



## **VOCATION to ORDINATION in the DIOCESE OF GLOUCESTER**

The Diocese of Gloucester is an exciting place to be a Christian, and to serve God. We have a thriving church community, with many growing congregations. There are many opportunities to grow in faith and discipleship, to mature as members of the body of Christ, and to find ways of training and serving which are appropriate for each person.

Vocation is for all! Everyone has a part to play, and should be exploring on a regular basis whether they are living out their own story in the fullness to which we are called by Jesus Christ (*John 10.10*).

This leaflet briefly sets out the nuts and bolts in the stages of exploration of one particular vocation, to ordained ministry in the Church of England. The reason for beginning this exploration will be quite varied: you may have thought about it on and off for years; you may have had a moment of inspiration or revelation; someone else may have said it to you; you may have had a niggling, unsettling feeling that has to be 'scratched'! Don't worry if you don't feel like a 'traditional' candidate for ordination – the Church of England is opening up to all sorts of new ministries, and the church is learning to keep the best of the old and be open to the best of the new, too.

The process is a rigorous one. It's not designed to put candidates off, but to ensure that any decision made is in the best interests of the candidate and the church, and is within God's will for all. It's designed to tell what's really going on for all involved.

1. Talk to your own parish priest or minister: their perception and understanding of you is the best place to begin. Talk to your close friends and family – what do they think, and what do you think about their reaction? You may want to explore various options through a meeting with one of the vocations officers, or you may want your minister to put you in touch with the DDO (Diocesan Director of Ordinands). Your minister's support of your enquiry is important, and the DDO will take a reference from him/her at an early stage. Readers should speak to the Warden of Readers.
2. Meet DDO for initial conversation(s), usually at their home or office.
3. Complete Diocesan registration form – quite a lengthy form which allows you to tell the story of how you come to be exploring this stage of the journey.
4. DDO will visit you at home, and have the opportunity to meet the family, where appropriate, to explore with them the implications of your offer for training and ordination, and to answer their questions.
5. The DDO may suggest reading, or a placement, to extend your understanding of your vocation, in relation to your own history, to the wider church, or to the theological tradition which has described the church and her ministry. There will be an opportunity to discuss these in further conversations with the DDO.
6. Candidates who have been divorced and have remarried (or who are married to someone who was previously divorced), where the former partner is still alive, need to apply for an Archbishop's faculty in order to be ordained. The present marriage

must have been in existence for at least three years to make this application, which will involve some careful conversations, initially with the DDO.

7. Meet with Vocations Assessors: these are appointed by the diocese to assist with the task of discerning vocation. Ideally, each candidate will meet two assessors, one male, one female, one ordained, one lay. The assessors will have a conversation based on the criteria for selection (see below) and report back to the DDO and Sponsoring Bishop.

8. Meet with the Bishop of Tewkesbury. Bishop John is the Sponsoring Bishop in Gloucester, and he oversees the process of discerning vocation to ordination in the diocese. He will take reports from the assessors and the incumbent, and make his own report after meeting each candidate. These reports all come back to the DDO, who makes a decision whether to sponsor the candidate for national selection, through a Bishop's Advisory Panel.

*It may be necessary at any stage of the process up to this point to say to the candidate (or for the candidate to say themselves) that it does not seem appropriate for them to proceed. This can be a hard word to hear, but it is generally better said earlier than later – or the emotional investment can be all the more painful to leave behind.*

9. If sponsored for a Bishop's Advisory Panel, the candidate is booked in to one of the two centres in Ely or Shallowford (between Birmingham and Stoke) for the 48 hour panel, which lasts from Monday to Wednesday afternoon. Preparation for the panel involves:

- Taking up of three further references
- A candidate's registration form (similar to that used by the diocese)
- A written reflection of 750 words on an aspect of mission by the candidate
- The drawing up of 'Sponsoring papers' by the DDO, commending the candidate
- CRB Declaration and Disclosure application
- Financial and Medical Disclosures

