process leading to ordination late in the process. It has a conversation (not an interview) with each candidate in order to learn that everything has been done according to the canons, both diocesan and denominational, and to get to know the candidate at least a little bit before one of the committee's members stands at the ordination as one of the presenters.

Traditionally, the candidates are asked these three questions in the half hour or so conversation:

- How have you experienced the discernment and formation process?
- What sacrifices have you made during this discernment and formation process?
- Share a story about your ministry that reflects your call to be a deacon/priest

These questions are shared in advance with those applying for ordination in a letter stressing that this is not an interview, rather an acknowledgement that she/he/they

“has been through a rigorous and discerning process with the Commission on Ministry and we trust their wisdom and reflection.”

The Standing Committee is required to assure that the following documents are in hand and in good form:

- Application for ordination
- Congregational letter of support
- Written evidence of admission to postulancy and candidacy
- Evidence of preparatory education/program and evaluation of how the postulant/candidate performed, along with any recommendations
- Certificate from the Commission on Ministry with its recommendation

The committee will take a vote to approve the applicant for ordination and will share that advice with the bishop. When it is time for the person to be ordained, the Standing Committee will certify by majority vote that the person has fulfilled all the requirements for ordination. Each ordinand will have at least one member of the Standing Committee as a presenter at their ordination.

Members of the Standing Committee are required to carry out their process of advice and consent to approve candidacy for ordination in accordance with the national canons, specifically Title I, Canon 12 Title III, Canons 5, 6 and 8, and also in accordance with Canon 4 of the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese of Maryland.

[Constitution & Canons \(generalconvention.org\)](http://generalconvention.org)

<https://episcopalmaryland.org/publication/diocesan-constitution-and-canons/>

**How are COM members recruited and appointed? What is the term for serving? What are the responsibilities and expectations for COM members?**

Diocesan Canon 4-100 states:

"At each annual meeting of the Convention, the Bishop shall nominate, subject to confirmation by the Convention, a Commission on Ministry ("Commission"), to consist of not fewer than fifteen persons, divided among Priests, Deacons and Lay Persons. Terms of office shall be three years, with terms expiring (insofar as is practicable) in a staggered fashion to ensure that the terms of approximately 1/3 of the Commission's membership expire in any given year."

Persons serving on the Commission on Ministry in the Diocese of Maryland should exhibit the following:

- a lively, personal Christian faith, open to new understandings and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit

- an ability to listen reverently and carefully to others, respecting the dignity of all persons in accordance with our Baptismal Covenant
- an ability to share one's own perceptions and thoughts without becoming defensive
- an ability to hold confidences and conversations in strict privacy
- an ability to work as a member of a team
- a commitment to work with others toward a shared consensus (which is not necessarily complete agreement but a group decision to move forward or not on persons in the process)
- a commitment to attend regular meetings of the COM, the COM retreat, and Saturday interviews as required by the process

### **Confidentiality & Conflict of Interest**

The COM files are confidential, and they include various evaluations that are meant to remain confidential, for the sake of the process. Discerners are always welcome to ask for feedback from their mentors, and mentors are always welcome to provide their own feedback as needed, but discerners are not allowed to access these confidential personal files.

### **Commission on Ministry Member Disclosure and Privacy Policy Agreement**

The Commission on Ministry is committed to serving the church, our diocese and those individuals discerning a call to lay ministry or holy orders. To that end, we want to provide fair and unbiased evaluations of such individuals and respect their privacy. As a member of the COM, you must adhere to and acknowledge your understanding of the following:

1. You are required to disclose to the COM any prior interaction or relationship you have with any individual discerning a call in our diocese. You are also required to disclose on-going interactions or relationships that develop with such an individual while serving on the COM. The disclosure must:
  - a. Be made as soon as you become aware of the matter
  - b. Be in writing or recorded in the minutes of a COM meeting
  - c. Specify the nature and duration of the relationship.

If you believe your interactions or relationship may jeopardize your ability to objectively evaluate that individual, you may recuse yourself from the evaluation of that individual. If, after discussing the matter, a majority of the COM determines your interactions or relationship may jeopardize your ability to



objectively evaluate that individual, the COM will recuse you from its evaluation of that individual. The final determination whether to permit or recuse a COM member from participating in that individual's evaluation must be recorded in the minutes or other official COM record.

Relationships that may warrant recusal include but are not limited to, those involved in a close professional, social, or personal relationship with the individual.

2. You acknowledge that the discernment and formation process is highly confidential. As such, all information obtained while engaged in your duties as a COM member must be held in strict confidence. Sharing information from any individual's discernment file with anyone outside of the COM is prohibited. Discussing information about an individual in discernment and formation with another COM member in public is also prohibited.
3. All copies of files, documents, or notes related to an individual existing at the close of a COM meeting should be left with the designated COM member for shredding and disposal. Any other material related to an individual that may be in your possession, either in physical or electronic form, should be shredded and disposed of, or deleted immediately after the interview or discussion relation to that individual.

## **COM Norms**

- COM members will attend all regular meetings
- Every effort will be made to begin and end meetings on time
- Meetings will open and close with prayer
- We will approach each other and the discerners with respect
- We will practice confidentiality
- We will approach the task at hand with integrity
- We will use "I" statements, speak directly, and own our own feelings
- We will avoid sidebar conversations and crosstalk

- In general, be sure to allow time for all members to speak before speaking a second time
- A representative from the COM will attend ordinations to support ordinands. We will have a sign-up sheet asking for participation
- COM members will sign up to attend interview days. Interview days are a key part of the COM's work, so members should be prepared to sign up and participate regularly

## **Glossary of terms and roles related to the process**

Archdeacon	A deacon with a defined administrative authority delegated by the diocesan bishop. The archdeacon is typically a deacon (in Maryland) who serves as advisor for deacons' deployment and pastoral care. The title of an archdeacon is "The Venerable," which is abbreviated "The Ven."
Archdeacon for Deployment and Pastoral Care	A deacon with a defined administrative authority to advise the diocesan bishop on the deployment of deacons to congregations and other ministries, and to support deacons pastorally and vocationally.
Archdeacon for Formation	A deacon with a defined administrative authority delegated by the diocesan bishop to manage, train, and support those seeking ordination to the diaconate.
Bishop	One of the three orders of ordained ministers in the church, bishops are charged with the apostolic work of leading, supervising, and uniting the church. Bishops oversee a diocese and exclusively convey the sacraments of confirmation and ordination. Bishops are priests prior to being elected and ordained as a bishop and continue to exercise their diaconal and priestly ministries alongside their episcopal ministry.
Candidacy	The time of continued education and formation, in preparation for ordained ministry lasting a minimum of six months. It is granted formally by the COM and the bishop.
Canons	The denominational and diocesan rules or "church law" that govern and order, among other things, the ordination process.
Canonicals	Competency exams administered toward the end of formation and before ordination. For deacons, see DDC. For priests, see GOEs
Co-Chairs of the COM	Leaders of the COM. One is clergy and one is laity.

