**Guidelines for Discerning a Vocation to Ordained Ministry**

1. Ordained ministry was established by God for service to the Church. All discernment by the Church must keep this in mind. The primary purpose of discerning with an aspirant is to determine whether or not this person has the ability to serve the Church and carry out the duties of ordained ministry in a healthy and consistent manner after going through an extensive formation person. No one has a "right" to be ordained. The determination of whether or not a person has a vocation to ordained ministry is not a determination of a person's goodness, or of their faith, or of any other qualities other than their suitability for ordained ministry in the Church. We have a deliberate process that takes time, and aspirants will need to let go of expectations that either the discernment process or the formation process will be speedy.

2. Deacons, priests, and bishops, although ordained for the universal Church, are nonetheless ordained to serve in a particular local church – in our case, the Independent Catholic Christian Church. We do not ordain "generic" deacons, priests, and bishops. Therefore, although many if not most aspirants who come to us will come having discerned a vocation to the ordained ministry of another local church, and may even have undergone formation, the question to be answered is if they have the ability to carry out the duties of ordained ministry in a healthy and consistent manner ***in this jurisdiction***. Our needs for clergy are different from and may even contradict those of other local churches. All those coming to us for ordained ministry will undergo additional formation – usually, the full five-year program, but in no circumstances less than three years.

3. The bishop is the one ultimately responsible to God for ordaining appropriate aspirants. Therefore, in all cases, the bishop is the one who must make the final determination. That being said, a collaborative discernment process will be undertaken, taking into account the discernment of clergy and laity concerning each aspirant. Because no one has a right to be ordained, a bishop can be negatively bound in cases of ordination – i.e., if the consensus of clergy and laity participating in the discernment is that an aspirant should not be ordained, the bishop may not proceed with ordaining that aspirant. However, a bishop may never be positively bound in the matter of ordination – i.e., if a bishop believes it would be wrong to ordain a particular person, he or she cannot be compelled to violate their conscience, even if the consensus is that a particular aspirant should be ordained. That being said, clergy and laity are urged to trust that the bishop will not act capriciously, but will exercise good faith in all matters of ordination.

4. There are many ways to exercise priesthood. Three in particular are important. First, priests are often called to provide sacramental ministry, preaching ministry, and pastoral leadership to local faith communities, such as parishes. Second, priests are often called to provide pastoral and sacramental ministry to individuals outside of a church context, such as hospital visitation and chaplaincy. Third, priests in the ICCC are expected to offer the Eucharist regularly, even daily, and the Office daily, often and perhaps usually in solitude, as a sacrificial offering of praise and intercession. Many who are called to priesthood may experience a stronger calling to one or another of these callings. However, experience has shown that one cannot necessarily predict which of these a priest will live out. Someone who is drawn to a solitary priestly ministry may nonetheless find a community coming together that they are called to serve. Someone who feels called to start a parish may find that no one comes for a very long time, and may only have the option of exercising their priesthood in solitude. For this reason, no one will be accepted into the ordination process who does not show the ability to exercise priestly ministry in a sustained way in all three of these contexts. Someone who cannot relate well to people but claims to be called to a hermit priesthood would not be an appropriate candidate, for example.

5. All interactions with an aspirant by all those called to be part of the discernment process should be conducted with respect, discretion, confidentiality, and appropriate candor. Similarly, all interactions by bishop, clergy, and laity involved in the discernment process should be carried out with mutual respect, even when there are disagreements. At the same time, all involved in the process should commit to being honest about their discernment about the aspirant, and should feel free to speak their mind without worry about negative consequences for doing so.