

February 2024



The Church of England

Diocese of Ely

Vocations

*The Shared
Discernment
Process
for Ordained
Ministry*

*This handbook is for those
beginning to explore their
vocation to ordained
ministry*



Beginnings

This handbook is for those beginning to explore their vocation to ordained ministry.

We are so excited that you are starting out on this journey of exploration. This journey of discernment takes courage, and the process is no small undertaking. So, thank you for putting yourself forward, for being willing to be open to the discernment of the church, and for being prepared to give generously of yourself in church ministry.

See [Understanding Discernment](#) | [The Church of England](#) for an overview of the national process.





Beginnings

Discernment begins in your local context. You will need to approach your local vicar, or chaplain, or another licenced minister who knows you well, and chat to them about your sense of vocation. If your incumbent (or other licenced minister) affirms your desire to enter the discernment process, then ask them to refer you to us: vocations@elydiocese.org.

You will be sent some forms to fill in and your vicar (or equivalent) will be asked to fill in an initial reference for you. Based on these forms there are two options:

- Especially if you are unsure whether you feel called to licenced lay ministry (LLM) or ordination, you may start by meeting with a Vocations Advisor (VA). They will help test and tease out your sense of vocation. You would probably meet with a VA once a month between 2 - 4 times.
- Or, if you are sure about a call to ordination, you may have an initial meeting with the Diocesan Director of Ordinands (DDO) to work out the best route for you. This could be:
 - to meet with a VA initially.
 - to start meeting with an Assistant (A)DDO.





Next Steps

Before meeting an (A)DDO you will be asked to fill in some further forms, and complete some safeguarding checks. You will then begin meeting with an (A)DDO who will accompany you through the national discernment process. These meetings will usually be about once a month. You may also be asked by your (A)DDO to write some reflections, read some books, or undertake a placement or other activity.

At the same time, you will join a Ministry Discernment Group. These groups meet monthly for six months and are for those exploring ordination or licenced lay ministry. The aim of the group is to provide an opportunity for candidates to share with one another and learn from the vocational journeys' of others. The discernment process is a shared journey, and so meeting together as a group is essential, alongside in-depth 1-1 meetings you will have with you (A)DDO. Some of the group sessions will be in person, and some will be online, as we will be gathering from the length and breadth of the diocese. There will be some preparatory work for each session, and then the bulk of the time together will be spent hearing from one another.





Stage 1 of the National Discernment Process

Your (A)DDO will work with you through the qualities that those who are ordained should inhabit.

There are six qualities:

**Love for God | Call to Ministry | Love for People
Wisdom | Fruitfulness | Potential**

Each quality is explored in relation to four domains:

Christ | The Church | The World | The Self

More information can be found at
[Understanding Discernment](#) | [The Church of England](#)



It is possible that your discernment journey may pause or stop here, if you and/or your (A)DDO begin to discover that you do not inhabit these qualities deeply enough in order to proceed.

If, or when, your (A)DDO feels the time is right you will be put forward for stage 1 of the national discernment process. This involves a day on Zoom with six short interviews based around some of the qualities.

The national advisors produce a short report (which comes out a week after you have attended stage 1). No recommendation is given, but the interviews are graded, simply to help you (the candidate) and the (A)DDO discern what is the best way forward from this point. It might be to stop or pause for the time being; it might be to think about some significant development work; or it might be to proceed full tilt towards stage 2.





Stage 2 of the National Discernment Process

If proceeding, you will continue to work with your (A)DDO towards stage 2. You may undertake some development work, or a placement, during this time. You will continue to meet 1-1 with your (A)DDO to talk through the qualities.

There will also be an opportunity for the (A)DDO to meet with you and your spouse, or partner, if applicable. This is to give them an opportunity to ask any questions about discernment and ordained ministry. The conversation is not part of your formal discernment process.

You will have to have an in-depth conversation with your (A)DDO, or another trained individual, around some sensitive issues, with probing questions about your past. You will also have an Assessment for Psychological Wellbeing by a trained psychotherapist. Both of these conversations are about establishing how you have dealt with previous difficulties, and ensuring there are no unresolved issues that may present significant problems for yourself or those amongst whom you may minister in the future. In other words, both conversations are about safeguarding yourself and others.



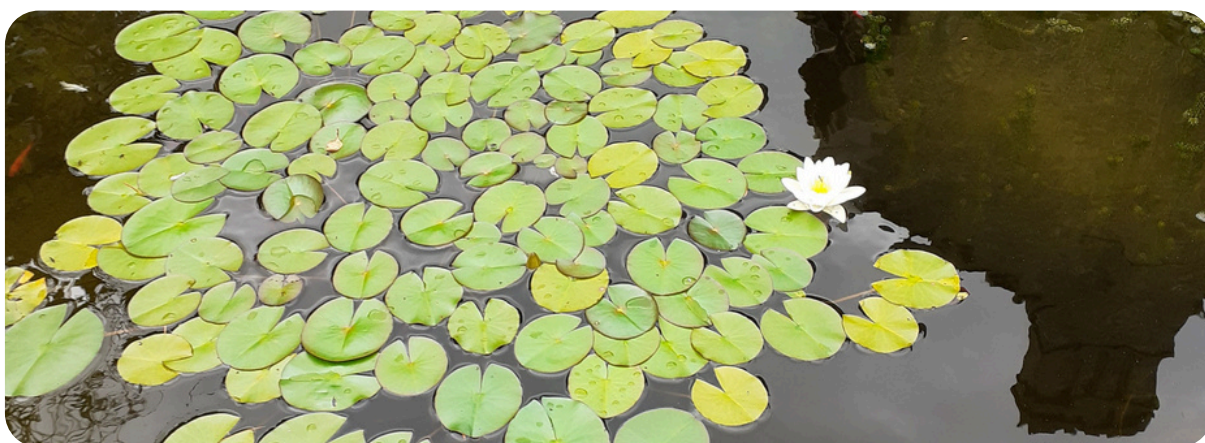
You may then be booked onto a stage 2 panel. Please note though that booking a panel does not guarantee attendance - your discernment journey may need to delay, pause or stop at various stages as further conversations are had with those involved in discernment.

