

A SHORT GUIDE TO:
SURVIVING
‘THE
DISCERNMENT
PROCESS’
IN THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

JULES
MIDDLETON



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'THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS'
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Informally - look I wrote and researched this and spent a long time doing it. However it is also God given, and written in order to help others. I also had input from many people who helped with the research by filling in questionnaires, to whom I am very grateful. So with all that, I *want* people to share it and see it, so that those who it could help will have access to it. I hope that bishops, DDOs and VCs might share it with those under their guidance and in doing so, that might include printing out some copies. So let's be sensible - I'm totally fine with that. If you're not sure, just drop me a message.

THE FIRST BIT

Some time ago I had one of those ‘why doesn’t someone do that’ thoughts. You know the ones where you see something that needs to be done and rather hope that someone might actually do it? Well with this one I felt a gentle prod from God to just do it myself.

Having gone through the ‘discernment’ or ‘selection process’ in the Church of England, discerning a call to ordained ministry, at times I found myself rather bewildered at what would happen next. As I progressed through, was recommended, and subsequently began training I found I was not alone in this. Despite being an enriching and worthwhile process, many people I spoke to had been totally unprepared for what the process would actually mean for them. Of course some of us were given a list or even a timeline if lucky, but most were left completely unprepared for the way it would affect us and those around us. At times emotional, occasionally draining, sometimes just all too much, I wanted to help people entering the process to feel a bit more prepared for it. So, this guide was begun.

In the writing of this I have spoken to many others who’ve gone through it, sent out questionnaires, tweets and Facebook requests, so this guide is the work of many, to whom I am very grateful. Together it is a guide, but also a personal reflection, hopefully giving you a taste of what the process could be like for you. I say right throughout this guide that the situation will vary from diocese to diocese and I can’t stress this enough, but I hope that it will also offer a framework of how the process generally works too.

Update 2020

I first wrote this guide when I was training for ministry because I wanted to share some of my experiences to help and encourage others. Over the last few years I’ve heard from so many people who have been through the process or considering vocation, how this guide has helped them in the process. Thank you to every single one of you who has emailed, messaged and tweeted to say thanks, or to ask a question, you made it all worth it.

In those few years some things have changed, and I’ve changed, so I wanted to update this guide to reflect that. I am aware that the Discernment Process is due to change soon so I

had put off doing the update, but then we were all hit with the Covid19 pandemic and so many things were put on hold, so I thought I'd just update it anyway. Much of this will remain useful even with an updated process and the rest will be useful for those of you in the process now. So there may well be *another* update next year, but let's just see what happens. As it was previously, this guide remains free to download via my website.

I'm still more than happy to be contacted with your suggestions to add in or just because you want to say hi, it's lovely to hear from you!

Jules Middleton, July 2020

ACRONYMNS

Why there are so many acronyms in the Church I don't know, but to make things a tad easier, here's some of the ones you might come across in the order in which you might come across them.

DDO – Diocesan Director of Ordinands. Works for the diocese, oversees those in discernment or training, and will be your point of contact in the diocese during the Discernment Process

ADDO – Assistant Diocesan Director of Ordinands. There may be several of these and depending on your diocese you may see an ADDO instead of DDO.

VC – Vocations Consultant. Usually someone who advises during the process and may take you through the selection criteria. They will be selected for you by your DDO.

VA – Vocations Advisor. As above just a different name, why is anyone's guess.

The DP – Discernment Process aka The Selection process. Didn't want to type it out endlessly so I just made up yet another acronym.

EC – Examining Chaplain. You may or may not see one of these before going to BAP. Usually a lay person appointed to go over your paperwork and check you out. Again.

Min Div – Ministry Division – responsible for advising the House of Bishops, individual bishops and members of diocesan staff about matters relating to: vocation, selection, ministerial education and development, deployment

VEG – Vocational Enquirers Group. Some dioceses have these, candidates getting together to support each other in the process.

Candidate – person in the discernment process. A possible candidate for training.

Ordinand – someone who has been recommended and is training for ordained ministry.

NSM – Non stipendiary Minister

SSM – Self Supporting Minister

BAP – Bishops Advisory Panel (yes some of you will find this term slightly inappropriate, just be careful where you make that joke, as I found out...)

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*Then I heard the voice of the
Lord saying, “Whom shall I
send, and who will go for us?”
And I said, “Here am I; send
me!”*

Isaiah 6:8 (NRSV)

INTRODUCTION

If you are reading this then I imagine you might just be considering a calling to ministry in the wonder that is the Church of England, or perhaps someone close to you is? You might even be on the verge of seeing a DDO, VC or perhaps head off to a BAP. You might also be wondering why on earth there are so many acronyms in the CofE? Well, don't worry, hopefully you'll have seen the explanation on the previous page.

My own realisation that I needed to embark on a journey into exploring vocation turned me into a sobbing crumpled heap, eating copious amounts of chocolate and wondering how on earth I got into all this in the first place. Hardly a 'here am I, send me', more a running in the opposite direction saying 'no thank you, Lord'. My own experiences of exploring a calling to ministry and going through the dreaded, wonderful, soul searching, emotional rollercoaster that is *The Discernment Process* led me to write this guide in the hope that it might help and encourage others, possibly feeling the same.

If you are anything like I was, then the likelihood is that as you approach this process you will not have much idea about what is going to happen. Let's face it just the words: *The Discernment Process* are enough to send you diving for prayer ministry and are hardly likely to fill your heart with a joyful glow of the knowledge that you are exploring God's amazing plan to give you a hope and future.

So, when I got to the end of the process and was selected for training, I wasn't really planning on looking back on it all. Once was enough, thank you very much. But it's funny how often God takes your well-made plans and throws them in the heavenly bin. I found that as soon as I was through it all, I met a lot of people who had been through it (yes really a lot, and if you think you know a lot of clergy now, just wait until you've got through this...) and most of them had the same thought – *I really had no idea what I was getting into*. Many people reported that the process was way more intrusive than they had thought it would be and that they wished they had been a bit more prepared in advance.

My husband, whose sense of humour is, well, perhaps a *little* wayward, always says that

The Discernment Process invites him to picture a bunch of old men in a room, stroking their beards, puffing on their ancient pipes and looking incredibly pensive. I'd like to say he's way off the mark, but there is a part of me that thinks perhaps his humour is actually a little too close to call in recognising the patriarchal structures of the Church of England. Whatever happens, at some point in the process there will indeed be people sat in a room discussing your future and you may or may not be present.

What to expect?

In the coming chapters we'll look at some key elements of the process, but tough as it may be, and it is, I do want to suggest that it really is a necessary process and one that can also be hugely rewarding. I have even joked that that I think all Christians should go through it, though it perhaps feels a little bit like intensive therapy. If there's anything lurking in your past you have never dealt with, it will undoubtedly come up during the process. If you have a hang up about one part of the church, expect it to be well and truly examined. If you have never considered your position on rural churches that only allow people from Mars who have 5 legs and speak only Spanish into their church, expect to be challenged to form a position on it. I was once told during the process, 'if you sit on the fence you will get splinters in your bum'. Nice. Though to be honest I still think sometimes sitting on the fence is ok - and quite possibly a ministerial skill.

From here on in I'm going to refer to *The Discernment Process* as the *DP*. One, because it's less wordy and two, because it feels slightly less terrifying, which you may find helpful.

So then, what will the DP mean for you? Well, this next sentence may sound rather unhelpful, but it seems to me that there is no standard way of going through this process, there are a host of reasons, decisions and personal foibles that direct how the whole thing might play out. Of course to some extent this is necessary as we are all individuals, but at the same time can be vastly frustrating, especially when you compare notes with someone else going through it all. With that in mind, this is not so much a step-by-step plan for how to get through DP, but more a collection of things that you *might* expect to deal with, both practically and personally. And whilst I may jest about it all, right at the start let me just say, if *you* feel called into ministry, go check it out. It might be a tough road, it might be a long one, or it might not, but either way, do explore it. Years ago a friend sent me this

quote from Paul Coelho. I was on the verge of opening a new business at the time, and was really not sure about what I was undertaking but reading these words encouraged me that taking this risk was worth it.

Pitiful is the person who is afraid of taking risks. Perhaps this person will never be disappointed or disillusioned; perhaps she won't suffer the way people do when they have a dream to follow. But when the person looks back she will hear her heart saying, 'What have you done with the miracles that God planted in your days? What have you done with the talents God bestowed on you? You buried yourself in a cave because you were fearful of losing those talents. So this is your heritage: the certainty that you have wasted your life.'

