

INFORMATION FOR PARISH CLERGY WITH POTENTIAL ORDINATION CANDIDATES

Introduction

It may be that someone has come to you wanting to talk about a sense of vocation, or you have made the suggestion yourself. Unless your parish has recently produced a candidate it is unlikely that you will be aware of the present diocesan procedures and policies. This leaflet attempts to shed some light on these.

First Steps

It will help if you explore the sense of vocation as fully as possible. It is important that your candidate knows about the range of accredited ministry opportunities, including ordained ministry, Reader ministry, the Church Army, service abroad and the religious communities, as well as having a proper understanding of the lay ministry of all believers. Issues of stipendiary or non-stipendiary ministry should be considered. It is a good idea to get your candidate to talk to people in different forms of ministry. If you want advice about suitable contacts, ask Robin Coutts, Diocesan Director of Ordinands (DDO), or Peter Kelly (Vocations Group Chairman). They run an annual ministry exploration event, 'Exploring God's Call' and have information about national vocation conferences.

But above all, it will help if you can make as accurate an assessment as possible of your candidate. Do you honestly think he or she has appropriate qualities and gifts, the maturity, stamina, intellectual potential and commitment need to cope with public ministry? Is there a well established devotional life which connects with the real world? Is there at least some ministerial experience? Is there evidence of leadership gifts and the ability to work with others? What is the family's attitude? The DDO is always ready to advise and help in these assessments, but your role is essential, since it is you who sees your candidate and can observe how she or he relates to the congregation and to others.

It can be hard to say 'no' to a candidate, but it is kinder to do this at the parish level before hopes and expectations have been raised. Having said this, sometimes it is very hard to discern someone's potential vocation and if this is the case it is better to err on the side of generosity.

On to the DDO

It helps the DDO if you make first contact with him on your candidate's behalf, giving some background information, before your candidate contacts one of them.

Readers have their own selection system and Dennis Lloyd (Warden of Readers) should be contacted in the first instance. In the case of the Church Army, missionary societies and religious orders, the DDO can give the necessary guidance.

What age must a candidate be?

There is no lower age for a first enquiry and while the regulations permit candidates to attend selection conferences at 18 years of age, only in rare cases is it appropriate for candidate to attend as young as that. There is, however, clear encouragement for young men and women to come forward for selection. Candidates for NSM are normally over the age of 30.

NSMs candidates should normally be under 57 years of age for attending a selection conference, although in exceptional circumstances that upper age limit may be extended to 60 years. Our guideline is that stipendiary candidates should normally be under 45 years of age when sponsored.

What about divorced candidates?

If a married candidate or their spouse has been divorced and the former spouse is still living, it will be necessary for the DDO to apply for a faculty under Canon C4 from the Archbishop before that candidate can be sponsored for a selection conference. This potentially sensitive process is only embarked upon if initial discernment by the DDO indicates the probability of the candidate being sponsored for a selection conference.

How long does the discernment process take?

The length of the process varies depending upon each candidate's situation. It rarely takes less than nine months, as sufficient time is needed to find out about the candidate's sense of vocation, understanding of ordained ministry, of the Church of England and Anglicanism, spiritual life, theological understanding and stability of personality.

During the discernment process a candidate often engages in guided reading, possibly a placement and greater practical involvement in their home parish. She or he will have to complete a registration form, provide referees (including the incumbent), see a lay and ordained examining chaplain and have regular meetings with the DDO. (Where family are involved the DDO will also want to meet with them on at least one occasion.)

Support during the process

Throughout the time of 'testing' someone's vocation, supporting them in all the ways possible is important. Family and friends play a crucial role and in addition, their home parish has a vital role. As incumbent your part in this is paramount. Candidates' situations will vary, but experience shows that secrecy throughout the process is seldom a positive path. It may be that in early days, once a candidate is in the diocesan 'system', the parish support consists of a small group of people sharing the responsibility of support and prayer. As a candidate draws nearer to attending a selection conference it can be creative for the whole congregation to learn something about what the process entails and to be supporting the candidate. The incumbent can make all the difference in helping the congregation know and practice the difference between 'expectations' and 'support'.