10. The Sponsoring Papers will describe the anticipated ministry and its context for the candidate. This includes:

- (i) priest, permanent deacon, or accredited lay minister
- (ii) incumbent or member of a ministry team
- (iii) nationally deployed, or locally within either a parish, deanery or diocese
- (iv) any special focus of ministry (eg Ordained Pioneer Minister)
- (v) whether the candidate anticipates stipendiary or non-stipendiary ministry

Candidates for stipendiary ministry will need to be nationally deployable, and would normally expect to be suited to ministry as an incumbent (team leader). Candidates for local ordained ministry within a deanery or diocese would usually expect to be non-stipendiary. Candidates for local ministry within a parish (OLM) are not expected to display the same qualities as team leaders as other candidates, but are expected to display high collaborative skills and both commitment to and understanding of their locality, and to be supported by a resolution of their own church council (PCC).

The Ordained Pioneer Ministry category is new, from September 2005, and is for those who show a calling and aptitude to be pushing the boundaries of the ministry of the Church of England. Many will already be leading ‘fresh expressions of church’ – new church congregations, often meeting away from traditional buildings and attracting previously unchurched people into membership – and will often be allowed to train ‘on the job’. They will need particular gifts in communication, and a depth of spirituality, theology and personal resources to sustain them in this demanding role.

It’s not necessary for final decisions to be made at this stage about the precise category of sponsorship: the procedures introduced in 2005 allow for considerable flexibility.

11. The panel includes:

- Participation in a community of discernment with a conference secretary from Ministry Division and up to 15 other candidates, in two groups each with 3 assessors. There will be shared meals and worship, and some time for relaxation.
- Three in depth interviews looking at vocation, personality and aptitude for training.
- A group presentation by each candidate of 5 minutes, on a subject of their choice followed by chairing a group discussion on the same topic.
- A ‘personal inventory’, in which you will be asked to offer immediate written responses in note form to questions linked to the criteria for selection
- A ‘pastoral exercise’, writing a letter in response to a challenging pastoral problem.

12. The candidate will continue to meet with the DDO before the panel, who will assist with advice (and encouragement!) in the preparation of the written reflection, and the presentation and group exercise. Bishop John will also meet with each candidate in the week before they attend the panel, to talk and pray with them.

13. The report of the panel will be received within two weeks. Each candidate in this diocese will receive a phone call from Bishop John informing them of the decision, and then meet with the DDO to receive a copy of the report and debrief. The panel report will include detailed feedback on the criteria for selection (listed below), and give a summary recommendation, which may be:

- Recommended for training (with category of sponsorship)
- Conditionally recommended for training – the candidate is required to fulfil certain conditions either in relation to paperwork (e.g. CRB clearance), or a further medical or other report, or some other condition to enable them to fulfil one or more of the criteria for selection
- Not recommended for training. This is always a hard message to hear, and no matter how much assurance is given about still having a full part to play in the ministry of the church, it will take some time before it is possible to lay down the prospect of one role and be ready to take up another. It is important to recognise this possibility at each stage, and to be prepared for it.

The conference report is not a recommendation for ordination (or not) – but just for training. The process of discernment goes on through the period of training.

14. The report will also have a recommendation in relation to training routes. This will have been discussed with the DDO, and a suggestion will have been included in the sponsoring papers. Training routes relate to anticipated focus of ministry, and the age of the candidate. Training focuses on three key areas, all of which are a part of an overall programme of *priestly, or ministerial, formation*:

- Knowledge: especially, but not solely, theology
- Skills: especially ministerial skills
- Values: spirituality and character

Candidates under 30 will normally undertake 3 years residential training in one of the church's theological colleges. Those between 30 and 49 will usually train for 2 years in a college, or 3 years on WEMTC (West of England Ministerial Training Course), based in Cheltenham. WEMTC meets on Thursday evenings in term time throughout the year, for regular training Saturdays or weekends (around 9 per year) and a 9 day residential Easter School. Candidates over 50 will also usually train on WEMTC, although there may be greater flexibility about the precise arrangements. A number of candidates at any stage may train as commuters, travelling either daily or weekly to a college within a convenient distance. Final decisions about training are made in consultation between the candidate, DDO and Sponsoring Bishop.