Commission on Ministry (COM)	A 15+ member committee comprised of laity, deacons and priests appointed by the bishop and confirmed by Diocesan Convention that "advises and assists the Bishop with the opportunities and ministry needs of all baptized persons, oversight and recruitment for ministry of all baptized persons - laity, deacons, and priest." (Diocese of Maryland Canon 4-100). The COM offers programs and support to anyone exploring a call to either a lay vocation or holy orders by supporting the ongoing discernment of gifts and call in the local faith community as well as through discernment and formation programs at the diocesan level.
Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)	An internship program in a clinical pastoral setting (like a hospital or nursing home) where interns have hands-on experiences providing pastoral care while reflecting and learning with an approved supervisor and peer group. Interns will have relational experiences, and get feedback, to develop greater self-awareness and skills in pastoral care. Interns participate in classwork, case study, and practical experiences to cultivate their skills.
Deacon	One of the three orders of ordained ministers in the church, deacons serve as a bridge between the church and the world. Deacons serve in specific congregations or regionally, but under the direct authority of the bishop. Deacons have particular liturgical roles, such as proclaiming the gospel at the Eucharist, bidding the general confession, assisting at the altar, and dismissing the congregation.
Determination of Diaconal Competencies (DDC)	The examination administered annually to deacon postulants prior to ordination to examine their mastery of deacon competencies (previously known as deacon canonical examination).
Diocese	A geographically defined area of congregations and other ministries under the authority of a bishop. The Diocese of Maryland has a little over 100 congregations and affiliated agencies.
Diocesan Day on the Diaconate (D3)	One-day event for anyone discerning a call to be a deacon to learn more about deacons and their ministry.

Discerners	Persons intentionally seeking understanding of their ministry call as laity, or toward a religious order, or ordained ministry. Those who are participating in the COM's process are referred to as "discerners."
Discerning Ordained Vocation (DOV)	A six-month program for those discerning a call to ordination. People in DOV work with a peer cohort, a mentor team that includes a lay person, priest, deacon, and a lay committee from their internship congregation.
DOV Mentors	A team (one lay, one priest, and one deacon) that facilitates the discernment and formation of persons in DOV. They prepare individual recommendations to the bishop and COM for persons to move forward to postulancy or not.
Episcopate	An adjective describing a bishop (from the Greek work "episkopos").
Exploring Baptismal Ministry (EBM)	The first program offered for group discernment and formation at the diocesan level. People interested in learning more about and exploring both lay and ordained ministry are encouraged to enroll in EBM. Participants in EBM work with a peer cohort and mentor team that includes a lay person, priest, deacon, and a lay committee from their home congregation.
EBM Mentors	A team (one layperson, deacon, and priest) that mentors and facilitates the training of persons exploring their baptismal ministry as a lay person. The mentors write a report on each discernor for the COM in preparation for possible application to DOV.
Eve Wayne	Executive secretary to the assisting bishop and canon to the ordinary. She is the designated staff recipient of all information related to persons in the discernment and formation process and/or seeking ordination.

Examining Chaplains	A team that reviews, grades and reports to bishops and COM on the competence of those preparing for ordination. The denomination's Board of Examining Chaplains is charged with preparing "at least annually a GOE or DDC covering the subject matter set forth in the canons for priest and deacon candidates.
Executive Committee	Certain members of the COM, by title, who meet monthly to provide oversight and support for the COM.
General Ordination Examination (GOE)	The denominational Board of Examining Chaplains produce a new GOE annually through a process of conceiving and formulating questions based on six canonical areas. The exam is administered over the course of three days at various seminary locations in January of each year.
Holy Orders	A term referring to formal ordination or "ordering" of individuals to the diaconate, priesthood or episcopacy (bishop).
Individual Formation Plan (IFP)	An individualized plan for a deacon postulant that outlines the diaconal areas of competency, internships, CPE, learning goals, objectives, and postulant completion dates/activities.
Internship Supervisor	The clergy person responsible for supervising the activities of a person in discernment or formation at a congregation other than their sponsoring congregation.
Licensing	Lay persons may be licensed by the bishop for certain ministries such as preaching, teaching, pastoral care and evangelism.
Ordination	To "set apart" individuals for a specific order of ministry. Bishops have the authority to "ordain" individuals to either the diaconate or priesthood, or (with at least two other bishops) to the episcopacy. Those to be ordained are called "ordinands".
Parish Discernment Committee (PDC)	A committee of lay persons at the internship parish of a postulant that is responsible for listening and advising the postulant during the parish internship. They write an evaluation and recommendation letter to the COM at the end of the internship. PDC members are chosen by the priest in consultation with the discernor (may include 1-2 non-parish members if appropriate).

Postulancy	The first official stage of preparation toward ordination, recommended by the sponsoring congregation, and approved by the COM and the bishop. A covenant agreement is signed by the postulant and the bishop. Postulancy in our diocese lasts a minimum of one year.
Priest	One of the three orders of ordained ministers in the Church, priests serve as preachers, pastors, and teachers, mostly as they provide oversight within faith communities. Priests proclaim the good news of Jesus by preaching and as they preside at baptisms, Eucharist, and other sacramental rites such as healing, reconciliation, marriage, and funerals. Priests are ordained to the diaconate for a transitional period prior to ordination to the priesthood.
Rector	The ordained priest called to oversee a congregation. Instead of a rector, some congregations have a priest-in-charge or a vicar.
Seminary	A graduate-level accredited school of higher education specifically for preparing individuals for professional ministry in the church.
Sponsoring Congregation	This is the parish or congregation that is sending forth and supporting the person in discernment and formation.
Standing Committee	Elected diocesan committee responsible for certifying that the canonical requirements for ordination to holy orders are met. They work in tandem with the COM.
Standing Committee and Commission on Ministry Liaison	Representative to the standing committee who is member of the COM.
<i>The Book of Common Prayer</i> (BCP)	The book that defines our corporate worship and beliefs. TEC has its own BCP that is unique to our branch of Anglicanism, but every one of the 38 provinces of the Anglican Communion (of which TEC is one) has its own unique but similar BCP.

The Episcopal Church (TEC)	A denominational branch of the worldwide Anglican Communion, composed of 110 dioceses mostly in the United States, but also inclusive of dioceses all over the world. TEC's corporate name is the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society and was formed as a branch of the Church of England in the late 1700s.
Transitional Deacon	A person preparing to be ordained to the priesthood who is first ordained to the diaconate for a period of time. Priests ordained diaconal ministry continues after ordination to the priesthood. For instance, in the absence of a deacon, a priest performs all liturgical roles of a deacon in a worship service.
Vestry	The elected body of lay leaders in a congregation that endorses a discernment's application to postulancy, candidacy and ordination.
Vocational Deacon	A person called to serve permanently as a deacon with no intent to move toward ordination to the priesthood. In rare instances, some vocational deacons may later discern a call to the priesthood, and some been ordained as such.



## **Commission on Ministry Information Session**

The Commission on Ministry will host a workshop once a year, via Zoom or in-person, for those who are curious about the process of discernment, formation, and ordination in the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland. All are welcome, including discerners, clergy, and lay leaders who want to learn more about the process.

## **Exploring Baptismal Ministry**

EBM is the acronym for **Exploring Baptismal Ministry**. In the Diocese of Maryland, EBM is the beginning of formal discernment and formation for those considering a call to ordained ministry; however, respecting its name and the belief that all persons are called into God's service, this program is the appropriate starting place for those discerning both ordained and lay ministries (see also *Developing a Lay Ministry Track*).