Between booking the panel and attending the panel a number of other things have to happen:

- You and the (A)DDO write what are called “sponsoring papers” that the national advisors will read before meeting you.
- You will have two interviews with ‘Diocesan Assessors’ which gives you a practice for the interviews at stage 2, and also gives the (A)DDO other perspectives upon which to draw.
- You will meet with the Bishop, who needs to know something of those going to stage 2 panels.

Again, it is possible (though not likely) that in light of these interviews with diocesan assessors and / or the Bishop your discernment may delay, pause, or stop.

Stage 2 is a two day residential (there is an option to be a day guest if necessary). You will have two in-depth interviews around the qualities, and take part in a group exercise. You will also join in with the rhythm of prayer, with others at the panel.



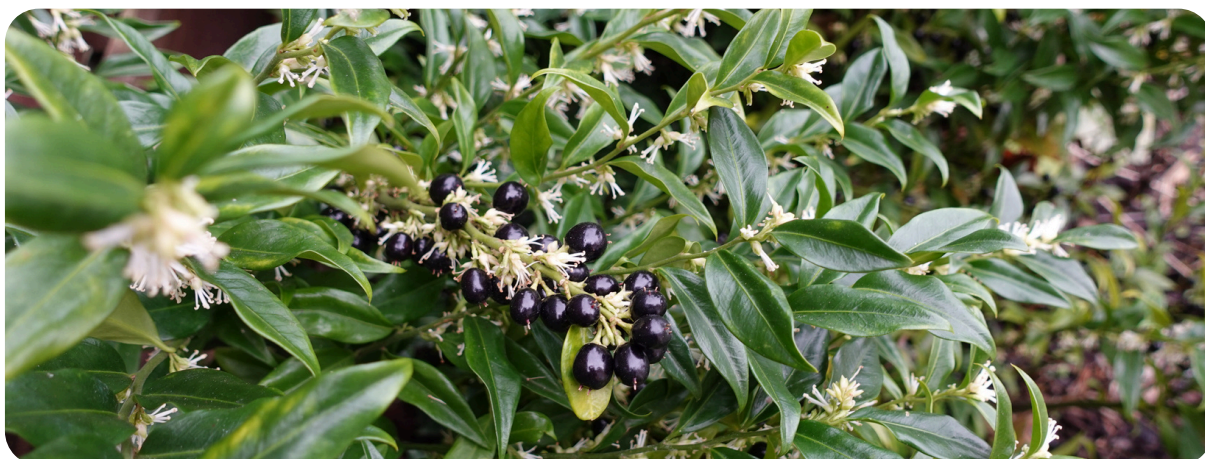
After Stage 2

A week after the panel the report is released to your (A)DDO, the DDO, and the Bishop. They meet together with the panel secretary (who hosts the stage 2 panel) to talk about the report. Following this meeting the report will be released to you, and you will arrange a time to go through it with your (A)DDO.

The report can give one of five recommendations to the Bishop:

- Recommended.
- Recommended but with advice for development work either before or during training.
- Recommended, but with conditions that must be met before training commences.
- Not yet ready to proceed.
- Not recommended.

If the advice is that you are not ready to proceed, or that you are not recommended, then you will be offered the opportunity to reflect with one of our team who provides care for candidates.



After Stage 2

If you have been recommended for training, you will then work with the DDO to confirm your training route. It is important to note that the final decision on your training pathway belongs to the Bishop, although clearly they will be principally guided by the DDO and the candidate. Once the pathway is confirmed you wait to begin training. You can defer your training for two full academic years if needed due to personal circumstances. We cannot guarantee that you will be ordained at the end of your training: it remains part of the discernment process and there are occasions when it is not suitable for candidates to continue. Nor can we guarantee that you will be offered a stipendiary curacy in the diocese.

Support through the process

We are committed to ensuring that discernment is open and accessible to people from all backgrounds and walks of life. The Church of England runs a Mentor Directory to support those from underrepresented groups, which you can access here: [Ministry Mentor Directory](#) | [The Church of England](#).

Our Minority Ethnic Vocations Champion, is also available to work with candidates.

We want to support, and will make all reasonable adjustments for, those going through the process who have special learning differences, are neurodiverse, or are disabled. It may be possible for diagnoses and/or assessments to be sought through the discernment process.

If you are under 30 and exploring ordination, then you may wish to connect with our young vocations champion.

Expenses

Candidates are entitled to claim for expenses when meeting with an ADDO and it is hoped that these will be met by your parish. Travel expenses for the Stage 2 panel can be claimed from the diocese.

Length of the process

It is impossible to say how long the discernment process takes. The absolute shortest timeframe is about a year, but it usually takes nearer two, and may take longer if there are pauses for placements and development work.

This may seem like a long time, but the process must be rigorous and plunge the depths of your character. You are not applying for a job but discerning a call to be a visible representative of the Church. Ordained ministry encompasses the whole of life and will have a profound impact upon you and your household, and so it is only right that it takes some time and leaves no stone unturned. It is a hugely rewarding and exciting ministry and cannot be undertaken lightly.