Paul Coelho

So why not take a risk for yourself?

I hope that the following pages will be helpful, perhaps make you smile or laugh, possibly cry (not intentionally!) and that this guide might prove a useful tool for surviving the DP. There's a bit in here about my experiences, there's also some stories from others who've been through it, some info on the process itself and how it works, some God stuff (obviously), and some suggestions of where to look for more info.

CHLOË'S STORY

Chloë Hewett is an ordinand in the Diocese of Birmingham and is studying at The Queen's Foundation. She is a Mum of three young children.

From a very early age I knew that I wanted to be a nurse, and was happy with my choice, starting my training at age 18. About a year before I went to university to train, I began to get these occasional, yet persistent, thoughts that I should be a priest. I completely ignored this, of course, because it was a ridiculous idea and not part of the plan!

Nursing didn't work out for me in the end, and I switched my degree to Medieval History, avoiding the Theology degree I kept looking at. All the optional modules that I took, including my dissertation, ended up being religion and church history-based... God's sense of humour coming out to play there, perhaps?

Over the years this gentle background nudging grew in intensity and volume - with me desperately turning the other way - constantly prodding and pushing the image of a vicar in my mind, until I could no longer ignore it. During a career break to raise my children, I decided to address it and, I hoped, make it go away... I stumbled across Jules' Discernment Process guide in my online searches to see if how I felt was 'normal', and I all but heard God sigh that I was finally listening!

The difference, for me, between the nursing and ministry vocations was how the calling manifested within me, and my response to it. I wanted to be a nurse, but I felt I HAD to be a priest, that there was no other option that would fit. I couldn't shake it, no matter how I tried. It was a feeling that eventually consumed my thoughts until I had to explore it. I was scared, but I wanted to try, my family supported it fully, and God wouldn't let it drop, so I said yes.

WHAT NOW?

Each chapter will have some suggested reading, links, resources, podcasts - whatever I have found or others have recommended, that might be of help. Have a look at whatever takes your fancy, and if it doesn't then even more reason to read it and broaden your view! There's plenty more in the Bibliography at the end and big thanks to those who've recommended good resources.

If you're reading the e-book version, I've added links - with books I've used Church House Publishing/Eden/SPCK where possible, for others I've used Amazon, simply for ease and the rather useful 'look inside' feature. Feel free to use your own preferred bookshop, support local, or borrow them from a friendly neighbourhood priest if you can. You'll probably end up buying a lot of books, so I suggest only buying the ones you really want.

In addition, if you are in the DP, your DDO or vocations guide will probably give you a reading list too, the ones mentioned here are those that come recommended by at least one person who has been through the process.

Vocation in the Church of England

A good first port of call, the vocation section on the CofE website has lots of useful info and links to other sections, for example types of ministry, info for younger candidates, BAME candidates and lots more.

Dioceses

Find your diocesan website here, useful for finding local contacts

Grove Booklets

If you haven't heard of these before, you need to! Short, to the point booklets on basically anything and everything to do with the Church of England and the Christian faith. At £3.95

each they are little gems and well worth checking out.

For example:

Margaret Magdalen, ***Vocation: Exploring Call and Identity***

CPAS (Church Pastoral Aid Society) ***Exploring Authorised Ministry?***

Gives a good overview, currently priced £3.50

CPAS ***Guide to Exploring Vocation for Leaders***

This is a short (20 page) PDF which is free to download. It is, as the title suggests, a guide for clergy or leaders in order to help them to help people approaching the idea of a calling. However it is still a useful resource as it covers a lot of areas in brief, for example a biblical view of calling, types of ministry (very useful graphic on p.19), the ordination service, selection criteria and it has a list of further resources and recommendations at the end.

Katy Magdalene, ***I Think It's God Calling***

Diary of calling from the first inklings through BAP and to college which gives a really good overview from a personal experience. Sadly it's not currently in print, but second-hand copies are available and you can get it for Kindle.

SHAPE from CPAS – a free online tool helps you reflect on how God has shaped you so you can work out whether or not your sense of calling is realistic, informed and obedient. S.H.A.P.E. stands for Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality and Experience. By looking at these five areas, you can understand more about who you are, how God has made you and how he has used life to shape you

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first born within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Romans 8:28 (NRSV)

1. WHAT IS 'DISCERNMENT' ALL ABOUT?

My first real brush with the DP was when the DDO called me at home, in the middle of my son's birthday party. There were a large number of children in my kitchen all attempting to get the closest to the chocolate fountain that we had, perhaps foolishly, borrowed for the occasion. There was screaming and mess and much hilarity. It was into the midst of this mayhem, that the DDO arrived (via the medium of British Telecom). Of course I was completely unprepared and made a hasty retreat to a quiet room of the house, praying that the boys would not wreck the kitchen in my absence. It was also totally unexpected, not least because I had been assured that The Church of England takes so long to process anything that it would be months before I heard from him. It was actually just two days after I'd been referred. There was a brief conversation in which I hoped I sounded normal, especially having run upstairs to escape the noise and was now breathing in a somewhat heavy fashion, and I was then invited (or perhaps summoned) to the DDO's house for a chat. I took biscuits, because that's what one does when one is visiting someone else. He declined to accept them and I rather think he may have thought they were a bribe.

The Process (DP)

So, to the process itself, what the heck is it all about? In short, *The Discernment Process* is the means by which candidates (aka: ordinary people) are selected for ministry with the Church of England. It entails being assessed against a list of *selection criteria* under the guide of your DDO and will end up with a BAP (Bishops Advisory Panel). We'll come on to all that later, but everything in between those points will vary enormously (yes, really) according to your diocese. Which is one reason why people can find the whole thing so difficult, because there is no set process to compare against. Whilst the process is overseen by the selection team at *Ministry Division* (no, it's not something from Harry Potter, it actually exists) their role is largely that – an overseeing role. The responsibility for selecting candidates for training lies with individual bishops, they will be the ones licensing candidates at the end of it all, and in many cases candidates remain within their dioceses too. Ministry Division ('affectionately' known as *Min Div*) however does have more of an input once it comes to BAP, where they have a

representative overseeing this final stage of the process. They also collate all the information relating to the outcome of each BAP before it is sent back to the bishops.

In short, effectively you do the discerning in your own diocese under the DDO and bishop's careful gaze (or glare...) and then they send you off to BAP where Min Div basically makes sure that you match up to what has been reported about you in the process.

The largest part of the process, therefore, the discernment period, is down to your own bishop, DDO and diocese, hence the variations. Do bear in mind that some of what appears in the following pages may not apply to you. I have tried to cover all bases in the hope that at least some of them will be helpful to each reader, and yet I am sure there will still be things I have missed for which I can only apologise and yet, still blame it on your dioceses.

Why go through it at all?

You might well ask, why do I have to go through this process? Shouldn't I be trusted enough to recognise a calling in my own life? Well all I can say to that is that everyone, without fail, who I have spoken to who has been through it, has found it worthwhile to some extent. It really helps you to think about your own faith, why you believe what you do and what experiences have shaped your opinions and the way you live your life. Whatever you feel about your own calling, the process should help you to work out in *your* mind exactly what that means for *you*. Which, it has to be said is possibly more important than what the Church of England thinks (but don't tell them I said that). Aside from all that The Bible tells us to 'make your calling and election sure' (2 Peter 1:10-11) so just in case you weren't sure, it's there in God's word.

'Discernment' literally means an act or process by which 'keen perception, insight or judgement' are used. In a Christian sense one would hope there is also a level of listening to God as well. In the DP the 'discerning' is done by you as an individual, guided by others and by God; but also by a whole raft of people around you that we shall come on to throughout this guide. It's a very thorough process but it's important to remember that the result of it all is to find the best people for different types of ministry in the CofE, and those who are genuinely called by God to that vocation, which has to be said, I'm afraid, may, or may not, include you. If it's a 'not', don't panic – we'll come on to that later, but for the meantime park that

particular worry on a shelf somewhere.

What's your 'ministry'?

