Christian Vocation: Ordained Ministry
The Starting Point

At the heart of our faith we believe that through baptism all Christians are called to fulfil their Christian Vocation in the world. Throughout our lives this can take many and various forms; vocation is not a static concept but forever changing and developing as God calls new things out of us. But importantly vocations can be expressed in driving a bus, being an accountant, cleaning an office or in missionary work (not just in the so-called caring professions of medicine, nursing, teaching, social work, etc.).

Alongside this primary vocation and calling to be God’s holy people in the world, Christians are also called to support and be active in their local churches. This calling will include everything from washing up after a church social to reading or administering communion in services, to undertaking positions of leadership as Churchwarden or as a Licensed Lay Minister.

And finally (at the bottom of the heap!) God calls some of the Baptised to follow a vocation in ordained ministry or the religious life. Sometimes this is seen as the peak of vocational calling, but even a simple examination of the Gospel and Christian tradition will remind us that such ministries are fundamentally about service, following Jesus who calls us to serve (Matthew 20:25-28).

In this document our starting point is when someone has articulated a sense of vocation to ordained ministry or religious life and would like to pursue it further.

Whilst we recognise that vocations can be nurtured and encouraged and that it is an important responsibility for each priest to promote a culture in which this happens, the resources for this are elsewhere. See resources list on page 8.

The purpose of this document is to provide a simple reference for priests to work with individuals exploring their vocation.

The aim is to work with them to the point where they are ready for the next steps - to explore their vocation further with the Area Director of Ordinands (ADO), to be then presented to the Bishop and prepared for the Selection Conference (known as a BAP, the Bishops Advisory Panel) - and to support them through to the point of training if recommended, and even moreso if not recommended.

At any stage the candidate or ADO may decide to slow or stop the process but typically from referral to an ADO to BAP will take 6 - 12 months with training beginning the following September. It is unusual for a candidate to be able to start training in September if they have not started the process with an ADO at least prior to July the previous year.
The discernment process will follow the stages outlined—

1—Discernment with incumbent

2—Area specific events: vocations or discernment groups

3—Initial discussion/allocation to an ADO

4—Meetings with ADO to explore 9 criteria in depth and prepare for selection process

5—Interview with two assessors and a psychotherapist

6—Interview with bishop

7—Bishop’s decision to sponsor

8—Preparation for BAP

9—Attend BAP

10—Panel decision advised by bishop. Debrief report with ADO

11—Finalise funding and financial arrangements

12—Start training
Working With a Vocation

There are currently 9 criteria for selection of which the primary one is Vocation as summarised—

"Candidates should be able to articulate a sense of vocation to the ordained ministry and reflect on the effect of this on their life. They should be able to speak of the development of their inner conviction and the extent to which others have confirmed it. They should be able to show an understanding of what it means to be a deacon or a priest. Their sense of vocation should be obedient, realistic and informed."

In working with candidates it is recommended that you focus principally on this criteria (though you may wish to support the process of exploration of the other criteria), setting up a programme of discussion, and reflection to look at each of the key elements. At the end of this stage you will be satisfied that the candidates would be able to articulate in their own words the story of their calling. They will also understand the discernment process in outline and be ready to be referred to the next stage with an ADO.

Your primary role is to provide supportive direction and accompany them on the journey. But you do also act as a gatekeeper, to challenge and redirect if you do not share their conviction for a vocation.

Whilst most of the work you do with the candidate will be in one to one discussion it may be helpful to introduce other elements to the process such as...

- Vocation discernment groups these may be offered at parish level or there may be groups run at the Area as part of the Area Discernment process. Contact with others going through the process formally or informally is a good idea for mutual support and learning.
- Theological study – there are very good discipleship and introductory theology courses available at Area/Diocese and theological colleges as well as parish level for example the St Edmunds Course in Christian Studies.
- Regular one to one meetings supplemented by conversations with members of the congregation and/or others in the leadership team. Discussion of books using a reading list.
- Exploration of other churches/traditions through worship/placements to understand the breadth of the Church or England.
- Experience of positions of responsibility: PCC member, group leader.
- Experience of ministry activities leading intercessions, serving, giving talks or preaching, pastoral care, baptism visiting.
- Keeping a journal.
- Finding a Spiritual director or equivalent.
- Identification of and discussion with priestly role models and a mentor.

Referral

You are encouraged to talk to the ADO at any time for advice and at the appropriate time you would recommend them to the ADO. Please check in advance the form of this referral, for example it could be a short report in which you describe the candidate, their journey to date and why you support their sense of vocation or you may be asked for a comment against each of the 9 criteria. Where possible in your referral please use quotes from others or examples to illustrate your recommendation.
Contacts & Resources:

Area Directors of Ordinands:
Two Cities: Alan Carr
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Stepney: Irena Edgcumbe
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Diocese:
Director of Ministry: Neil Evans
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Ordinands and Vocations Officer: Judy Barrett
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Diocese of London links:
clergystudysummit.com
londoncallings.uk
london.anglican.org

Church of England links:
information and resources for clergy and parishes
churchofengland.org/clergy-office-holders/vocation.aspx
callwaiting.org.uk
vocation.churchofengland.org
churchsupporthub.org/vocations
churchprinthub.org/?cat=430

Introductory Courses
stmellitus.org/beginning-theology
staugustinescollege.ac.uk/courses/exploring-theology

Work Experience/intern schemes including schemes in
Stepney and North London
callwaiting.org.uk/cemes