

The Diocese of Exeter

Bishop's Guidelines for the Ordained Ministry

Section 3 - Ministry and Vocation

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Introduction

One of the exciting developments in the Church at the present time is the way in which we are rediscovering and exploring a whole variety of forms of ministry. The days of over-reliance on full-time Stipendiary Clergy supplemented by Readers have gone as we realise the breadth of God's calling.

It is important to distinguish between Ministry and Discipleship. All Christians are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ – it is a fundamental part of our baptismal calling. The Ministry to which some are called will vary from person to person and follows on from discipleship. This section of the Handbook deals with the vocation and discernment to such ministries as well as the practical details of some of the varieties of such ministry within the church rather than our common discipleship.

Vocation and Discernment

Many active members of the church may sooner or later feel that they are being called by God to some form of ministry in his service within the church. Sometimes this may appear as a very clear calling to a specific ministry and for other people it may be rather more tenuous and uncertain. In many cases the call will be expressed through the

members of the local church who recognise what God is doing in an individual rather than by the individual themselves.

Whatever the individual calling it always needs to be tested in an appropriate way, not least to be certain that this calling is shared by others and that the person concerned understands the actual nature of that to which they believe they are called. It is important to take all approaches seriously, even if the person appears to be most unsuitable for the vocation which they believe they may have discerned. In this case it is probable that God is calling them, but to something else and the discovery of what this might be is a journey which it is important for them to take with appropriate guidance.

Local Lay Ministries

In some ways, the number of lay ministries is unlimited, however, the vocations department has identified a number of headings which are listed on the literature which they provide at vocations events. These are:

Working with Children

Working with Young People

Local evangelism

Administration

Finance

Management

Leading Worship

Social Concern

Pioneer Ministry

Listening and Visiting

Spiritual Guidance

Family work and relationships

Safeguarding

Church Mission

Ministry Teams

Most of these involve a calling and authorisation by the local Church within the Mission Community (or parish). They vary considerably in their degree of specialisation and training. However, in many cases suitable training is available within the diocese.

Churchwardens

Churchwardens are the oldest form of lay minister within the Church of England and have specific legal duties which are laid down in Canon Law, although they also take on many other roles in addition, especially in a smaller church where there fewer volunteers. Churchwardens are appointed by the combined population of the parish and Church Electoral Roll and not by the members of the Church Electoral Roll alone, at a separate

meeting held prior to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting and in accordance with the Churchwardens Measure. However, a Churchwarden is actually an officer of the Bishop, is accountable to the Bishop and is admitted to office at a special service, usually presided over by the Archdeacon. If they wish to resign then they can only do so by writing to the Bishop.

Authorisation and Authority

As indicated above, Local Lay Ministries involve a calling and authorisation by the local church within a parish or Mission Community, albeit that in some cases this may only be possible after the completion of suitable training. An example of this would be the local safeguarding officer for children and vulnerable adults. Those who are authorised in this way are accountable to the local Church, usually in the form of the Church Council or the Priest who has charge of the benefice. It is always helpful to be clear precisely where this accountability lies as this can avoid a great deal of confusion in the event of a complaint.

However, there are other vocations which involve an authorisation from the Diocesan Bishop through the issuing of a licence and which follow training which is recognised and accredited nationally so that the resulting ministry can usually be transferred to another part of the country or, indeed, the Anglican Church throughout the world. Such licences are issued to Readers and Ordained Ministers and very occasionally to Licensed Lay Workers. The issuing of a licence by the Bishop confers an authority upon the minister in question by authorising them to act on behalf of the Bishop. In turn, this has the consequence that the person concerned is responsible and accountable to the Bishop who may call them to account for their actions if these break Church Law, violate codes of conduct or contravene a direct instruction from the Bishop. No licensed minister is a free agent - the authorisation granted through the licence carries with it an accountability to the person who issues the licence. The way in which this applies to the leading of worship and preaching is discussed in section 2 of the handbook.

An ordained minister who is not licensed by the Bishop may not be invited to preach or officiate at services unless he or she has been granted a Permission to Officiate (PtO) by the Bishop. Such a Permission is usually issued to ordained ministers who have retired from a regular ministry (in the case of stipendiary priests this means that they are drawing their pension and not in receipt of any stipend or house for duty) although there are circumstances in which it would be issued to other clergy as well. Whereas a licence grants a minister an authority and accountability in a particular place or role, a PtO has no such authority and simply indicates that the minister concerned is of good standing and that they may be invited to undertake such duties as they may agree with the local incumbent, priest in charge or, during an interregnum, the Churchwardens.