Fred dislikes the idea going into the ministry partly because he doesn't like "feeling obligated to look serious", and he centres his doubts on "what people expect of [clergy]"

George Eliot, Middlemarch

As George Eliot highlights, there are expectations about what ministry might entail - not least our own. The term 'ministry' can be applied to all of us, of course – as Christians we all have a ministry of some sort. However in this guide when I refer to ministry, I am referring to it in terms of a specific leadership role within the Church of England (simply to save on space and avoid endless emails/tweets about what ministry is). So then, the DP is simply about working out what type of ministry *you* are called to. For many this might be Licensed Lay (Reader) Ministry or Ordained Ministry but there are many variations on that and other ways to serve in leadership within the church and it's important to think about this as you enter the process. It is perhaps the most obvious and visible choice that if you are called into leadership in the church, to aim for ordination, but that might not be what God is calling you to. For example other roles (some ordained and some not) include chaplaincy (hospital, prison, school), being a Distinctive Deacon, Church Army Evangelist, or Pioneer Minister, to name just a few. Equally you might want to consider whether are you called to a stipendiary role (i.e. paid) or self-supporting (a posh way of saying voluntary)?

Hopefully your DDO, incumbent or advisor will go through this with you and certainly during the process you will be encouraged to look at the various options and to think prayerfully about why you feel called to what you do. I am not going to go into all the various types of ministry in detail here as there is a lot written on that already, I just want to flag up that what

might be the most obvious direction, may not be the right one for you.

Of course it's not just about the type of minister, the DP should also help you to think about the *area* of ministry you feel called to. For example, are you interested in rural ministry, or maybe your passion is in missional opportunities, or do you feel your role is to be more sacramental? Your main area of interest or ministry, will usually be included on the sponsoring papers that are put together when you go to BAP so it's good to at least think about this (though I'm pretty sure that if you simply feel called to 'bread and butter' vicaring they will love you!).

One thing I found very useful about the process was actually having time and, in fact being encouraged to, think about this at length. The CofE is such a broad institution that there are so many different opportunities to consider, it might be that God has already put you in the area God wants you in, or it may be that your calling is to something vastly different. My advice is to take your time to think it through thoroughly.

It is also important, if you are coming to this with some 'life experience' (*they* love that term) to think about the skills and talents you already have. Just because God is sending you off on a tangent, it doesn't mean everything you have already learned and experienced will be shelved, whether that is what some might call a 'good' experience or a 'bad' one! On the contrary in my experience God very much uses what you have already! Romans 8:28 reminds us that God works through ALL things for the good of those who love the Lord, so we can be sure that nothing gets wasted in the kingdom. I have certainly looked back on both positive and negative experiences from my pre-ordained life and reflected on how they have been useful in a ministerial sense, on many occasions.

Lastly, and I suggest this is something to remind yourself of when the process is dragging or you are frustrated by it, which will undoubtedly happen at some point: hmm, well, let's put it like this, I'm sure we can all think of a vicar we once met, who possibly wasn't the best choice of vicar, or perhaps might have been 'better suited' to another vocation, right? Well, that's another reason why the DP is so important. In times gone by, people were simply sent on a selection weekend (under the various guises that it took) or the bishop just decided to make someone a priest (which actually can still happen, and from time to time does in exceptional

circumstances). Over the years, thankfully, the DP has become much more thorough, meaning less chance of 'unsuitable' people getting through, but it does mean for you and I, a much longer, tougher process. However, that isn't to say that those making the decision are infallible, they are not, of course, none of us are, but generally speaking these are people with a lot of experience and interest in the various areas under the title of 'vocation'. They are well trained and make their decisions thoughtfully and more importantly prayerfully.

An Unsupportive Incumbent

In rare cases you may find that your incumbent is not supportive of your call. Now, let me say first off that I hope most of us have a good relationship with our vicar and feel able to talk to them openly and without fear of reprisal, ridicule or rejection. However there are times where this is not the case, which could be for a number of reasons.

Now, if you have a good relationship with your incumbent and they advise you that they are unsure of your calling, it is up to you to weigh that up. Only you can know how your relationship works, perhaps they need to think about it more, perhaps they suggest to you some things to do first, or to get some experience. It may even be that they are right, so do think carefully. Only you can know how to deal with that situation. However if you feel that you are being treated unfairly you can get advice elsewhere. Don't just be put off, do talk to someone else, potentially another priest or a diocesan vocations officer. Or you could find out about CofE vocations events and go along to one of them for more advice.

DAVID'S STORY

David Bean is a 3rd year, self supporting curate in the diocese of Southwell and Nottingham. He is currently the only Distinctive Deacon in his diocese. He works part time for a Christian Alms House charity and is a husband, brother and uncle.

Some years ago, as a lay person, leading parish involvement in *Street Pastors*, the local food bank, in the credit union and poverty relief, my then parish priest said to me: *Now this is all very well, David, but you need to explore your vocation. We need to get you doing more for the church!* Which puzzled me, really, because as far as I was concerned this **was** the work of the church. I was not convinced that I was called to ordained ministry, but there was something that I couldn't quite leave alone...

I was sent away to read the ordinal for deacons – and nearly fell off my chair. It described a ministry of practical service and enabling, a life of visible self-giving, that I was either doing, or yearned to do.

I became convinced that I was called to something “deacon shaped” but did that mean “Deacon”? That was not a question for me alone - it required the Church's discernment, not merely mine.

My advice? :

- The ordination services contain our public theology on the role of deacon and priest – they are full of Scripture and wisdom. Ponder and pray over them.
- Recognise that the process is about the discernment of the will of God, not a job application. The answer might be “You've got a perfectly good lay vocation – just get on with it!”
- Listen to God's voice in your heart and mind, and in the words of others.
- Trust that God is in the process.

SIAN'S STORY

Sian Parker is an ordinand from the diocese of Derby and is training at Cranmer Hall in Durham. She spends most of her spare time cooking, reading, and playing boardgames.

Ever since I started going to church at the age of 20, I knew God was calling me to explore ordained ministry. It was a thought that nagged away at me, no matter how much I tried to convince myself I wasn't the right kind of person to be a priest. I had recently been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, and the stigma attached to mental health and disability in wider society meant I wasn't sure the church would want to ordain someone like me. I was even told by one person that it was the Church of England's policy to refuse to ordain bipolar people. Fortunately, this couldn't be further from the truth!

I knew I had to be faithful to my call and trust that God didn't make mistakes. I looked at people in the Bible who were called to be priests and leaders and saw that God had the power to turn weakness into strength. I started to see my own disability as something which might allow me to reach out to others who were marginalised in society as I had been. I spoke with my vicar and then with the Diocesan Director of Ordinands, both of whom encouraged and journeyed with me through my discernment.

The church gave me the confidence to see myself as God saw me - not as someone who was sick and unsuitable, but as a beloved child of God, called to use her unique gifts to build God's kingdom here on earth.

WHAT NOW?

Mark Chapman, **Anglicanism A Short Introduction**

As it says, a short intro to Anglicanism, very useful and you'll be surprised what you didn't know.

Lilian Daniel and Martin B. Copenhaver, **This Odd & Wondrous Calling**

Two pastors views on the challenges and joys of vocation

Frances Dewar, **Called or Collared**

I found this very helpful in the early stages of the DP.

Watchman Nee, **What Shall This Man do?**

looks at ministry in general, in the New Testament context.

Robert Reiss, **The Testing of Vocation**

looks at the way the process has worked over the years. Some good background reading.

Step Forward Anglican

aimed at those in the 18-35 bracket and put together by a selection of DDOs and members of Cranmer Hall (theological training college), features some resources and highlights events coming up.

Every Day People

Guide from the CofE on Minority Ethnic vocations

*There is no fear in love, but perfect
love casts out fear*

1 John 4:18

2. GETTING STARTED

I hope that if you are reading this right now you will already have been through some sort of personal tussle over your calling. But you may of course still be in the 'temporary insanity' phase. So if you feel like you are going a little bit mad, or absolutely terrified, don't worry everyone does at some stage. Well I say everyone, there are of course those who have been told since birth they are destined for the Priesthood (and if that's you then just stop being smug and just skip the next few paragraphs) but for the most part we all feel like it's a REALLY BIG DEAL! I mean who in their right mind would actually *want* to be a vicar? Long hours, working lots of evenings and definitely weekends, and what's more, the uniform sucks. Need I say more?

Never before has that passage about Jacob wrestling with God felt so pertinent than when I was considering that God *might* be calling me into ministry. The bible says Jacob wrestled with him all night long. Well it will probably be longer than a night wrestling over this one, more likely months. When people ask me if this is something I always wanted to do, I laugh. A lot. I spent about six months in denial about the whole thing and I know people who have spent years trying to avoid it. In fact you may find yourself using the DP as a way of finalising and confirming once and for all that you are most definitely *not* called into ministry. I did not do this. No, not me. Never. Hmm, well, maybe a little...