EBM is a six-month program that includes monthly meetings with three mentors and a group of 5-12 peers, with assigned reading and writing, as well as group discussion and reflection enabling participants to listen more closely to God's call. Participants have the support of the three EBM Mentors (a priest, a deacon, a layperson). They may also have the support of a Parish Discernment Committee – a group of laypersons at their home parish who serve as an additional set of listening ears and observers in the discernment and formation process. Throughout EBM, discerners will be supported by their mentors while also being evaluated. Discerners in the program must also have a spiritual director that they meet with at least monthly. Discerners must notify Eve Wayne if they have changed spiritual directors while in the program.

Discerners in EBM are expected to pattern their lives in accordance with the teachings of Christ, so that they may be a wholesome example to others.

At the end of the EBM program the mentors will write formal evaluations for each discerner, and these will be submitted to the confidential COM files in the bishop's office. In the past, the COM has enjoyed hosting a debriefing meeting at the end of EBM so that discerners can share their experiences and feedback, as well as having a Q & A time about next steps in the process.

At the end of the EBM program, those sensing a call to ordination may apply to enter the DOV program for the next stage of discernment and formation. Those applying to begin DOV will need the recommendation of their mentors, as well as the approval of the bishop and COM co-chairs.

## **Discerning Ordained Vocations**

“DOV” is the acronym for **Discerning Ordained Vocations**. In the Diocese of Maryland, DOV is the second stage of the formal discernment and formation process, and it lasts six months. It is generally the next step taken following EBM for those who are discerning a call to ordained ministry, and it requires the endorsement of the Vestry of the discerner’s home congregation, as well as the approval of the bishop, and COM co-chairs.

The DOV program includes monthly Saturday gatherings with assigned reading and writing, group discussion and reflection. DOV also includes a 3-4 months-long internship at a congregation that is suitable as a teaching location for discerners while they participate actively in many aspects of congregational leadership. The goals of this internship experience are multivalent; primarily it is to offer the discerner hands on experiences so that they may reflect on how daily parish ministry relates to their sense of call. The internship also offers the important experience of leaving one’s home parish for a time. Clergy who agree to be a DOV Intern Supervisor will be kept in the loop by the DOV mentors via email, phone call, and documents that fully explain the guidelines/requirements/time period for internships. DOV Mentor contact information is always included so any Supervisor is welcome to contact Mentors directly with questions or concerns.

Each participant has the support of the three DOV leaders (a priest, a deacon, a layperson). They may also have the support of a Parish Discernment Committee – a group of laypersons at both their home parish and their internship parish, who serve as an additional set of listening ears and observers in the discernment and formation process.

Each participant is required to have a spiritual director with whom they meet at least monthly throughout DOV.

Discerners in DOV are expected to pattern their lives in accordance with the teachings of Christ, so that they may be a wholesome example to others.

After completing DOV, discerners may apply to the Commission on Ministry to become postulants. There are a number of requirements that are part of the postulancy application process, and people may turn to Eve Wayne, on the diocesan staff, for guidance about their paperwork. After submitting all required paperwork to the COM's confidential files in the bishop's office, applicants will be invited to attend an interview day with members of the full COM, who will meet with discerners in small groups. At the end of the interview day, COM members will meet with the bishop to make their recommendations and take a vote about granting postulancy. The bishop will notify applicants within a few days to let them know if they were granted postulancy.

## Developing a Lay Ministry Track

The COM affirms that if a discerner recognizes a call to lay ministry and discipleship it is a blessing to discern one's true call to whatever order of ministry. The COM hopes to provide a mentor to serve as a resource for additional, focused formation in lay leadership for those who:

- have completed EBM (Exploring Baptismal Ministry) and
- identified a call, affirmed by the COM and by the community, to a particular area of servant leadership within or outside of a parochial setting *that does not point toward ordination* as a deacon or priest.

A mentor would be available to one who has discerned a call to lay ministry for a period of time not to exceed six months from the completion of EBM. This lay ministry mentorship is being developed, in part, to respond to the changing needs of the church with regard to shifting clergy roles, e.g., the availability of, and decreasing needs for clergy to serve in full-time parochial roles. The church is placing a renewed emphasis on mutual ministry and the critical role that effective lay ministers play both in the church and in the broader community.

Formation opportunities would include both classroom learning and practical application.

## Psychological Evaluations

The Commission on Ministry has worked to improve the process for psychological evaluations of discerners and has spent much time brainstorming about needed improvements. A subcommittee of the COM was appointed to discuss and implement changes to the psychological evaluation procedure.

This subcommittee met and reflected on the past process for psychological examinations, sharing feedback from a variety of sources. Then we developed plans for a new and improved process, as well as interviewing and hiring three qualified psychologists to address our goals. Those psychologists are Dr. Kasey L Serdar, Ph.D., Dr. Richard Ruth, Ph.D., and Dr. Jonathan R. Schettino, Ph.D. We were pleased to hire psychologists who were of different genders, races, and sexual orientations.

Moving forward, discerners will be able to choose which psychologist they want to see. We hope this will set discerners at ease with the process. Currently the cost remains the same as in the past, at \$1,200. for the whole evaluation. The "Dear Discerner" letter below will be shared with those who are coming through the process.

The subcommittee who worked on this process will serve in an ongoing capacity by meeting once or twice yearly to read through the summary reports provided by the psychologists. The goal is to provide more in depth and thorough recommendations to the bishop as he considers next steps in the process for each discerner. We trust that discerners will benefit from the feedback they receive while going through this process.

Note that as part of the application process to enter EBM, discerners will be required to set up and participate in a psychological evaluation with a psychologist on the COM's approved list.

## **Letter to Discerners Regarding Psychological Evaluation**

Dear Discerner,

In the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, we are grateful to you for participating in the discernment and formation process for ordination. Discerning a call to ministry is a complex process that is both individual and communal. The process will invite you to deeply examine your life, honestly assess your strengths and weaknesses, and reflect on the complexities of your motivations, as well as your perception of God's will. At the local and diocesan levels, the church is charged with evaluating your call and suitability for ordained service in the church, affirming that God accomplishes great things through imperfect people.

The Diocese of Maryland seeks candidates for ordination who are faithful, mature, honest, flexible, resilient, empathic, and who demonstrate the capacity for creative leadership. We wish to ordain leaders who will draw people into more loving and life-giving relationships with God and each other, through Christ.

We know that healthy clergy make healthy congregations, and unhealthy clergy make unhealthy congregations. Problematic clergy have the potential to cause harm to the people and communities in their care. For these reasons, the church must be thorough in the assessment of persons discerning a call to ordained ministry. We do not expect potential candidates to be perfect, but we do expect that they will be generally healthy, open to feedback, and when appropriate, eager to follow up on recommendations for additional work.

Canon law requires the Commission on Ministry to administer and evaluate psychological examinations of all discerners who are in the ordination process. We see this as an opportunity for us to learn more about you, and for you to learn more about yourself. We have taken great care to employ psychologists who are skilled, trustworthy, and thoughtful. Our hope is that the process of going through a psychological examination will be both positive and transformative.

Once you choose a psychologist from our approved list, and you contact them, you will be invited to fill out several questionnaires and forms. In addition, your spiritual autobiography will be shared, and you will eventually have a face-to-face meeting with the psychologist. We have asked the examining psychologists to provide written summaries for Bishop Sutton and the Commission on Ministry. We have also asked them to share feedback with you in the midst of a final meeting where you may ask questions and get clarification about their insights.

May God bless you with honesty, humility, and growth in the midst of this process.

Faithfully yours,  
The Commission on Ministry

## **Background Check**

A background check is conducted by the Diocese through an independent vendor to ascertain problems or concerns related to criminal, financial or driving records.