It is important to remember that any minister who holds a Licence or Permission to Officiate from the Bishop of a different diocese is limited in what they may be invited to do when visiting a diocese other than their own – see Section 2.

Readers

A Reader is a lay person who has received a formal and nationally accredited training and then been licensed to a ministry in which they lead worship, preach, teach and exercise pastoral care. They are, therefore, first and foremost a Lay theologian whose east end

ministry of preaching and leading worship, transparently flows out of, and is deeply informed by, that west end engagement with the daily life of the world beyond the church. It is a vitally important ministry and those who are called to it do need that call and that gifting to be fully and properly recognised and affirmed. By the very nature of this calling, all Readers have a vital and significant role in helping the church and the secular world to interpret each other.

Readers are therefore not a second rate or second class clerics, but first class, first rate laity who are theologically educated, trained and formed with the aim that as lay ministers they will flourish and use their education, training and formation to enable and encourage other lay people to flourish and blossom too.

Training as a Reader occurs locally within the diocese on a course organised by SWMTC. This is a formal course validated to adult learning criteria and with a syllabus which is recognised by the National Church so that it is recognised throughout the Church of England. This generally lasts for three years with initial probationary licensing occurring at the end of the second year of formal training.

Ordained Ministries

A calling to ordained ministry may be to a full-time stipendiary appointment or may be to a role as a self-supporting minister who may either continue with their existing employment or due to retirement, part-time work or because they do not need to work, give of their time to the church. In the latter case the intention may be to always remain as a self-supporting assistant minister or to have the option of changing to the stipendiary leader of a Mission Community or full-time paid chaplain at some future date. This distinction is important as it affects selection and assessment.

Anyone who believes that they may be called to ordained ministry and who clearly does not need to be guided to discover their true but different vocation should be referred to the Diocesan Director of Ordinands who will put them in touch with one or more of the Bishop's Advisors who will discuss their calling with them.

Selection and Training

The final decision as to whether a particular person should train for ordained ministry and whether they should then be ordained is made by the Diocesan Bishop. In making this decision he is guided by the recommendation from a National Bishops' Advisory Panel which is residential and lasts for forty-eight hours.

Training for self-supporting ministry takes place on a regional course, which in this diocese will usually mean SWMTC. Training is usually for three years before ordination to the diaconate, although this may be shorter depending on prior learning and experience.

Training for Stipendiary Ministry may take place locally with SWMTC alongside any existing occupation, but may also take place at one of a number of residential colleges around the country. Grants for individual and family maintenance are available and suitable accommodation also available for families. The length of training here depends upon the age and prior training of the candidate but would usually be for two years in the case of a candidate over the age of thirty and three years for a younger candidate unless they already had a degree in theology.

Age-related issues

There are no hard and fast rules concerning an upper age limit for selection and we are finding that an increasing number of people are offering for ordained ministry well into their sixties. In such cases it is important that candidates have a track record of parish ministry which gives evidence that they are already grounded in the ministry of the church and have learned how to adapt other skills to Christian work.

However, we do not have anything stronger than guidelines when it comes to giving an age beyond which a candidate will not normally be considered for training for stipendiary or self-supporting ministry. In general, those exploring stipendiary ministry must be of an age such that they will be able to complete a four-year curacy and a subsequent stipendiary post. Those exploring self-supporting ministry should be of an age such that they will be able to complete a four-year curacy.

If anyone is concerned about issues related to their age or prior experience they should contact the Diocesan Director of Ordinands for the latest advice.

Mobility and Locality - The Placement of New Ministers

The vocation to ordained ministry may find its initial discernment in two different ways and although these can overlap it is important to make the distinction between them. For some, the calling is very much one which is felt by the individual as they encounter God and respond to His call to them personally. For others, the recognition of the call may come from the local church community rather than the individual involved so that it is as if the local church calls out the individual on behalf of God.

This distinction is significant because whilst a stipendiary minister should always expect to serve in a different Mission Community from that out of which they were called, this will not necessarily be the case for a self-supporting minister. Whilst fully accepting that the gift of Orders implies an understanding that the ministry of the Ordained is there to serve the whole church, when a Mission Community calls out a self-supporting ordinand it is normally assumed that the minister will initially return to serve within that community following ordination.