For some and certainly for me, getting to some sort of acceptance over the calling took a while, in fact it was when I realised I hadn't been able to sing the hymn 'Here I am Lord' without blubbing for about two years I knew I had a problem. So acceptance came for me in three phases: 1: denial, 2: hysteria, 3: defeat

1: Denial

If there is one thing I have learned, it is that if God is calling you there's not much you can do to avoid it. Eventually God's going to start shouting in your ear so you might as well give in and check it out (or get some super strength ear plugs). Believe me, and for your own sanity I recommend the former in the long run.

For me, being called into ministry followed a rather unexpected encounter with God, bringing both me and my husband to a real and living faith after years of doubt and dabbling with the

parish church, so it was somewhat of a shock to say the least. Well, I say shock, nuclear warfare might just about sum-up what was going on in my brain at the time. It didn't help that a number of 'coincidences' happened, and conversations with random people that usually involved them telling me to consider ministry, became common place. In fact the most bizarre of all was when a double glazing salesman came to the house and in conversation told me 'when you have a calling on your life you just have to obey'. Flippin' Nora so God is even using double glazing salesmen now?!

This is actually pretty common, people affirming your calling that is, not the double glazing man bit, that *would* be weird – in conversation at BAP, 'so, have you had you visit from the Anglian man yet?' (other windows are available...). Told you you'd need good ear plugs...

2: Hysteria

So as you can imagine the next logical step was hysteria. 'Right so I can't actually ignore this any more, that means I have to consider God – yes that's THE God, creator of the universe – might actually be asking ME, yes me, failed, broken me, to do this thing. ARGHHHHHHH!!!' This meant my mind going into complete overdrive about what it would mean for us as a family: moving house, studying, and horror of horrors a dog collar (might have been getting a teensy bit ahead of myself there...). At some point I admitted all this to my husband who was rather wary about the whole thing (I should let you know that I *may* have been known to have a few hair brained schemes in the past, so his wariness was somewhat understandable. Although actually come to think of it, it would probably have been understandable in any case).

Eventually we agreed that in order to have some peace of mind (and hopefully put the whole idea to bed) I had to find out more. Even at this stage I didn't want it to be official, so I went to see a priest other than my own. Sadly the hysteria stage had not yet finished so I spent an hour sniveling and sobbing in his vestry. There was snot. It was not pretty. In fact the scariest thing was that he knew exactly why I was there even though I hadn't given him even an inkling of why I wanted to chat to him.

Apparently (and thankfully for me) my reaction was not uncommon, not in response to him of course, lovely man, just my reaction to the generally hugely momentous thought that I might be 'called'. Because let's face it at this stage (and at many others in the DP) it's pretty momentous.

So if you are currently a gibbering wreck, trying hard to avoid it all, you are not the first and nor will you be the last, take comfort that there are probably many others snorting their way into the process right now. And if that doesn't help, Psalm 56:8 tells us that God 'keeps track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.' (NLT), which is nice to know, although I feel sure it is probably a vat in my case rather than a bottle.

3: Defeat

I was, it's fair to say, completely defeated. Having been to see someone 'in the know' who I was convinced would send me away with a flea in my ear, but who did exactly the opposite, well then, I had nowhere else to run. And run I did want to. Said lovely priest then sent me on to the relevant powers that be, starting with my own vicar and the process began...

I should say again at this point, not everyone feels completely baffled by the whole thing, many people know exactly what God is calling them to and have no need to sob on random priests, which is great. It's just that a lot of people do! So if you have made it as far as seeing the DDO, I applaud you! Well done, you deserve a medal, but just to warn you, it's only just begun.

Where to start

So, you think you might have 'a calling'. Maybe you've been to see your incumbent, maybe you've already seen your DDO. There are various ways to enter the process and like pretty much everything about the DP it varies from one diocese to another. However, generally accepted is that the best first port of call is usually your own vicar. Usually they will have a bit of a chat with you, perhaps give you some opportunities to explore that sense of call in your own church and then with an informed opinion can refer you on. Occasionally I have heard of people whose incumbents refused to support them and wouldn't therefore refer them to the DDO. This might be for a range of reasons: perhaps they just don't think you are suited; perhaps there is a theological concern or perhaps there is some unconscious (or possibly conscious) bias. This is, I hope, unusual but if that happens don't be completely put off and do seek a second opinion or support elsewhere, if needed.

There are lots of options – for example The CofE runs vocations days as do many dioceses, some have vocations advisors too who are a great starting point for an informal chat. You can do like I did and see another priest if you happen to know one, and if you get really stuck you can always contact your diocesan office and ask to speak to the DDO direct. This isn't usually the 'done thing' so I would only suggest doing that if it's essential in your case. In most dioceses your first 'official' meeting will be with either a DDO or a Vocations Advisor and they will then fill you in on what will happen next.

The DDO

My advice here is not to expect too much from the first meeting with your DDO or VA or whoever else they send you to. Whilst it can be incredibly nerve wracking and potentially emotional, it tends to be an informal chat about why you feel called. Unless you are really barking up the wrong tree, or there is something significant in your life that needs addressing, it's unlikely you will come away from this disheartened, and you will probably then be passed on to someone else to get the ball rolling.

This can be a bit of a let down, but remember this is just the start of a process that can take years. Yes, really years, and that varies enormously. So don't expect to come out from that meeting with a fully formed time scale of when you might become a vicar (or other). I don't know a single person who was given an accurate time scale in that first meeting, however you might

and should be given a guide to what needs to happen before then.

All that said, don't underestimate your DDO, most of them have a lot of experience in vocations. Do go prepared, take questions and concerns, and be completely honest, it's not a test (yet!). Most people I have spoken to came away from their first meeting feeling relieved and upbeat. Relieved because although the meeting itself isn't hugely important to the whole process, it really is a personal milestone.

What happens next?

Well this is where things get a bit cloudy. Dependent on your diocese you will be guided through the next part of the process by someone, who could be your DDO, an Assistant DDO (ADDO), a Vocational Consultant (VC), or someone else. In the next chapter we'll look in detail at the 'Ministry Enquiry Form' and the 'Criteria for Selection' but the timeline below should give you a rough idea of how things will happen (bear in mind, as I've said, things do vary).

- **Initial informal chat** with your vicar or other advisor – led by you.
- **Referred to DDO** – usually by your own vicar
- **Initial Interview** – usually with the DDO but in some cases an ADDO or Vocations Advisor
- If approved to go ahead, fill in the '**Ministry Enquiry Form**' (see Chapter 3) & references will be required.
- There then may be further **interviews** to go through the 'Selection Criteria' (also Chapter 3). This is probably the most vague part of the process and could be with a VC, with your DDO, ADDO or others.
- **More interviews** – at the end of going through the selection criteria you may be interviewed by an Examining Chaplain (EC) or even go to a Diocesan Panel.
- **Interview with your bishop** – If you haven't already met with your bishop you will almost certainly be required to meet with them before they decide to sponsor you to BAP. They will have the relevant reports and paperwork on you before meeting you and they will then make the decision to sponsor you for BAP. At this stage all your sponsoring papers (more form filling in) will then be sent off to Min Div who will send you a date for BAP.
- **Go to BAP** (See Chapter 5)
- **Get a result**

The Sending candidates to BAP guide does state that on entering the DP, candidates should be given clear, written guidelines explaining the process to them and indicating some idea of the timescale involved. Of course if that were always the case there would be less need for me to write this guide, but don't be afraid to ask! It can be quite daunting entering into this whole mechanism but at the end of the day you are the one it will affect most of all, so do ask questions and do query things you are unsure about.

DUNCAN'S STORY

Duncan Hutchison is an Assistant Curate in the Diocese of Gloucester. He completed training in 2020 on a part-time pathway, he is also a primary school teacher.

In our diocese, once you have acknowledged the calling God has on you, for yourself, you must then see the Vocations Advisor. After completing a long questionnaire, which asks you to detail why you think you're called to ordained ministry and how many people have recognized your calling, the Vocations Advisor begins the process of seeing if there would be any mileage in you seeing the Diocesan Director of Ordinands. This is just one of many conversations that you enter into over this period. She checked details, such as ensuring I understood what it meant to be a priest and what my understanding of the role of priest was.