## Steps in the discernment and formation process for the Diaconate

- More complete information is available in the *Manual for the Diaconate*.  
<https://episcopalmaryland.org/the-diaconate/>
- Helpful information is also available at the 2020 Diocesan Day of the Diaconate recording online.  
[https://zoom.us/rec/play/6J0pdO\\_7rDM3GYeQsASDC\\_Z4W9W6fa6sg3IaqKYIyU2zUHRVMAWgYedGNOpJpyNfMnDTpiQ1JxxCqd6P?startTime=1585400762000](https://zoom.us/rec/play/6J0pdO_7rDM3GYeQsASDC_Z4W9W6fa6sg3IaqKYIyU2zUHRVMAWgYedGNOpJpyNfMnDTpiQ1JxxCqd6P?startTime=1585400762000)
- Apply to the Commission on Ministry process by submitting:
- Application form
  - Resume
  - Photo
  - Letter from rector
  - Psychological examination report from provided Diocesan list
  - Scheduled interview with Bishop Ihloff
- Exploring Baptismal Ministry (EBM)
- Discerning Ordained Vocations (DOV)
- Continue with spiritual direction
- Meeting with your Parish Discernment Committee
- Completion of a congregational internship and follow-on reports
- Completion of four diocesan-mandated trainings
- Background check
- Letter of support from your rector and vestry
- Physical exam
- Apply for postulancy
- Have postulancy interview day with the Commission on Ministry, who will make recommendations to Bishop Ihloff

- If a discerner is granted postulancy, then postulancy will last a minimum of one year
- Deacon Formation Program (DFP) – individualized, working with the archdeacon for formation and the bishop
- Pastoral training in a clinical setting (Clinical Pastoral Education or another approved program)
- When a discerner is perceived (by the archdeacon for formation and the discerner) to be “ready,” they may then apply for candidacy (which lasts a minimum of 6 months), Have interview day with the COM
- When a discerner has completed all other requirements in the process, and is perceived (by the archdeacon for formation and the discerner) to be ready, they may then apply to be ordained
- COM certifies to the Standing Committee that a person has fulfilled all of the requirements in the process
- Ordination interviews are with the Standing Committee

### **Steps in the discernment and formation process for the Priesthood**

- More complete information is available in the *Manual for the Priesthood*.  
<https://episcopalmaryland.org/publication/manual-for-priesthood/>
- Apply to the Commission on Ministry process by submitting:
  - Application form
  - Resume
  - Photo
  - Letter from rector
  - Psychological examination report from provided Diocesan list
  - Scheduled interview with Bishop Ihloff
- Exploring Baptismal Ministry (EBM)
- Discerning Ordained Vocations (DOV)
- Continue with spiritual direction



- Meeting with your Parish Discernment Committee
- Completion of a congregational internship and follow-on reports
- Completion of four diocesan-mandated trainings
- Background check
- Letter of support from your rector and vestry
- Physical exam
- Apply for postulancy, have interview day with the COM, who will make a recommendation to the bishop
- If granted postulancy, then this will last a minimum of one year
- Meeting with Bishop Ihloff to talk about seminary training
- Application and acceptance to seminary or approved training
- Pastoral training in a clinical setting (Clinical Pastoral Education)
- Application for candidacy, have interview day with the COM, who will make a recommendation to the bishop
- Candidacy lasts a minimum of six months.
- Complete all required training and other steps in the process. Then apply for ordination
- The COM certifies to the Standing Committee that a person has completed all the steps in the process
- Interview with the Standing Committee to gain approval for ordination. Ordination to the transitional diaconate for the priesthood occurs at least six months after candidacy. Final ordination occurs at least six months after ordination to the transitional diaconate.

## **Interviews**

- COM members will sign up to attend interview days. In-person interview days generally run from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Online interview days generally run from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. COM members should log into their online small group meeting 5-10 minutes before the interviewee is scheduled to log in.
- In-person interviews happen at the Diocesan Center and take place in small groups sitting in circles. Interview days begin with Morning Prayer in the Cathedral before breaking into small groups. All COM members will have a chance to interview all interviewees in a small group meeting.
- During times when interviews cannot happen in person, they will take place via Zoom or other conferencing method, also in small groups. All COM members will have a chance to interview all interviewees in a small group Zoom meeting.
- Prior to interview days, COM members will be asked to set up times when they can read through the files of the discerners. Some file documents will be available on a Google drive and COM members will review them prior to the interview day.
- A COM subcommittee has been appointed to read through psychological reports and give feedback to the bishop. The bishop will also read all psychological reports prior to the interview day. During a time of pandemic or national emergency only the bishop will read the psychological reports. If s/he reads anything that causes her/him concern, s/he will draw on the members of our subcommittee to get a second opinion. When things return to a more normal situation, our subcommittee will continue our custom of reading the confidential psychological examination reports.
- On interview days, COM members refrain from sharing their impressions of interviewees until the final debriefing so that we can avoid group think. Please read the attached article on Groupthink.
- Please have paper and pen ready to take notes. Each COM member should take their own personal notes. Groups should not appoint a separate notetaker. Because of confidentiality issues we will be destroying our notes after our debriefing meeting. Therefore, the volunteer writing the final report will be taking further notes to aid in writing the summary.
- Interviews should start and end on time. Our time with each discerner is 30 minutes, and there will be a 15-minute break between meetings with discerners. Use this break to complete your notes, stretch, or take a comfort break. Do not discuss the interview or your impressions with other team members during the

break. We will have a discussion following all interviews. We want to avoid group think.

- Each interview should begin with an opening prayer given by a COM team member and should close with prayer given by the discerner.
- Briefly explain the procedures (prayers, notetaking) and introduce yourselves to the discerner at the beginning of the interview, before the prayer. There is no need to tell the discerner which files you have read.
- Team members will take turns asking questions of the discerner. A list of questions we have brainstormed and used in the past (see below) can be used as a starting place. You may ask any of these, and other questions as they come up. There are questions we avoid asking and they are appended at the bottom of the list. Please do not pre-assign questions to team members. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide your questions.
- The COM will debrief with the bishop at the end of the day and make our recommendations. The bishop will contact the discerners within a few days.
- Most importantly – be kind and courteous to each discerner during your interview and allow them to feel comfortable and listened to. Please avoid being confrontational since this might cause the discerner to shut down.
- Once all interviews are finished, we will take a 30-minute break and then resume for our debriefing meeting with each other and the bishop. The bishop plans to attend the final debriefing session so that s/he can hear everyone's feedback.
- Each COM member will have a chance to look at their private notes and share their impressions of the discerner. Each person's impressions are of value and deserve to be heard and respected. We are not arguing or trying to persuade others to our point of view. Groups will not decide on shared opinions before the debriefing. In the debriefing session, all points of view will be honored and respected.
- During the debriefing, please be aware of the time, and do the best that you can to share your impressions while also being as brief as possible. We are hoping to wrap up our meeting in a timely way.
- After all COM interviewers have shared their impressions, we will see if there is anything further to be shared. The bishop will have a chance to ask for or offer clarifications or more discussion about a discerner. Then we will take a vote on granting that discerner postulancy or candidacy. After each decision we will move to the next candidate.