NSM candidates are required to have the PCC's support for their candidacy. This support is recommended for stipendiary candidates also, but in either case the discussion should be confidential.

In the diocesan system each candidate is provided with a 'Vocations Chaplain'. The vocations chaplains understand the system and meet with candidates as they journey through the discernment process, offering support but not involved in assessment. Their role is in some aspects similar yet distinct from those who might assist in spiritual direction and it is a great help if incumbents can help candidates find someone to act in this latter capacity if they do not already have someone. As part of their support of candidates, vocations chaplains help prepare them for selection conference by working through with them the possible implications of a non-recommendation.

The DDO/DDNSM are there to support both candidates and incumbents throughout the process and are happy to come and talk to parishes/PCC's about the process or support in whatever ways may be considered helpful.

Financial Matters

One aspect of the process is the discussion of financial issues (an undischarged bankrupt cannot be a candidate; nor will a bishop ordain where there is evidence of financial problems.) Where there is significant debt it is helpful to seek to remedy this as soon as possible so that the candidate is in a reasonably secure financial position.

A Summary of the Criteria for Selection for Ministry in the Church of England

For a document giving details of the selection criteria click [here](#) (62kb).

Attending a selection conference

Not all candidates who come to see the DDO will eventually attend a national selection conference. In some cases the discernment process will point a candidate to a ministry other than ordained ministry, this may be the discernment of the DDO and those working with them, or of the candidate him/herself.

When there is a decision made by the DDO on the Bishop's behalf to sponsor a candidate for a selection conference the DDO will first contact the incumbent for her/his comment. Sponsoring papers are then written up by the DDO and the Ministry Division provides a date for a selection conference. The DDO prepare all candidates before conference so that they know in broad detail what to expect. There is further paperwork the candidate will need to complete prior to attending a conference.

The conference itself last two days and is residential. There is some choice in dates but the greater the candidate's flexibility the easier it can be to get an earlier date.

What happens after the conference?

It usually takes at least ten days for the conference report to reach the Bishop. The report is advising the Bishop as to whether a candidate should go forward for ordination training and formation, the decision is the Bishop's. The Bishop writes to the candidate, with a copy to incumbent and DDO, to convey his decision.

If the candidate is recommended

The DDO will meet up with the ordinand to discuss the report and the next steps. When a candidate is likely to be training residentially, the DDO will discuss options before attending a selection conference. Non stipendiary ordinands normally train on the Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme (STETS), a non-residential course based in Salisbury. Stipendiary ordinands who are married and over thirty will normally train non-residentially unless there are 'compelling reasons' pointing to residential training. Stipendiary ordinands who are single and over thirty may be permitted to train residentially or non-residentially. The House of Bishops requires ordinands under thirty to train residentially. The decision as to the timing of starting training is conditioned by the diocesan budget allocation for the year.

If the candidate is not recommended

A few candidates feel a sense of relief, but for most there will probably be understandable reactions of sadness, anger and bewilderment. People feel hurt and rejected and may focus their anger on the Church, God, themselves, the selectors or even the family or incumbent. The family and congregation may well share the sense of outrage. As incumbent, you also may share this sense, yet will have a crucial role in supporting them all.

The DDO will hope to see the candidate soon after the result is known and talk about the reasons for the selectors' advice to the Bishop. The Candidate will receive a copy of the report from the DDO, but may well need help interpreting it.

For the majority of candidates it will need time for them to accept the result. It is a good idea to suggest that they make no further moves to discuss their vocation for another few months. At the end of that time if their and your discernment is that they should try the same route again, then the DDO will be happy to meet with them. Please remember that except in exceptional circumstances two years must elapse before a candidate can attend another selection conference and there will need to be real evidence of further growth and development in the areas highlighted in the report.

How are title posts decided?

Further details on how title posts are decided are available from the DDO, but it may help to let candidates know the following at an early stage. NSM titles are decided on the criteria of 'where is the best place for this person to serve their title?' This may be the NSM's home parish **or** another parish within a reasonable travelling distance. Stipendiary candidates sponsored by Portsmouth Diocese are normally expected to be available to serve their title in the Diocese and will be released as early as possible if there is not a potential title post for them here.

Further information from:

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