The meeting with the Vocations Advisor was a positive one and it was agreed that I could now commence the formal journey of discernment with the DDO. I met with one of the Assistant DDOs in our Diocese. The meetings were very affirming and warm and she was genuinely willing me to succeed.

As I was going forward for ordination as a Minister in Secular Employment, I found that I had to phrase answers very carefully as there was little known about how my particular calling worked. Each time we met, I was told there were no right answers; however, I often felt, and was told, that the answers I gave were 'not quite what we are looking for' and I became very adept at knowing my story and explaining it with clarity. My advice is that you have to know your story and be confident in it, but also the more you can read about the incarnational aspects of priesthood and the distinctiveness of the CofE, the more you will be able to frame your answers in the right way. Perhaps talk to as many people/priests/ordinands that you know, about what they think is significant about priesthood in the CofE.

RACHEL'S STORY

Rachel Frost is an Ordinand from the Diocese of Bath and Wells and will be studying at Cranmer Hall, Durham from September 2020. She loves to bake and take her dog, Daisy, on long walks.

I hadn't planned to talk about a potential calling to ordination – in fact, I had been running away from such a conversation for about seven years! One day I arranged to meet someone from the diocese to talk about children's ministry - as that has been my job up until this point - and it was through that conversation that they challenged me to consider going on the discernment journey, as they were strongly sensing that was the call upon my life. Many people had said similar things, only this time it was different. After much squirming and resisting I agreed to let them pass on my details to the DDO.

As the months went on I saw a DDO every 5-6 weeks and each time we went through the criteria for selection, she gave me books to read and asked me to write reflections. Every appointment was different. They varied in depth and I realised over time that the relationship I had with my DDO was one which was incredibly unique. After 5 months I was given the Registration Form to complete - it's about 10 pages which travels with you all the way to BAP. It's long and deep. I learnt from it that you have to be prepared to be asked about every single word you write.

The next stage was seeing three Examining Chaplains. They interview you on specific criterion and each of them are different experiences. After that, I was sent to see the bishop who would decide whether or not I would go to BAP. For me that particular meeting was especially nerve wracking, but it was precious to be able to have a conversation with a woman who is in ministry and who is a bishop, a meeting I will surely never forget.

WHAT NOW?

There are lots of books on ordained roles, here's just a few but check out more in the Bibliography.

Christopher Cocksworth & Rosalind Brown, ***Being a Priest Today***

It's pretty much a dead cert that someone along the line will tell you to read this book. It is considered a classic and whilst personally I didn't find it all that exciting, there is some really useful stuff in there so trudge on through. There's also 'Being a Deacon Today' (Rosalind Brown) - recommended by a fellow student, this is helpful to gain an understanding of the deacon identity, even if you are not aiming for the distinctive diaconate, and the way the deacon identity underpins the priestly; and 'Being a Server Today' (Brendan Clover).

Stephen Cottrell, ***On Priesthood***

A more recent look at priesthood - exploring ministry as messenger, sentinel, steward, servant and shepherd

Emma Percy, ***What Clergy Do***

considering ministry through metaphors of motherhood.

Michael Ramsey, ***The Christian Priest Today***

Another classic and another one they are bound to make you read so get it and get ahead of the game!

Graham Tomlin, ***The Widening Circle***

Another more recent reflection on the role of priest from an evangelical viewpoint.

Magdalen Smith, ***Steel Angels***

on the personal qualities of a priest

Specifically on **ordained ministry in CofE**

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

3. IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU

Except of course it's not actually all about you, it's about God and you're just going to have to trust. Trust is a word you're going to hear a lot in this whole crazy journey and you really do need to find a way to trust God in it all. There were so many times when I felt at the end of my tether, completely out of my depth and no idea what to do except trust in the Lord.

I don't know about you but I love the passage in Exodus 3 where Moses is called by God. He starts off by saying 'here I am' when God calls his name, but that quickly turns to the opposite. You can almost imagine as the conversation went on: 'Oh no, you want that other Moses, not this one, case of mistaken identity, you see I'm the wrong Moses....'

I have to say I feel some kind of affinity with him in that moment. His evident fear and dislike of God's plan for him is rather comical really. I mean he seems to come up with every excuse imaginable and yet God has a come back each time, with grace and patience until finally we are told the Lord's anger burned against Moses. Not surprised to be honest. Anyone with young children or who has experienced how they can go on and on and on, might understand how God felt in that moment: 'Oh for goodness sake, would you just DO AS YOU ARE TOLD!'. Now I am sure that God has an unending supply of patience, but there is a small part of me that takes encouragement that in this moment God too seems like a frustrated parent.

God replied to Moses' first excuse with: 'I will be with you', and that is all you really need to remember, when you are going through the list of reasons why God couldn't possibly be calling you, and God is patiently counteracting every one. This might not be an easy process or even a quick one but whatever happens along the way, just remember the Lord will always be with you.

You

Now then, we are starting to get to the deeper stuff. This whole process can feel very intrusive, challenging and personal, and that was not something I was really prepared for. That can be a really positive thing but might also be really personally difficult, especially if you have difficult experiences in your past, for example: abuse, relationship breakdown (whether for you, your spouse or in your family), or a difficult upbringing, in fact anything that is likely to be seen as highly emotional or life changing. This will undoubtedly be picked up on and explored in depth.

Please, please be aware of this. Hopefully you will have a good advisor who will take you through any of these areas sensitively but even if that *is* the case, it may still bring up memories and in some cases, actual situations from your past that you may not want to revisit. (One candidate I know was asked to contact a previous partner despite being separated from them for a number of years). We'll touch on some of this later but for now, remember to be kind to yourself and go at your speed.

It might not be tough situations or things from your past that you find hard, in fact, it might just be the in depth probing of *you*, which can be hard on anyone. So, be kind to yourself and make sure you have someone you can talk to, away from the process when you need to.

Support

And on that note – support. Get some. If you haven't already you will need to think carefully about who you tell that you are exploring this process. People will probably (as people do) have opinions on it and on you, and it's worth just considering who you share with. It would be nice if everyone in the church was the very essence of discretion but in my experience it's always good to just clarify if you want to keep something confidential, then there can be no misunderstanding about it.

Personally, I chose a few key people who I could ask to pray and on whose shoulder I could cry if needed. However news may well leak out. For me that came via my blog which although it began as anonymous, I was writing about the process, and a post called '10 reasons not to be a vicar' got read by a few people from church. Though in fact, a positive outcome from that was those in the know who laughed and recognised all the denial in me that *they* had been through, which actually really helped me to process what I was thinking. So, in short choose your support wisely – the best people might not be the people you'd first think of.

If you enter the process you will undoubtedly be asked to find a *Spiritual Director* – again, choose carefully! The diocese can usually advise you on suggested people locally. Find someone who you can get on with and feel happy to talk to about anything (and it will be confidential so don't worry that they will snitch on you to the bishop), but also find someone who will challenge you. It's no good having someone continually telling you how wonderful you are, you need someone who will be honest and get you to think outside of your very carefully constructed box.

You might also find that your diocese has, what was termed locally as, a VEG group – or *Vocational Enquirers Group*. Some people I have spoken to loved their local group and found it a real support to be with others going through the same thing. Personally I didn't, but if you have something like this locally it is worth exploring and at least give it a go. If nothing else there will be people further on in the process who will be more 'in the know' than you and that is always useful.

Hopefully you will also have an incumbent/priest/vicar/significant spiritual other who will support you too. My vicar was frankly amazing, always suggesting stuff to read, giving advice when needed, allowing me to spout off about the process and give me a gentle shove when I needed it. Now this isn't always the case as I touched upon previously, so if you don't have a supportive vicar then all the more important to take note of the above.

Sacrifice

People will tell you there will be sacrifices along the way. Whilst it's true I don't find this especially helpful at this stage. For a start you're probably terrified as it is, you don't need someone scaremongering too. You (and your family if you have one) will probably need to make some changes and it might take some time to adjust to what those are, but just remember our God is one of love. In 1 John 4 we read those oft quoted words: 'perfect love casts out fear', now I know, you might well call me up for citing out of context but actually here the writer is talking about discerning what God is saying and reminding the reader of a God of Love. So take that same reminder - it's that same God of love who is calling you into ministry, so I really don't think God wants it all to be a total nightmare!

Family

If you have anyone around you who could be remotely termed 'family' and who is likely to be included in your support network, just bear in mind the impact on them too. For myself, at this stage, I knew that my family was affected by what I was doing but we took the view that we're all in this together. We talked, made decisions together and prayed together.