- Our goal at the end of interview days is to seek a general consensus, and to not have a divided COM. Yet, there may be times when there is majority/minority opinion, and we will do the best that we can to work through our discernment together.
- Once we have discussed all candidates, taken our votes and made our recommendations to the bishop, it will be the responsibility of the bishop to contact the candidate within a few days to let them know the decision on postulancy or candidacy.
- Volunteers from the COM will be asked to write up summaries of what COM members had to say on the interview day for each individual discerner, using the provided template (see below). Summaries will be emailed to the COM Co-Chairs and Eve Wayne. A copy will be placed in each discerner's confidential file.
- Most importantly – our discernment is a confidential process, thus notes and discussions should not be shared with anyone after our meeting.

## **Sample Questions Asked by the Commission on Ministry – for Discerners Seeking Postulancy**

The focus of an interview for postulancy is to hear about the discerner's call to ordained ministry. The call should be clearly stated. Questions are guides or starting points for a conversation with discerners. Many questions are prompts to help discerners provide more robust answers to questions. The goal of all questions is really a conversation about the call from God the discerners are experiencing. These questions allow everyone to hear both the present and future of the call, as well as provide a witness to the discerners' journey.

Questions are developed and asked within the context of the Commission on developed piece: General Attributes and Qualities of Ordained Leaders. This can be found in manuals for both the diaconate and the priesthood.

The following questions are grouped under the general headings found in the General Attributes and Qualities of Ordained Leaders.

### **Personal Faith in God through Jesus Christ that is living, growing in depth and healthy:**

1. What is your favorite piece of Scripture and what does it mean to you?
2. What is your prayer life like?
3. How do you nurture your relationship with God or cultivate it?
4. Do you have a rule of life that includes prayer, the study of Scripture, spiritual direction, and personal stewardship?
5. Tell us about a time when .... Where is Christ present in your life and those you know and those you have served?
6. Tell us about what you value in the Episcopal Church – in your congregation and your internship site. If you have been part of another Christian tradition, what did you value in that tradition and how has this shaped your faith?

### **Effective facilitator of the Christian faith in words, deeds, and actions:**

1. How do you understand the church within and outside of its doors?
2. What are you doing right now that gives meaning to the mission and ministry of the church?
3. What are your ideas about the diaconate or the priesthood?
4. Tell us about your ministry at your internship site...what did it mean to preach the gospel to people who were new to you? What did it mean to serve as their pastor?

5. Tell us about your lay committee and how you were mutually able to communicate about your call/ your ministry?

**Developer of communities of faith:**

1. What does the church need to thrive?
2. Are you cheerfully/obediently able to live under authority, to let go and follow?
3. In what ways do you value the profoundly human gifts of the community to the church, with respect to diversity – race, gender, sexual identity, age, economic status?
4. What have you learned from communities of faith that differ from your sponsoring congregation>
5. What experiences do you bring that will aid the church?
6. Tell us about a time when you have empowered others to lead.
7. Tell us about a time when you have collaborated with others in ministry.
8. Tell us about a time when you experienced conflict in the church and your response to it.

**Emotionally mature leadership:**

1. What do you have to sacrifice to live into this call?
2. What do you do for self-care?
3. How may this call affect your support network of family, friends and others?
4. Tell us about a time when someone listened to you deeply.
5. Tell us about a time when you have listened deeply and responded to another?

Questions **NOT** to ask :

- Citizenship status
- Physical limitations
- Sexual orientation
- Spousal support
- Family planning
- Children
- Age-related, as well as questions about race, ethnicity or identity.

## **Sample Questions Asked by the Commission on Ministry – for Discerners Seeking Candidacy**

The focus on this interview is formation – how are these postulants growing, learning, and even changing in sense of self, God, and call through their experience in formation? Are they fulfilling requirements for formation, and responding to areas that might need growth?

Many questions are prompts to help discerners provide more robust answers to questions. The goal of all questions is really a conversation about the call from God the discerners is experiencing. These questions allow everyone to hear both the present and future of the call, as well as provide a witness to the discerners' journey.

Questions are developed and asked within the context of the Commission on developed piece: General Attributes and Qualities of Ordained Leaders. This can be found in manuals for both the diaconate and the priesthood.

1. How is your sense of call deepening or emerging more clearly through formation time? How has seminary or the Deacon Formation Program sharpened your sense of priestly ministry and call?
2. How do you see yourself participating in the priesthood of Christ?
3. Are the academic and other formative aspects of seminary or the DFP working hand-in-hand, merely co-existing, or working against each other in any way?
4. How has the academic portion of your curriculum prepared you for ministry?
5. Can you identify any areas that need more attention during your remaining time in seminary or the DFP?
6. How are you keeping in touch with the bishop, the diocese and your home congregation?
7. Looking back on seminary or the DFP so far, what have you seen that has excited you? Is there anything that has been the opposite for you?
8. Have your expectations for formation been met? Have there been any surprises? How is formation affecting your spiritual growth?
9. Give us some examples of how you are dealing with theological diversity in the Church.
10. Overall, what has been most challenging living in a diverse community? How have you been changed through this experience?
11. What have you learned in the context of your field education work?

12. What do you see being the greatest challenges and opportunities of a highly liturgical and literate church like the Episcopal Church as we move forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
13. How have you experienced communities using the BCP and liturgical resources in ways that are new to you?
14. Tell us about your CPE experience.



## **Template for Report on a Discerner Following Interview with the COM**

### **DIOCESE OF MARYLAND**

#### **Commission on Ministry**

Commission on Ministry (Postulancy or Candidacy) Report for (Name)

(Name) was interviewed by the Commission on Ministry on (date). If a single interview, state members present. If interviewed by teams, state this, i.e., "interviewed by 3 teams of COM members." State any unusual circumstances that could impact the quality of the interview (i.e. interview via Skype or via conference call).

State how the nominee presents them self. Brief description of the nominee's articulation of their call – could include how they are/have been engaged, are engaging with Church/faith, how studies, readings, field placements, internships, have formed them. How does the nominee describe living out their call?

Describe past and present responsibilities/roles/experiences that speak to ministry aptitude, leadership, qualifications, and call to priesthood/diaconate/dedicated lay/religious life. Identify strengths and areas for growth.

State the recommendation:

A. We recommend admission as a (Postulant, Candidate) for the (Priesthood, Diaconate) now.

B. We recommend further discernment and formation about Baptismal Ministry.

C. We recommend specific experiences of personal, psychological, and/or spiritual growth, with a second interview at a later point in time.

Written and submitted on behalf of the Commission by (Name).

by  
*Irving L. Janis*

**“H**ow could we have been so stupid?” President John F. Kennedy asked after he and a close group of advisers had blundered into the Bay of Pigs invasion. For the last two years I have been studying that question, as it applies not only to the Bay of Pigs decision makers but also to those who led the United States into such other major fiascos as the failure to be prepared for the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Korean War stalemate, and the escalation of the Vietnam War.

Stupidity certainly is not the explanation. The men who participated in making the Bay of Pigs decision, for instance, comprised one of the greatest arrays of intellectual talent in the history of American government—Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, Douglas Dillon, Robert Kennedy, McGeorge Bundy, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Allen Dulles, and others.

It also seemed to me that explanations were incomplete if they concentrated only on disturbances in the behavior of each individual within a decision-making body: temporary emotional states of elation, fear, or anger that reduce a man's mental efficiency, for example, or chronic blind spots arising from a man's social prejudices or idiosyncratic biases.

