



A Christian Life of Faith: Signs and Thresholds along The Way!

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Just over a year ago, a group of lay formation leaders in the Episcopal Church left a three-day gathering that focused on what it means to be a lay professional in the Church and how such leaders are supported along the journey of faith. All with degrees in higher education (Master’s, DMin’s, and PhDs), we are employed by the Church on a variety of levels: local, diocesan, institutional, or church-wide in the areas of formation and ministry development. We shared stories of our calls to ministry; one thread that ran through each of our stories was that at one point we were encouraged or assumed to be interested in ordained ministry. Several of us had actually been in “the process” and discerned we were NOT called to ordained ministry. We had as many questions as we had stories.

- Why does it seem that one who is called to ministry in the Church is often encouraged to become a priest?
- How are the laity encouraged to grow in discipleship as well as discern their ministry in the world?
- How can a local congregation help individuals determine what their needs are for growth in specific areas of Christian discipleship?
- What systems are in place for raising up LAY leaders other than the excellent [Education for Ministry](#) program out of Sewanee’s School of Theology?

“In 1970 the General Convention of the Episcopal Church passed a new canon, Canon III.1, which required each diocese to establish a Commission on Ministry (CoM). The number of members, their selection, and their terms of office are determined by diocesan canons. The functions of Commissions on Ministry specified in the canon are to assist the bishop “in determining present and future needs for ministry in the diocese” and to assist “in enlisting and selecting persons for Holy Orders.” Commissions are to develop, train, and affirm lay ministries. They interview candidates prior to their ordination as deacons and may interview candidates prior to their ordination as priests, if requested by the bishop, reporting to the bishop in each case. They assist the bishop in guiding and counseling deacons and other ministers, and they assist in matters pertaining to the continuing education of the clergy.” (definition from [An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church, A User Friendly Reference for Episcopalians](#), Don S. Armentrout and Robert Boak Slocum, editors.

Sadly, many CoMs (who are comprised of lay and ordained leaders and serve volunteer terms upon their election at diocesan conventions) are overworked regarding those discerning the diaconate or priesthood. The raising up and training of lay people for leaders in and outside the church by CoMs often falls to the bottom of the “to do” list.

After our time together we dispersed, committed to develop a model that individuals, congregations, and dioceses could use to help lay people discern how they could strengthen their skills and deepen their knowledge to live out what God might be calling them on their faith journey. Finally, after months of focus-groups (done digitally due to the pandemic), phone calls, meetings, edits all along the way, and numerous

reviews by many individuals across the Episcopal Church, we are pleased to share the document we created entitled ***A Life of Faithful Living: Signs and Thresholds along The Way.***

Made freely available with hopes that leadership in dioceses (ie: CoMs) and congregations (ie: clergy), it is hoped this document will assist in developing programs / pathways for individuals and groups seeking to go deeper in their faith from a formation perspective.



The Document: A Life of Faithful Living

A Life of Faithful Living identifies the signs and thresholds of a faith-filled journey with God that has three dimensions: ***It is lifelong***—unfolding chronologically across one’s life; ***It is life-wide***—integrating formative events and experiences from across one’s contexts; and ***It is life-deep***—making meaning influenced by culture, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, ideologies, and values. The document identifies four thresholds—Claiming, Engaging, Sustaining, and Cultivating/ Catalyzing—and uses each “stage” or “phase” to organize the typical focus, questions, and signs of someone as they accept increased responsibility to proclaim God’s loving, liberating, life-giving Good News (evangelism) and to help others to find their path as we pass on our faith (faith formation). The document also identifies recognizable *signs* of maturing in our relationship with God — marks of our deepening knowledge and understanding, the shaping of our values and attitudes, as well as the honing of our practices and skills.

This document is our attempt to identify the signs and thresholds of a faith-filled journey. It is designed in two parts which reflect the ways two groups likely will use it. Both parts of this booklet include the same signs and thresholds; the signs and thresholds are just presented differently. The first part is primarily for ***individuals*** who may want to wonder, widen, and deepen their understanding of themselves and of God. For them, the signs and thresholds are a type of discernment or self-assessment tool to prompt reflection upon where they are in their personal faith and ministry development. This section identifies four thresholds —Claiming, Engaging, Sustaining, and Cultivating/ Catalyzing—and uses each “stage” or “phase” to organize the typical focus, questions, and signs of someone in this space. The hope is that individuals using this part will find descriptions that resonate and affirm their strengths and capacities as well as indicate areas where they may want to stretch and search for resources that enhance spiritual growth and leadership. The second part is primarily intended for ***those responsible for passing on the teachings of the church*** (such as Vestry members, Commissions on Ministry, faith formation leaders, spiritual directors, clergy, chaplains, diocesan directors, etc.). This section compiles the signs and thresholds into a grid for comparison across thresholds. This design should help facilitators, companions, and/or teachers to see the scope and sequence of how the stages relate and guide their adaptation of educational and formational resources for local contexts. The hope is that the signs and thresholds promote deeper faith and ministry development in a congregation, intentional community, or diocese. Regardless of the form you use, we hope you find it useful.

The seeds of this document were planted in the summer of 2019 when colleagues in faith formation and ministrydevelopment circles embraced God’s invitation and committed to produce this guide. It is our gift to the church. Recognizing that it is only a starting point, we want (and need) to hear your reactions to it, especially as you use it in your context. Tell us what is missing and how can it be improved and refined. Send your feedback and recommendations to [Julie Lytle](#) . We offer our thanks and blessings for your journey!

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