If you are married, have a partner, and/or with kids, this will affect them especially. There is so much I could say here, but really you need to work out for yourselves how that will work for you.

Perhaps just consider some of these questions that may be relevant to you:

Is your partner a Christian? Are you children? Whether yes or no, how will they feel about the idea of you being ordained? Will it affect your partner's job? Will it affect your lifestyle? Don't forget the implications of moving house and schools for children, possibly several times.

What about your parents or other family members? Are you prepared for their reaction? Will it be positive? And if not how will you manage that? Are there needs from other or older family members that fall to you?

Many people going through this process are not married, but some of the questions of family and support above, might still apply to you. I would also say, and especially for women (I'm afraid to say) is that you may well be questioned on future intentions/ family etc. Equally, if you identify with being LGBTQ+ you may find some questioning intrusive. Attitudes are changing across the church but sadly I still hear stories of those being asked inappropriate questions in these areas.

I'm not totally up on current employment or equality law in this respect, but I would suggest that in this 'profession' and bearing in mind how much depth this process goes into, it's not *unreasonable* to be asked about you being single or LGBTQ+. However what is not ok, is in depth probing about why/if/when/what and about having kids or the status of your relationship and so on. If you feel uncomfortable with questioning, then do say so.

In the same vein, some of those who are Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic have also reported treatment in the process that is openly racist. At the time of writing the 2020 update, there seems to be a willingness in the church to address systemic racism, so I have hope for the future of the church in this respect. As with other examples, please do not let things go if they need to be addressed, seek support or advice wherever you need.

Prayer

Now I hope I don't need to say this, but for goodness sake PRAY! Pray, pray, pray and pray some more. And ask others to pray for you. You will need it. That is all....

The Ministry Enquiry Form

It is likely that you will come away from your initial meeting with the DDO with a host of paperwork. Don't be daunted by this, just take some time to review and read through it, ideally with a partner, friend or your incumbent. One of these bits of paperwork will probably be the 'The Ministry Enquiry Form'... dun dun derrrr... Yet again it varies from diocese to diocese, but if you haven't already seen one, be prepared that filling it in will not be a five minute job. Mine asked for:

full details of you and your life, including medical history

areas of interest within the church

responsibilities within the church and elsewhere

previous training

why you feel called

and one of my all time faves: 'Please tell us very fully about your family background, upbringing and formative experiences, from childhood through to today...'

So basically they want an autobiography before you can go on. Yeah so, good luck with that one... definitely not a 5 minute job. My DDO told me when he gave it to me, not to rush it, that he wasn't in any hurry to have it back, and to think it through prayerfully. This was very helpful as of course the initial excitement meant that I *did* want to look at it immediately. But you might find you need to go and get details or dates from your past and even just filling in that form made me think about some things from my past that were rather emotional. So give yourself time and don't rush it. You will also need three referees – your incumbent, a church warden and one other lay person with a position of responsibility in your church. All this means that if you haven't spoken to anyone else about your calling, you will need to now.

Selection Criteria

You will probably also have been given a copy of the 'Selection Criteria' which you will need to work through with your advisor. These are the criteria under which you are assessed and each section has a list of things which you need to show evidence that you have understood them, experienced them and fit within them. Currently (though due to change soon but delayed due to the Covid19 pandemic) this is an 11 page document (and is one of the few things that is the same for all dioceses - hurrah!) 11 pages or not, I say again, do not be daunted! We've already

established that this is a very thorough process and the criteria reflect that. This is one reason why the process can take some time, as you work through these criteria with your advisor. You will undoubtedly find that some areas you can tick off straight away, others you need to go and do some reading, work, research or get some experience. I haven't listed them all here as the links are in the Bibliography but the 'Vocation' section stands alone as the most important - candidates will not be recommended for training, under any circumstance if they cannot show a discernible sense of calling/vocation.

AYO'S STORY

Ayo Audu is an ordinand in the Diocese of Oxford and is currently studying at St Mellitus College. He is also a keen cyclist.

I found the journey of discernment to be a lonely one. It didn't help that I kept ignoring God's call or that I got the call to the C of E long before I became a member of it! I knew no-one else who was exploring ordination with whom I could compare notes. My vicar (when I *finally* started attending an Anglican church) championed my vocation, and the DDO was excellent, but they were professionals, they were in the system. I needed an outsider like myself who was still learning the lingo, or at the very least was just a few steps ahead of me on the journey with whom I could share the sheer bewilderment of thinking, "Is God really calling me?" You can't exactly walk up to someone over tea and coffee and claim: "I think God is calling me to be a vicar!" And it sure would have helped to see one or two people who looked like me too.

Discernment to ordained ministry in the C of E is unique - I doubt there's a more convoluted process anywhere else. And I can see why; you need to test and try your sense of calling exhaustively as the conviction that results will buoy you through the challenges of theological training and beyond. But I found it lonely. Imagine my relief when I turned up at vicar school and found other people who had been exploring as I had been. Hearing their stories almost made up for all those years of loneliness.

If like me you find you could do with some company on your journey, then thankfully there's the newly launched C of E mentoring [resource](#) which allows you to find a mentor to journey with you. If only it had existed in my time!

JACK'S STORY

Jack Belloli is an ordinand in the Diocese of Ely and begins studying at Ripon College, Cuddesdon in autumn 2020. In his spare time, he still tries to write about poems and politics.

Having felt called to begin the discernment process halfway through a full-time PhD on contemporary theatre, I realised that I'd want some time after it finished to devote myself to seeing what parish ministry looked like in an unfamiliar context, to see if this would really be the kind of day-to-day life I was called to. Due partly to a personnel changeover in my diocese, this time on placement ended up being longer than I anticipated – one year in an outer estates context in Birmingham, then another back in Cambridge at a smaller, 'higher' church than my home one – but I wouldn't have missed either for the world, and they left me confident that I could begin training.

I'd been used to weighing up ideas before showing them to supervisors and readers, but these placements taught me to work *through* issues, in the moment: possibly making public mistakes and pushing some buttons along the way, but recognising that this would be the only way I could learn, and that my mentors and fellow community members would model grace and trust that this was part of the process!

These placements also taught me – particularly as each drew to a close – how much bigger any church context is than my capacity to intervene in it. God's work can go on without me; setting up this work, or being the gentlest of companions to it, can be enough. I hope that this is humility that I'll be able to take into incumbency.

WHAT NOW?

Kate Coleman, ***7 Deadly Sins of Women in Leadership: Overcome Self-Defeating Behaviour in Work and Ministry***

Helpful for female leaders to consider

Jules Middleton, ***Breaking the Mould – Learning to Thrive as a Ministry Mum***

Surviving as a mum in ministry from calling through to ordained ministry

Blogs

‘10 Reasons not to be a Vicar’

and the following comments might provide some light relief as well as strike a chord.

Other

AMEN Anglican Minority Ethnic Network

Disability & Jesus Organisation

Mentoring from the Church of England

Mentoring from NEXT Leadership

WATCH *National organisation working actively for gender justice, equality and inclusion in the Church of England*

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

Jeremiah 1: 4-9

4. JUMPING THROUGH HOOPS

Often I found the DP felt like I was on a bit of a treadmill, going through a list of things that needed to be ticked off in order to allow me to progress to the next stage. In fact one very well known vicar's son said to me of the process 'you just have to jump through their hoops' in order to get to the end of it and then get on with what you are called to. To a large extent this is true but that isn't to take away from the value of the process. At the time I had this conversation I was feeling very much like I *was* just jumping through hoops so I decided to get some encouragement by chatting with people doing the kind of ministry I felt called to. I did a bit of research and either met up with, emailed or spoke to people doing a whole variety of different things both in the CofE and elsewhere. I met with vicars, lay preachers, ministers, chaplains, pioneers, you name it I met them. I found this hugely beneficial and would thoroughly recommend it, especially if you feel called to something slightly unusual or outside the bounds of 'traditional parish ministry'. It gave me something to aim for and something to focus on outside of the 'tick list'.

It's so important to remember who is calling you into all this. When you feel like you are on a treadmill it's easy to be swayed from trusting in The One, to worrying about oneself. Jeremiah's calling was pretty heavy duty and whilst I've yet to meet someone who had God put his hand to their lips, something got you into this in the first place, so just hang on to that, ok?