I preferred to broaden the picture by looking at the fiascos from the standpoint of group dynamics as it has been explored over the past three decades, first by the great social psychologist Kurt Lewin and later in many experimental situations by myself and other behavioral scientists. My conclusion after poring over hundreds of relevant documents—historical reports about formal group meetings and infor-

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mal conversations among the members—is that the groups that committed the fiascos were victims of what I call “groupthink.”

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## “GROUPY”

In each case study, I was surprised to discover the extent to which each group displayed the typical phenomena of social conformity that are regularly encountered in studies of group dynamics among ordinary citizens. For example, some of the phenomena appear to be completely in line with findings from social-psychological experiments showing that powerful social pressures are brought to bear by the members of a cohesive group whenever a dissident begins to voice his objections to a group consensus. Other phenomena are reminiscent of the shared illusions observed in encounter groups and friendship cliques when the members simultaneously reach a peak of “groupy” feelings.

Above all, there are numerous indications pointing to the development of group norms that bolster morale at the expense of critical thinking. One of the most common norms appears to be that of remaining loyal to the group by sticking with the policies to which the group has already committed itself, even when those policies are obviously working out badly and have unintended consequences that disturb the conscience of each member. This is one of the key characteristics of groupthink.

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1984

I use the term *groupthink* as a quick and easy way to refer to the mode of thinking that persons engage in when *concurrence seeking* becomes so dominant in a cohesive in-group that it tends to override realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action. Groupthink is a term of the same order as the words in the newspeak vocabulary George Orwell used in his dismaying world of 1984. In that context, groupthink takes on an invidious connotation. Exactly such connotation is intended, since the term refers to a deterioration in mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgments as a result of group pressures.

The symptoms of groupthink arise when the members of decision-making groups become motivated to avoid being too harsh in their judgments of their leaders' or their colleagues' ideas. They adopt a soft line of criticism, even in their own thinking. At their meeting, all the members are amiable and seek complete concurrence on every important issue, with no bickering or conflict to spoil the cozy “we-feeling” atmosphere.

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## KILL

Paradoxically, soft-headed groups are often hard-hearted when it comes to dealing with outgroups or enemies. They find it relatively easy to resort to dehumanizing solutions—they will readily authorize bombing attacks that kill large numbers of civilians in the name of the noble

cause of persuading an unfriendly government to negotiate at the peace table. They are unlikely to pursue the more difficult and controversial issues that arise when alternatives to a harsh military solution come up for discussion. Nor are they inclined to raise ethical issues that carry the implication that *this fine group of ours, with its humanitarianism and its high-minded principles, might be capable of adopting a course of action that is inhumane and immoral.*

## NORMS

There is evidence from a number of social-psychological studies that as the members of a group feel more accepted by the others, which is a central feature of increased group cohesiveness, they display less overt conformity to group norms. Thus we would expect that the more cohesive a group becomes, the less the members will feel constrained to censor what they say out of fear of being socially punished for antagonizing the leader or any of their fellow members.

In contrast, the groupthink type of conformity tends to increase as group cohesiveness increases. Groupthink involves nondeliberate suppression of critical thoughts as a result of internalization of the group's norms, which is quite different from deliberate suppression on the basis of external threats of social punishment. The more cohesive the group, the greater the inner compulsion on the part of each member to avoid creating disunity, which inclines him to believe in the soundness of whatever proposals are promoted by the leader or by a majority of the group's members.

In a cohesive group, the danger is not so much that each individual will fail to reveal his objections to what the others propose but that he will think the proposal is a good one, without attempting to carry out a careful, critical scrutiny of the pros and cons of the alternatives. When groupthink becomes dominant, there also is considerable suppression of deviant thoughts, but it takes the form of each person's deciding that his misgivings are not relevant and should be set aside, that the benefits of the doubt regarding any lingering uncertainties should be given to the group consensus.

## STRESS

I do not mean to imply that all cohesive groups necessarily suffer from groupthink. All in-groups may have a mild tendency toward groupthink, displaying one or another of the symptoms from time to time, but it need not be so dominant as to influence the quality of the group's final decision. Neither do I mean to imply that there is anything necessarily inefficient or harmful about group decisions in general. On the contrary, a group whose members have properly defined roles, with traditions concerning the procedures to follow in pursuing a critical inquiry, probably is capable of making better decisions than any individual group member working alone.

The problem is that the advantages of having decisions made by groups are often lost because of powerful psychological pressures that arise when the members work closely together, share the same set of values and, above all, face a crisis situation that puts everyone under intense stress.

The main principle of groupthink, which I offer in the spirit of Parkinson's Law, is this: *The more amiability and esprit de corps there is among the members of a policy-making in-group, the greater the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by a groupthink, which is likely to result in irrational and dehumanizing actions directed against outgroups.*

## SYMPTOMS

In my studies of high-level governmental decision makers, both civilian and military, I have found eight main symptoms of groupthink.

**1. Invulnerability.** Most or all of the members of the in-group share an *illusion* of invulnerability that provides for them some degree of reassurance about obvious dangers and leads them to become overoptimistic and willing to take extraordinary risks. It also causes them to fail to respond to clear warnings of danger.

The Kennedy in-group, which uncritically accepted the Central Intelligence Agency's disastrous Bay of Pigs plan, operated on the false assumption that they could keep secret the fact that the United States was responsible for the invasion of Cuba. Even after news of the plan began to leak out, their belief remained unshaken. They failed even to consider the danger that awaited them, a worldwide revulsion against the United States.

A similar attitude appeared among the members of President Lyndon B. Johnson's in-group, the "Tuesday Cabinet," which kept escalating the Vietnam War despite repeated setbacks and failures. "There was a belief," Bill Moyers commented after he resigned, "that if we indicated a willingness to use our power, they [the North Vietnamese] would get the message and back away from an all-out confrontation. . . . There was a confidence—it was never bragged about, it was just there—that when the chips were really down, the other people would fold."

A most poignant example of an illusion of invulnerability involves the in-group around Admiral H. E. Kimmel, which failed to prepare for the possibility of a Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor despite repeated warnings. Informed by his intelligence chief that radio contact with Japanese aircraft carriers had been lost, Kimmel joked about it: "What, you don't know where the carriers are? Do you mean to say that they could be rounding Diamond Head (at Honolulu) and you wouldn't know it?" The carriers were in fact moving full-steam toward Kimmel's command post at the time. Laughing together about a danger signal, which

labels it as a purely laughing matter, is a characteristic manifestation of groupthink.

**2. Rationale.** As we see, victims of groupthink ignore warnings; they also collectively construct rationalizations in order to discount warnings and other forms of negative feedback that, taken seriously, might lead the group members to reconsider their assumptions each time they recommit themselves to past decisions. Why did the Johnson in-group avoid reconsidering its escalation policy when time and again the expectations on which they based their decisions turned out to be wrong? James C. Thompson, Jr., a Harvard historian who spent five years as an observing participant in both the State Department and the White House, tells us that the policy makers avoided critical discussion of their prior decisions and continually invented new rationalizations so that they could sincerely recommit themselves to defeating the North Vietnamese.

In the fall of 1964, before the bombing of North Vietnam began, some of the policy makers predicted that six weeks of air strikes would induce the North Vietnamese to seek peace talks. When someone asked, "What if they don't?" the answer was that another four weeks certainly would do the trick.

Later, after each setback, the in-group agreed that by investing just a bit more effort (by stepping up the bomb tonnage a bit, for instance), their course of action would prove to be right. *The Pentagon Papers* bear out these observations.