However, there will be circumstances when it is appropriate, even essential, for the newly ordained self-supporting minister to be deployed elsewhere, especially if the calling has come to them rather than through the local church. If this seems likely then the necessary conversations will be held before the final year of pre-ordination training begins. Personal circumstances will be taken into account in reaching any such decision.

The Diaconate

For many years, the common expectation of those ordained deacon in the Church of England was that they would normally in due course be ordained priest, generally about one year later. However, we are currently rediscovering a more traditional pattern which recognises a calling to be a deacon and remain a deacon, filling a role which is distinct from and complimentary to that of a priest. In this diocese such a calling is openly recognised and encouraged. The training involved, whilst broadly similar to that of those called to priesthood, also contains a number of different elements to reflect the different role and emphasis in this ministry.

Transfer between Ministries

It is not unlikely that someone undertaking a locally authorised ministry will be called to one with a diocesan authorisation which carries a Bishop's licence. However, it is also possible that a Reader may be called to ordination or that a minister who was recommended and assessed for a permanent assistant ministry feels called to the ministry of oversight.

In the case of a Reader exploring a vocation to the diaconate or priesthood they need to go through the full discernment and selection process although the subsequent training may be modified to take account of prior learning and experience. If following selection to train as a Reader the person concerned realises that their call might really be to ordained ministry it is important that they raise this possibility as soon as possible.

For someone wishing to move from self-supporting to stipendiary ministry there are two criteria. The first is that they have satisfied the national learning outcomes for full-time stipendiary ministry and secure the support of a diocesan Bishop who will offer them a post and the second is that they need to satisfy the medical panel of the Church of England Pensions Board so that they can join the Pension Scheme.

However, it is also possible that someone who has already been selected and begun training as a Reader may subsequently feel, during the course of the training, that their call is to ordained ministry. It is also possible that someone training for ordination may feel that they are actually called to be a Reader. In both cases, once a candidate for Reader or Ordained ministry has been selected / recommended for training and has embarked on the training course, it is expected that they will complete it. However, if they wish to explore an alternative ministry this procedure must be followed:

- i. Their wish to explore an alternative ministry should in the first instance be expressed to the Programme Director of the training programme.
- ii. The Programme Director will then initiate a further process of vocational exploration for the candidate with the Vocations Officer.
- iii. The Vocations Officer will send a written report to the Programme Director and, if there are indications that the ministry for which the candidate is training is not appropriate for him/her, but an alternative licensed ministry is, the Vocations Officer will refer the candidate to the DDO (to initiate exploration of ordained ministry) or the Warden of Readers (to initiate exploration of Reader ministry), with a copy of the written report.
- iv. As a consequence of this further exploration it may be appropriate for the candidate to withdraw from the training course they are currently undertaking (for instance, in order to give sufficient time to the discernment process). A recommendation that a candidate withdraw from training should be made jointly by the DDO and Warden of Readers in consultation with the candidate, and will require the Bishop's consent. The decision to withdraw a candidate from training will then be conveyed to the training organisation (and, where appropriate, to Ministry Division).

The Ministry Division of the Church of England does not normally expect a candidate for ordained ministry to also be in training for Reader ministry. If such a case should arise and the Bishop believes that it is appropriate for the candidate to be exploring ordained ministry whilst also in training for Reader ministry, the DDO's Sponsoring Papers will include a statement from the Bishop to that effect.

A decision on the appropriate vocation should be reached before a prospective Reader is licensed or an Ordinand ordained. If there is still uncertainty or confusion at this point the licensing / ordination should be delayed to give further time for discernment.

The Priesthood of all Believers

The distinction between discipleship and ministry which was made on the first page of this section is important. It is often thought that all God's people are called to exercise a priestly ministry through the idea of the priesthood of all believers. This is then developed into a statement that ordained ministry is simply an extension of this more universal priesthood in which the individual is given authority to preach and teach on behalf of the Church.

However, the understanding of the Church of England is fundamentally different. The priesthood of all believers is a characteristic of the Church and it is a vocation that we share through our baptism. It is one aspect of a discipleship in which the whole church stands before God as a corporate body in worship and service. Individual priesthood (as well as the diaconate and episcopate) are not just further expressions of this common priesthood but rather 'charisms' – particular gifts and ministries given by God for the well-being of His Church. For these ministries there is the recognition of a separate calling to something which is distinct.

The confusion between these two different views of priesthood is something which can and has caused a great deal of misunderstanding at various times and it is therefore important to bear the difference in mind – it is essentially the difference between discipleship and a particular ministry.