A.W.Tozer said this:

Let us practice the fine art of making every work a priestly ministration. Let us believe that God is in all our simple deeds and learn to find Him there.

A.W.Tozer

This reminds me too of Brother Lawrence's practicing God's presence in all things – and good advice it is too. If we can take this attitude of God being in these things we have to tick off, then

we might be sure of God's accompaniment with us as we jump through the hoops.

However... depending on your diocese there may well be *a lot* of things you need to tick off *your* list. From the endless reading, to placements, from meeting with various people to writing essays, and many other assignments, and of course the timing may not be of your choice either. There are a host of reasons why you might be asked to visit someone, read a particular book or do a placement and it has to be said that largely these may be down to the whim of your advisor or DDO. As a charismatic I was told to visit a range of churches and priests in the more traditional or anglo-catholic part of the church. Whilst this was hugely valuable and I didn't mind doing it as I learned a lot along the way, it did grate rather that those in the DP of the more anglo-catholic persuasion were not asked to visit more charismatic churches. I am delighted that with some new input in the vocations process here, that has changed.

Either way, whatever you are asked to do my advice is to try and do it with good grace and humility however hard that might be at any particular time! I tried to learn from all that I was asked to do and although at times some of it was hard, dull, and irritating, I did learn from everything I was asked to do. Ultimately that's what 'they' want to see – that you are open and willing to learn. If you can go back to your advisor and report that you learned something new or had your eyes opened to something new that will undoubtedly get you extra brownie points!

Official Hoops

There are of course several more *official* hoops, which might require more than a bit of reading to get your tick. I've tried to list the obvious ones below but if you've experienced others do let me know and I can add them in.

Medicals

The *Ministry Enquiry Form* requires you to flag up any previous or existing medical conditions. In some cases you may be required to take a medical before you can move forward. This was something I needed to do due to an ongoing health condition and for me was a case of filling in more forms (!), getting a letter from my GP and then meeting with an approved CofE doctor locally who went through my notes and discussed with me how my condition might affect my future ministry. It was fairly simple and, although a bit of a pain as it was yet another thing to sort out, it really wasn't that difficult and in fact he confirmed that he thought

my condition wouldn't be a barrier to training or ministry which was very affirming. One candidate told me that they were required to see a psychotherapist, which was standard for candidates in their diocese. Their experience was sadly not entirely positive.

Mental Health

Depression and other mental health conditions are of course incredibly common and whilst attitudes are changing towards them, the church is probably on a par with the rest of society – in that some people will be sympathetic, others the opposite. If you have or have had a mental health condition the DDO will want to know about it, and in most cases will be very supportive. One candidate told me she was very encouraged by the reaction of her ADDO and was even asked what support she might need. She was required to have a medical assessment but found this both helpful and encouraging. Sadly I have heard some negative stories too but like everything else in this process I encourage you to be honest and open, and to seek advice if you come against a negative attitude.

Divorce/C4 Faculty

If you or your partner has ever been divorced and have remarried, you will need to apply for a C4 faculty. Good old Church of England speak there, which means effectively you will be scrutinised to within an inch of your life over the divorce. Or in other words you need a bit of paper signed by both archbishops saying you can go ahead in the process. The relevant canon says this:

No person shall be admitted into holy orders who has re-married and, the other party to that marriage being alive, has a former spouse still living; or who is married to a person who has been previously married and whose former spouse is still living.

What that means is that if this applies to you, you need a faculty and it needs to be complete before you go to BAP. It can take some time so this is usually flagged up early on in the process to get the ball rolling, but if it hasn't then do bring it the attention of your DDO, to save delays later.

Seemingly this regulation is to make sure there was no hint of impropriety or scandal that might come out at a later date and damage you, the church, or those around you. This is

understandable of course, but I should warn you that if C4 applies to you, do be prepared, it is not to be undertaken lightly. Whilst the DP examines us as candidates in great detail, this process necessarily draws in others, including your spouse and where applicable possibly the previous partner. Of all those who have spoken to me about the C4 process, almost all have found it extremely emotional and hard going. As with everything else experiences on this will vary between dioceses. Several candidates reported feeling that they needed to prove their innocence, or that they were being accused, often many years after the event. In my research candidates used phrases like:

Feeling like a suspect under interrogation, not a spouse supporting her husband seeking ordination; one of the worst experiences of my life; we were treated as criminals; get your story straight...

But there are also others who reported a gentle chat over a cuppa and a sense of compassion and grace from the advisor working with them.

After various discussions and meetings, the C4 process often ends with a panel where 3 or 4 people will talk to you and question you about your divorce. Several people reported that it took quite some time to hear back after the panel whether the C4 would be approved or not. Whichever way you look at it, if you or your partner have been divorced, then you need to be prepared that this will almost certainly be painful and intrusive. Do take your time over it and allow yourself space to process as you need.

LGBTQ+

Staying away from theological opinions, below are the current guidelines within the CofE. There are various motions and reports that chart the Church of England's view and debates in this area – which are listed at the end of this chapter if you want the full low down.

Perhaps the most important bit of information anyone reading this needs to know is that in 1991 there was a report published called 'Issues In Human Sexuality' which all candidates are required to read, and agree to abide by its guidelines. The report states this:

There are occasions when a candidate's personal life, such as their sexual orientation, civil partnerships, marriage breakdown or divorce, reflects sensitive issues in the life of the Church and which are a matter of current debate. The House of Bishops' statement Issues

in Human Sexuality (GS Misc 382, 1991) embodies the criteria which the House would wish to apply to ordinands and makes clear that all Christians are called to chastity and fidelity and to respect the will of the Church on matters of sexual morality (see Criterion E (Relationships). This requirement is even clearer for ministers since they are called not only to live the Gospel but also be acceptable and accessible as pastors. In relation to the specific issue of homosexuality this means that: 'clergy cannot claim the liberty to enter into sexually active homophile relationships' (Issues in Human Sexuality para 5.17).

The report also suggests that bisexuality is not acceptable, on the grounds that it suggests infidelity. However it is true that Christian thinking on bisexuality has changed a lot since this report and it would frankly be both unfair and incorrect to assume that someone who identifies as bisexual will be prone to infidelity any more than anyone else. If you'd like to read more on this a helpful and interesting post by Benny Hazlehurst is [here](#).

There is actually nothing to prevent someone in a Civil Partnership or same-sex relationship being ordained, provided that they agree to abide by the discipline laid out in this report. There are indeed many clergy in civil partnerships. The question of same sex marriage however, is more complicated. After the *Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013* was passed, the House of Bishops produced a statement in Feb 2014 addressing a number of areas. It states that they (The House of Bishops) are not willing to ordain anyone in a same sex marriage and at the time of writing stands. You can read the full report online via the Church of England Website.

There is very little written on being transgender and ordination. Current (published 2017) advice for DDOs notes:

Transgender candidates are welcome to be considered for selection for ordained ministry in the Church of England. Any bishop intending to sponsor a transgender person for a BAP will certify that they have decided that they would be prepared to ordain and offer a title to that person if during the course of training and formation they were deemed to have a vocation to ordained ministry

The Pilling Report was published in 2013 and further looked at all these questions in the light of cultural attitudes. It is well worth a read for anyone going through the process but still stands simply as a report. This was followed by 'facilitated conversations' across the country, for more

info on this see the *Shared Conversations* site.

So what does all this actually mean? Well, firstly any questions around sexuality or gender will be resolved with your DDO during the discernment process, and well before you get to BAP. Secondly, it may mean that the DP is a bit more complicated for you and quite possibly more of those intrusive questions. Like everything else this seems to vary according to your diocese or bishop, so do seek support where you need it.

Women in ministry

Of course one would hope that in this day and age being a woman would have no bearing on this process whatsoever, sadly though there are the odd pockets of misogyny within the church, thankfully it is the odd pocket, but they are there and I believe it's better to acknowledge that than ignore it. Whatever you feel about women in ministry, if you are female you will undoubtedly come up against some issues at some point or other in your journey. I found it very useful to think about exactly what I felt about being a woman in church leadership in some depth so that I could easily articulate that, if necessary. I also advocate an approach of grace – arguing ones point from a position of frustration or anger is rarely, if ever, helpful. The Anglican Communion is vast and broad and encompasses a range of beliefs and ideals, and if selected, you will be working with people from various points across that range. Relating to those of a different view point with love and grace is in my opinion a more positive and Christlike way forward than one of angry accusation. If you are being called to the CofE that means you will be a part of it, warts and all, and that may at times be a difficult experience.

