

Discerning Vocation in the Diocese of Blackburn (2016)

Discerning a Call

The most important context for discerning a call to ministry (lay or ordained) is the local context, where people are known and have the opportunity to develop their gifts. Sometimes the last person to recognise a call from God is the person God is calling – they may need others to broach the question with them and help them to tease out and articulate what's involved. Amongst those others the parish priest or chaplain (for students and others worshipping outside the usual parish context) is a key person, as their support is vital to the whole process. (It's a bit trickier if a parish is in vacancy, but not impossible – please ask for advice.)

First Steps in the formal process

If you or someone you know wants to discern whether God might be calling them to any **Ordained or Licensed** ministry (Priest, Deacon, Reader or Church Army Evangelist) they need to obtain two simple forms, one for the candidate and one for their incumbent. These are available on the Vocations page of the diocesan website. They include details of how to return the form

The candidate will then have an initial meeting with one of the Suffragan Bishops. This conversation will explore the candidate's prayer life and current ministry and come to a view on whether this is a call that merits further exploration.

The Vocations Team

Following the meeting with Bishop Geoff or Bishop Philip, the vast majority of candidates will be referred to the Vocations Team. A member of the Vocations Team will be allocated to each candidate and they will meet on a number of occasions to explore God's call together. The leader of the Discernment Team is the Revd Cath Braithwaite (who also co-ordinates the Vocations Team as a whole). You can contact Cath on vocation@blackburn.anglican.org.

The Journey to Ordination

If, once the candidate has seen a member of the Vocations Team, a call to Ordination is to be explored, they will be referred to our team of three DDOs (The Revds John Darch, Cindy Rigney and David Arnold). This will mark the start of a more formal process of discernment which will usually include a short placement in another Parish.

As part of the decision on whether to sponsor a candidate to a Bishop's Advisory Panel, they will be asked to see three examining chaplains who will each interview them against three of the nine Ministry Division criteria for selection. This replaces the old Diocesan Panel and is intended to give candidates an experience of what will happen at a BAP as well as providing a much richer evidence base for sponsoring papers.

Readers and Church Army Evangelists

Those whose call is to Reader Ministry will be referred by the Vocations Team to the Warden of Readers who will continue to oversee this selection process.

In addition we are working with the Church Army to pioneer a new form of Licensed Ministry which is that of local Church Army Evangelist. These will be trained in the Parish context and will attend six weekends a year at Church Army College in Sheffield. Once trained they will be deployable locally on a self supporting basis or can also apply for paid work as a Church Army Evangelist. Training will be funded by the Church Army. For more information on this development, please contact Sue Penfold sue.penfold@blackburn.anglican.org.

Supporting a Candidate

Whilst it is right that Licensed and Ordained Ministries are discerned and acknowledged by the wider church, the most important part of this process is the ongoing support of the Parish Priest. It is often their role model that will have encouraged a candidate to explore vocation, and their continuing advice and prayers will be essential. You can find help in this from any member of the Vocations or DDO team, from Sue Penfold or from me. And please do not hesitate to contact any of us if you have questions about any of this – every enquiry is unique, so we know there will be queries.