The Ministry Division of the Church of England, who oversee the selection process, take responsibility for the training fees of recommended candidates. Those who train residentially will also receive a grant to support them and their family, where appropriate. This is arranged through the DDO.

*Candidates will remain in close contact with the Diocese through the DDO throughout their training. We have an annual gathering of Ordinands hosted by Bishop John, and the DDO's will endeavour to visit all Ordinands on a regular basis.*

15. In the summer before the end of training, conversations will begin to focus upon possible 'title parishes' – the context where ordained ministry is to begin. Candidates whose sponsorship is for a form of local ministry may well already know where they anticipate serving their title, but will need to confirm that the training institution considers their progress to have been satisfactory, and that they have the agreement of both the incumbent and the Diocesan Bishop. Nationally deployable candidates will find themselves in conversation with the Bishop (probably through the DDO) about possibilities within the diocese. In recent years, Gloucester has taken its nationally allocated figure of four stipendiary curates, plus one more funded from within the diocese, each year. We have also sponsored a similar number of candidates for stipendiary ministry. In practice, as Ordinands and parishes have thought and prayed through what each are looking for, we have found that a little over half our candidates have stayed within the diocese at ordination. There is no guarantee of a post in Gloucester – but it is certainly a possibility.

16. The ordination service and retreat are a celebration of the ministry of the whole people of God – a wonderful outpouring of thanksgiving at the way God calls us to be partners with him in building his kingdom, and an offering of ourselves in love. The service takes place at Petertide – the closest Saturday (for priests) and Sunday (for deacons) to the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul on 29<sup>th</sup> June. The retreat begins on the Wednesday, and is spent in prayer and reflection together. At the heart of the service are these descriptions of the work of deacons and priests:

**Deacons** are called to work with the Bishop and the priests with whom they serve as heralds of Christ's kingdom. They are to proclaim the gospel in word and deed, as agents of God's purposes of love. They are to serve the community in which they are set, bringing to the Church the needs and hopes of all the people. They are to work with their fellow members in searching out the poor and weak, the sick and lonely and those who are oppressed and powerless, reaching into the forgotten corners of the world, that the love of God may be made visible.

Deacons share in the pastoral ministry of the Church and in leading God's people in worship. They preach the word and bring the needs of the world before the Church in intercession. They accompany those searching for faith and bring them to baptism. They assist in administering the sacraments; they distribute communion and minister to the sick and housebound.

Deacons are to seek nourishment from the Scriptures; they are to study them with God's people, that the whole Church may be equipped to live out the gospel in the world. They are to be faithful in prayer, expectant and watchful for the signs of God's presence, as he reveals his kingdom among us.

**Priests** are called to be servants and shepherds among the people to whom they are sent. With their Bishop and fellow ministers, they are to proclaim the word of the Lord and to watch for the signs of God's new creation. They are to be messengers, watchmen and stewards of the Lord; they are to teach and to admonish, to feed and provide for his family, to search for his children in the wilderness of this world's temptations, and to guide them through its confusions, that they may be saved through Christ for ever. Formed by the word, they are to call their hearers to repentance and to declare in Christ's name the absolution and forgiveness of their sins.

With all God's people, they are to tell the story of God's love. They are to baptize new disciples in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and to walk with them in the way of Christ, nurturing them in the faith. They are to unfold the Scriptures, to preach the word in season and out of season, and to declare the mighty acts of God. They are to preside at the Lord's table and lead his people in worship, offering with them a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. They are to bless the people in God's name. They are to resist evil, support the weak, defend the poor, and intercede for all in need. They are to minister to the sick and prepare the dying for their death. Guided by the Spirit, they are to discern and foster the gifts of all God's people, that the whole Church may be built up in unity and faith. (Common Worship Ordination Services, 2005)

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