In *The Limits of Intervention*, Townsend Hoopes, who was acting Secretary of the Air Force under Johnson, says that Walt W. Rostow in particular showed a remarkable capacity for what has been called "instant rationalization." According to Hoopes, Rostow buttressed the group's optimism about being on the road to victory by culling selected scraps of evidence from news reports or, if necessary, by inventing "plausible" forecasts that had no basis in evidence at all.

Admiral Kimmel's group rationalized away their warnings, too. Right up to December 7, 1941, they convinced themselves that the Japanese would never dare attempt a full-scale surprise assault against Hawaii because Japan's leaders would realize that it would precipitate an all-out war which the United States would surely win. They made no attempt to look at the situation through the eyes of the Japanese leaders—another manifestation of groupthink.

**3. Morality.** Victims of groupthink believe unquestionably in the inherent morality of their in-group; this belief inclines the members to ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions.

Evidence that this symptom is at work usually is of a negative kind—the things that are left unsaid in group meetings. At least two influential persons had doubts about the morality of the Bay of Pigs adventure.



One of them, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., presented his strong objections in a memorandum to President Kennedy and Secretary of State Rusk but suppressed them when he attended meetings of the Kennedy team. The other, Senator J. William Fulbright, was not a member of the group, but the President invited him to express his misgivings in a speech to the policy makers. However, when Fulbright finished speaking the President moved on to other agenda items without asking for reactions of the group.

David Kraslow and Stuart H. Loory, in *The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam*, report that during 1966 President Johnson's in-group was concerned primarily with selecting bomb targets in North Vietnam. They based their selections on four factors—the military advantage, the risk to American aircraft and pilots, the danger of forcing other countries into the fighting, and the danger of heavy civilian casualties. At their regular Tuesday luncheons, they weighed these factors the way school teachers grade examination papers, averaging them out. Though evidence on this point is scant, I suspect that the group's ritualistic adherence to a standardized procedure induced the members to feel morally justified in their destructive way of dealing with the Vietnamese people—after all, the danger of heavy civilian casualties from U.S. air strikes was taken into account on their checklists.

**4. Stereotypes.** Victims of groupthink hold stereotyped views of the leaders of enemy groups: They are so evil that genuine attempts at negotiating differences with them are unwarranted, or they are too weak or too stupid to deal effectively with whatever attempts the in-group makes to defeat their purposes, no matter how risky the attempts are.

Kennedy's groupthinkers believed that Premier Fidel Castro's air force was so ineffectual that obsolete B-26s could knock it out completely in a surprise attack before the invasion began. They also believed that Castro's army was so weak that a small Cuban-exile brigade could establish a well-protected beachhead at the Bay of Pigs. In addition, they believed that Castro was not smart enough to put down any possible internal uprisings in support of the exiles. They were wrong on all three assumptions. Though much of the blame was attributable to faulty intelligence, the point is that none of Kennedy's advisers even questioned the CIA planners about these assumptions.

The Johnson advisers' sloganistic thinking about "the Communist apparatus" that was "working all around the world" (as Dean Rusk put it) led them to overlook the powerful nationalistic strivings of the North Vietnamese government and its efforts to ward off Chinese domination. The crudest of all stereotypes used by Johnson's inner circle to justify their policies was the domino theory ("If we don't stop the Reds in South Vietnam, tomorrow they will be in Hawaii and next week they will be in San Francisco," Johnson once said). The group

so firmly accepted this stereotype that it became almost impossible for any adviser to introduce a more sophisticated viewpoint.

In the documents on Pearl Harbor, it is clear to see that the Navy commanders stationed in Hawaii had a naive image of Japan as a midget that would not dare to strike a blow against a powerful giant.

**5. Pressure.** Victims of groupthink apply direct pressure to any individual who momentarily expresses doubts about any of the group's shared illusions or who questions the validity of the arguments supporting a policy alternative favored by the majority. This gambit reinforces the concurrence-seeking norm that loyal members are expected to maintain.

President Kennedy probably was more active than anyone else in raising skeptical questions during the Bay of Pigs meetings, and yet he seems to have encouraged the group's docile, uncritical acceptance of defective arguments in favor of the CIA's plan. At every meeting, he allowed the CIA representatives to dominate the discussion. He permitted them to give their immediate refutations in response to each tentative doubt that one of the others expressed, instead of asking whether anyone shared the doubt or wanted to pursue the implications of the new worrisome issue that had just been raised. And at the most crucial meeting, when he was calling on each member to give his vote for or against the plan, he did not call on Arthur Schlesinger, the one man there who was known by the President to have serious misgivings.

Historian Thompson informs us that whenever a member of Johnson's in-group began to express doubts, the group used subtle social pressures to "domesticate" him. To start with, the dissenter was made to feel at home, provided that he lived up to two restrictions: (1) that he did not voice his doubts to outsiders, which would play into the hands of the opposition; and (2) that he kept his criticisms within the bounds of acceptable deviation, which meant not challenging any of the fundamental assumptions that went into the group's prior commitments. One such "domesticated dissenter" was Bill Moyers. When Moyers arrived at a meeting, Thompson tells us, the President greeted him with, "Well, here comes Mr. Stop-the-Bombing."

**6. Self-censorship.** Victims of groupthink avoid deviating from what appears to be group consensus; they keep silent about their misgivings and even minimize to themselves the importance of their doubts.

As we have seen, Schlesinger was not all hesitant about presenting his strong objections to the Bay of Pigs plan in a memorandum to the President and the Secretary of State. But he became keenly aware of his tendency to suppress objections at the White House meetings. "In the months after the Bay of Pigs I bitterly reproached myself for having kept so silent during those crucial discussions in the cabinet room," Schlesinger writes in *A Thousand Days*. "I can only explain



my failure to do more than raise a few timid questions by reporting that one's impulse to blow the whistle on this nonsense was simply undone by the circumstances of the discussion."

**7. Unanimity.** Victims of groupthink share an illusion of unanimity within the group concerning almost all judgments expressed by members who speak in favor of the majority view. This symptom results partly from the preceding one, whose effects are augmented by the false assumption that any individual who remains silent during any part of the discussion is in full accord with what the others are saying.

When a group of persons who respect each other's opinions arrives at a unanimous view, each member is likely to feel that the belief must be true. This reliance on consensual validation within the group tends to replace individual critical thinking and reality testing, unless there are clear-cut disagreements among the members. In contemplating a course of action such as the invasion of Cuba, it is painful for the members to confront disagreements within their group, particularly if it becomes apparent that there are widely divergent views about whether the preferred course of action is too risky to undertake at all. Such disagreements are likely to arouse anxieties about making a serious error. Once the sense of unanimity is shattered, the members no longer can feel complacently confident about the decision they are inclined to make. Each man must then face the annoying realization that there are troublesome uncertainties, and he must diligently seek out the best information he can get in order to decide for himself exactly how serious the risks might be. This is one of the unpleasant consequences of being in a group of hardheaded critical thinkers.

To avoid such an unpleasant state, the members often become inclined, without quite realizing it, to prevent latent disagreements from surfacing when they are about to initiate a risky course of action. The group leader and the members support each other in playing up the areas of convergence in their thinking at the expense of fully exploring divergencies that might reveal unsettled issues.

