



FORMATION

A time of formation: the first three years

After the initial period of conversation and discernment, and the taking of the first three-year promise, the new member enters a period of formation. The process is directed toward the person's growth in the spiritual life and emotional intelligence, a grounding in the life of the Order and a deeper understanding of the Anglican/Episcopal ethos, and the development of parish development competence.

Taking the Promise

After the three-year formation period the member may take the Promise a second time and receive the Cross. This is a lifelong-commitment which is renewed every three years. Before the member takes that Promise all existing Professed Members with a life commitment will vote on giving consent, or not, for the Promise to be taken.

Purpose of the formation process

In a process of training, mentoring, and implementation the member moves forward in three broad areas of formation.

1. Parish development
2. Growth in the spiritual life and emotional intelligence
3. Incorporation into the Order's Life and Ethos

The Order of the Ascension forms members in alignment with our community's charism. We seek consistency with our identity and purpose.

A formation plan

To initiate the three-year formation process, the Presiding Officer appoints a guide for the new member. The guide will assist the new member in a process of self-assessment and gathering of feedback to design a formation plan. As part of the initial discernment period the new member will already have created a draft plan. A standard formation plan is available as a guide (see PDF below)

The applicant now creates a Formation Plan with a three-year grid (worksheet below) including commitments for formation through: (1) Training - we assume participation in a Church Development Institute (CDI) or comparable program plus a couple of experiential training labs (human interaction, conflict management, group development, etc.) In some cases participation in a CDI may be waved and the number of week long experiential workshops increased. If CDI was completed some years previously it may make sense to do it again; (2) A course of reading; and (3) Completion of specific developmental initiatives in the parish; and 4) other activities designed to advance the members incorporation. A model formation plan is provided by the Order and may be used as is if it fits the needs of the member and the Order. The member may also create a formation plan in consultation with his or her guide and subject to the approval of the Presiding officer or person delegated to that task.

That Formation Plan will include training to develop an awareness of underlying group dynamics, skills in giving and receiving feedback, human interaction training, conflict management, and/or skills for disciplined reflection on group experience. It will also include ways to increase the member's competence in parish development that is grounded in Anglican pastoral/ascetical theology, organization development, and the orientation of the Order. The guide will help the new member develop a plan consistent with that person's prior experience and training and with attention to their particular developmental needs.

If you have completed a parish development program

We will work with you to modify the formation process to take into account previous work. If you have completed a program such as Shaping the Parish, Church Development Institute, or the College for Congregational Development 1) we assume that such training is consistent with your membership and 2) that it probably doesn't fully address the parish development learning we seek in members.

We are seeking a result that comes from more coaching, application and disciplined reflection. We want to help members achieve a higher level of integration among theory, skills, and self. We assist members develop a more consistent approach to learning that is grounded in disciplined learning from experience (Action-Research, Action-Learning). If you have completed one of the programs you should expect to do at least two week-long labs to round out your experience

Our focus is on developing an adequate level of proficiency. It isn't about jumping through hoops.

In all this the member will need to take the initiative in accomplishing the purposes of the formation process.

Your vocation or role in relation to formation

Members need to have and maintain a role in relation to parish life that allows them to express the Order's charism. The roles with the most obvious relationship--parish rector, parish development consultant, bishop, diocesan staff with related responsibilities. Generally speaking, new members will be coming from one of those roles.

Of course other roles are possible--researchers and writers in parish development, assisting clergy, some diocesan staff members. Some roles may be inappropriate in the earlier years of membership but fine later. For example, being a researcher or writer may fit a member after that person has been "in the trenches" for some years. Members retired from active ministry continue as valued members. The same is true of members who can no longer fulfill OA responsibilities due to illness or old age.

Your work in the first year will be twofold. First, if you are the priest-in-charge of a parish you will focus on establishing a basic pattern for you and for your parish. If you are in some other role the focus may be more about your own pattern of learning and spiritual discipline and learning how to do parish development from that role. Second we will help you reflect on the changes you're making so that you increase your ability to manage change and exercise leadership in the parish.

To read and use [OA Formation Process: Action Plan](#) - this is the standard action plan for the new member's formation