"Our meetings took place in a curious atmosphere of assumed consensus," Schlesinger writes. His additional comments clearly show that, curiously, the consensus was an illusion—an illusion that could be maintained only because the major participants did not reveal their own reasoning or discuss their idiosyncratic assumptions and vague reservations. Evidence from several sources makes it clear that even the three principals—President Kennedy, Rusk and McNamara—had widely differing assumptions about the invasion plan.

**8. Mindguards.** Victims of groupthink sometimes appoint themselves as mindguards to protect the leader and fellow members from adverse information that might break the complacency they shared about the effectiveness and morality of past decisions. At a large birth-

day party for his wife, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, who had been constantly informed about the Cuban invasion plan, took Schlesinger aside and asked him why he was opposed. Kennedy listened coldly and said, "You may be right or you may be wrong, but the President has made his mind up. Don't push it any further. Now is the time for everyone to help him all they can."

Rusk also functioned as a highly effective mindguard by failing to transmit to the group the strong objections of three "outsiders" who had learned of the invasion plan—Undersecretary of State Chester Bowles, USIA Director Edward R. Murrow, and Rusk's intelligence chief, Roger Hilsman. Had Rusk done so, their warnings might have reinforced Schlesinger's memorandum and jolted some of Kennedy's in-group, if not the President himself, into reconsidering the decision.

## PRODUCTS

When a group of executives frequently displays most or all of these interrelated symptoms, a detailed study of their deliberations is likely to reveal a number of immediate consequences. These consequences are, in effect, products of poor decision-making practices because they lead to inadequate solutions to the problems being dealt with.

First, the group limits its discussions to a few alternative courses of action (often only two) without an initial survey of all the alternatives that might be worthy of consideration.

Second, the group fails to reexamine the course of action initially preferred by the majority after they learn of risks and drawbacks they had not considered originally.

Third, the members spend little or no time discussing whether there are nonobvious gains they may have overlooked or ways of reducing the seemingly prohibitive costs that made rejected alternatives appear undesirable to them.

Fourth, members make little or no attempt to obtain information from experts within their own organizations who might be able to supply more precise estimates of potential losses and gains.

Fifth, members show positive interest in facts and opinions that support their preferred policy; they tend to ignore facts and opinions that do not.

Sixth, members spend little time deliberating about how the chosen policy might be hindered by bureaucratic inertia, sabotaged by political opponents, or temporarily derailed by common accidents. Consequently, they fail to work out contingency plans to cope with foreseeable setbacks that could endanger the overall success of their chosen course.

## SUPPORT

The search for an explanation of why groupthink occurs had led me through a quagmire of complicated theoretical issues in the murky area of human motivation. My belief, based on recent social-psychologi-

cal research, is that we can best understand the various symptoms of groupthink as a mutual effort among the group members to maintain self-esteem and emotional equanimity by providing social support to each other, especially at times when they share responsibility for making vital decisions.

Even when no important decision is pending, the typical administrator will begin to doubt the wisdom and morality of his past decisions each time he receives information about setbacks, particularly if the information is accompanied by negative feedback from prominent men who originally had been his supporters. It should not be surprising, therefore, to find that individual members strive to develop unanimity and esprit de corps that will help bolster each other's morale, to create an optimistic outlook about the success of pending decisions, and to reaffirm the positive value of past policies to which all of them are committed.

## PRIDE

Shared illusions of invulnerability, for example, can reduce anxiety about taking risks. Rationalizations help members believe that the risks are really not so bad after all. The assumption of inherent morality helps the members to avoid feelings of shame or guilt. Negative stereotypes function as stress-reducing devices to enhance a sense of moral righteousness as well as pride in a lofty mission.

The mutual enhancement of self-esteem and morale may have functional value in enabling the members to maintain their capacity to take actions, but it has maladaptive consequences insofar as concurrence-seeking tendencies interfere with critical, rational capacities and lead to serious errors of judgment.

While I have limited my study to decision-making bodies in government, groupthink symptoms appear in business, industry, and any other field where small, cohesive groups make the decisions. It is vital, then, for all sorts of people—and especially group leaders—to know what steps they can take to prevent groupthink.

## REMEDIES

To counterpoint my case studies of the major fiascos, I have also investigated two highly successful group enterprises, the formulation of the Marshall Plan in the Truman Administration and the handling of the Cuban missile crisis by President Kennedy and his advisers. I have found it instructive to examine the steps Kennedy took to change his group's decision-making processes. These changes ensured that the mistakes made by his Bay of Pigs in-group were not repeated by the missile-crisis in-group, even though the membership of both groups was essentially the same.

The following recommendations for preventing groupthink incorpo-

rate many of the good practices I discovered to be characteristic of the Marshall Plan and missile-crisis groups:

1. The leader of a policy-forming group should assign the role of critical evaluator to each member, encouraging the group to give high priority to open airing of objections and doubts. This practice needs to be reinforced by the leader's acceptance of criticism of his own judgments in order to discourage members from soft-pedaling their disagreements and from allowing their striving for concurrence to inhibit criticism.
2. When the key members of a hierarchy assign a policy-planning mission to any group within their organization, they should adopt an impartial stance instead of stating preferences and expectations at the beginning. This will encourage open inquiry and impartial probing of a wide range of policy alternatives.
3. The organization routinely should set up several outside policy-planning and evaluation groups to work on the same policy question, each deliberating under a different leader. This can prevent the insulation of an in-group.
4. At intervals before the group reaches a final consensus, the leader should require each member to discuss the group's deliberations with associates in his own unit of the organization—assuming that those associates can be trusted to adhere to the same security regulations that govern the policy markers—and then to report back their reactions to the group.
5. The group should invite one or more outside experts to each meeting on a staggered basis and encourage the experts to challenge the views of the core members.
6. At every general meeting of the group, whenever the agenda calls for an evaluation of policy alternatives, at least one member should play devil's advocate, functioning as a good lawyer in challenging the testimony of those who advocate the majority position.
7. Whenever the policy issue involves relations with a rival nation or organization, the group should devote a sizable block of time, perhaps an entire session, to a survey of all warning signals from the rivals and should write alternative scenarios on the rivals' intentions.
8. When the group is surveying policy alternatives for feasibility and effectiveness, it should from time to time divide into two or more subgroups to meet separately under different chairmen and then come back together to hammer out differences.
9. After reaching a preliminary consensus about what seems to be the best policy, the group should hold a "second-chance"

meeting at which every member expresses as vividly as he can all his residual doubts and rethinks the entire issue before making a definitive choice.

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## HOW

These recommendations have their disadvantages. To encourage the open airing of objections, for instance, might lead to prolonged and costly debates when a rapidly growing crisis requires immediate solution. It also could cause rejection, depression, and anger. A leader's failure to set a norm might create cleavage between leader and members that could develop into a disruptive power struggle if the leader looks on the emerging consensus as anathema. Setting up outside evaluation groups might increase the risk of security leakage. Still, inventive executives who know their way around the organizational maze probably can figure out how to apply one or another of the prescriptions successfully without harmful side effects.

They also could benefit from the advice of outside experts in the administrative and behavioral sciences. Though these experts have much to offer, they have had few chances to work on policy-making machinery within large organizations. As matters now stand, executives innovate only when they need new procedures to avoid repeating serious errors that have deflated their self-images.

In this era of atomic warheads, urban disorganization, and ecocatastrophes, it seems to me that policy makers should collaborate with behavioral scientists and give top priority to preventing groupthink and its attendant fiascos.