Of course I am not saying to stand by and do nothing and frankly I've had my own moments of being less than graceful over this! If you are actively discriminated against because of your gender, race, sexuality or for any reason, then do seek further advice. One person I spoke to had an incumbent who refused to entertain the idea that she might be called to ministry as he was so actively against women in ministry. It took years for her to take the next step to train for ordination, largely due to his attitude, which even then involved her leaving that church.

If this happens to you, don't just roll over and think well, I must be wrong. Get some impartial advice, seek out another priest, or you can even contact your DDO direct, details should be on your diocesan website. It remains a difficult issue for some, but that is no reason why your own journey should be thwarted by one person.

In addition be aware of questions about getting married or having children (if applicable) or being forced down the route of 'self-supporting' ministry, because 'your husband has a salary' as it was phrased to one candidate. For some SSM is the right route but you should not expect to be guilted in to it, there is nothing wrong with earning a salary from ministry!

Disabilities

The Sending Candidates to BAP guide looks at disabilities of various forms, briefly (p.13). I advise reading this section and if necessary highlighting it to your DDO if they are unaware of any extra support available. However even with support available it may be a challenge depending on your disability. One candidate (now, happily, ordained) who uses a wheelchair found the process at times incredibly difficult, facing significant obstacles, prejudice and lack of provision. This is a gifted and intelligent man with a masters degree and it saddens me that in this day and age that he has had to face such trials to pursue his calling. I suspect that like pretty much everything I've written, this will vary from diocese to diocese and certainly others with differing disabilities had a smoother process. The Disability & Jesus Organisation, is a group formed of Christians with different disabilities, focussed on seeing things change in the church. I would recommend looking at their website and contacting them for advice. Their website says this:

Disability equality is far more than just meeting our legal obligations under "The Equality Act 2010". We should learn to see it as a gospel imperative "And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either." We should be ready and willing to go much further than the law requires

Ages and stages

Age does remain an interesting factor here. In the past, younger people were usually told to go away and get some life experience! Thankfully that doesn't happen so much and the CofE in recent years has really encouraged those in the 18-35 bracket to explore vocation. However

there are some different guidelines for those who will be under 23 at the point of ordination and your DDO can advise on that. Of course you might still find the odd stick in the mud who thinks you are way too young and wet behind the ears. If that's the case, don't give up, get a second opinion or get some advice elsewhere!

If you are over about 55 you are likely to face some questions around your age. Currently the upper age limit is at the discretion of your bishop and so, yet again, varies from diocese to diocese (sorry, that old chestnut again). Many people going through this process over the age of 55 are only given the opportunity to be a SSM (Self-Supporting Minister) and to train regionally rather than residentially. So, just be prepared for this, if it happens to you it's unlikely to be about you or your ability, just your age. And again, nothing seems to be set in stone, so if you feel you are being unfairly treated then do chat further to your DDO or bishop.

Changing diocese

Several people I know changed church or even diocese whilst in discernment. This might be unavoidable due to a life change or might be deliberate. Some candidates have found they were more accepted in one diocese than another, and this has been for various reasons. If you need to change diocese this is possible and if you've already started the process you can go straight to the DDO. However like all things in some cases it's easier than others. One candidate moved due to a job change and was made to start the whole process again despite being months in to it.

Timing

The Church of England is a funny old place isn't it? For some people the DP can take years for others, months - don't attempt to put any kind of time scale on it, you will just frustrate yourself, there seem to be so many different factors in the whole thing that it's impossible to say. I have heard a general guideline of at least two years to get from the initial DDO visit to BAP, but it does vary enormously. As a natural planner and organiser this lack of timescale was frustrating for me - I zoomed through seeing my VC within about 7 months but then had to wait another 3 months just to see the bishop, and then several more to get a BAP date. But if you can try to be peaceful about the random nature of timing from the start it will help you enormously! As one candidate wisely said 'you can put the brakes on whenever you like but you can't speed it up'. My DDO said to me right at the start that if you need a break or want a bit of time out that's fine, if not even

expected at some point, but my friend was right, there's no speeding it up.

Well, I say that, it's just very unlikely, but if there are extenuating circumstances you can try. One candidate I know was ready for BAP and was making major decisions about his employment future, so they made an effort to get him to an earlier BAP in order to start college the same year. In another case, the DDO was, shall we say, not as *efficient* as some, and chasing emails or phone calls actually helped to keep things going.

There is a balance and in most cases it's just that the process can be quite slow, but if you think things are being delayed unnecessarily, do chase up your DDO. I did hear of someone deliberately collaring their DDO at a vacations day so you never know, maybe tactics like that do work!

ALICE'S STORY

Alice Jolley is a 1st year curate in the Diocese of Lincoln. During her training at Westcott House she and her partner, Coral, entered into their Civil Partnership. Alice and Coral live in Lincoln.

My first experience of a sense of calling was direct; I was 15, and a new curate had arrived in the nearby parish. She was the first young woman in a collar I had ever seen, and as soon as she walked into the room I heard a voice say “this is what I want you to do”. I remember locking myself in a toilet cubicle, leaning against the door and praying “Okay, I’ve heard you, but I’m not doing anything about it, or telling anyone”. It turned out I didn’t need to tell anyone, because over the next few months all sorts of people asked me “Have you thought about being ordained?”. By the end of the year I had been to see the DDO, and I knew it was serious. It was a strong feeling of being drawn in that both excited and terrified me.

After my A Levels I took a year out to be a pastoral assistant in a cathedral. It was a coming of age: exploring my calling in a serious way, learning about the Church of England, and realising that I was gay. I was scared about how things might turn out, and whether I would ever be able to have a committed relationship. My DDO was supportive, and I spent my final year at Durham University formally going through the process with affirming support from my college chaplain. I went to BAP just before my finals, having also just met Coral. I enjoyed my BAP, and I was honest while I was there.

It wasn’t long before Coral and I knew we wanted to spend the rest of our lives together. Our Civil Partnership was during my final year at Westcott House, and we were supported through that very vulnerable time. I’m thankful to serve in an inclusive parish, where Coral and I are very happy.

BEVERLEY'S STORY

Beverley Ejimofo is a former Director of a training organisation, now enjoying embarrassing her three grown-up daughters by dancing at concerts and in front of their friends, wife to a busy husband and servant to the family cat Coltrane.

My background was in an independent evangelical church which is where I first sensed a calling on my life, but it was a decade or so later that it became clear God was calling me to the Anglican church - which at first I couldn't get my head around! Within a year of moving over, the vicar suggested I explore vocation.

I met first with a Vocations Guide and then the DDO. As a black woman, there is always a little bit of holding my breath on meeting new people like this, thinking 'will this person have an issue with me?'. The discernment process itself was good; I enjoyed exploring my journey of faith supported by the diocesan officers. On reflection, however, there was often an unrealised concern at the back of my mind, a sense of having to prove myself, to be worthy of acceptance; so an added, albeit semi-conscious, layer of nuance.

Again, as I reflect on the process, I think the system that I experienced and am still experiencing, is not fully supportive of diversity. During the discernment process and training, few of the authority figures or tutors were people of colour. I am used to being the only black person in a group, and for some (I have certainly experienced this) it can feel uncomfortable, even scary to raise your head above the parapet. The sense, based on previous experience, that people might judge me more harshly than they would my peers. Many black people have inbuilt mechanisms to cope with this; this is the norm in daily life, but what would be pleasant is if it were not – that would be groundbreaking. Greater diversity in the workforce, DP, and colleges would be a supportive and positive step.

It can act the other way of course – pushing someone through the DP because they dare not say they shouldn't be there; we should not be afraid of making the right decisions. However,

if you don't invite people to the table you will never ensure you have the right balance; a good leader has to manage performance, why should this be an issue if the person is BAME?

One of the things they do really well in Rochester Diocese is offering a specific BAME 'consider your vocation' intro day; this is truly helpful. It would be innovative and a potential solution if somewhere though the DP, a candidate that is from a black or ethnic minority background had a designated person within their diocese they could speak with if they have any concerns about the process. This would be in the knowledge that they were safe, and any issues would be explored and resolved.

I found my discernment process and subsequent training to be life-enhancing, truly formational. What a privilege it was to have someone walk with me, help me to identify key aspects of my spiritual journey and see how God had shaped my life. Now I will be entrusted with helping others through the ministry, I am beyond grateful.

WHAT NOW?

Jonathan Lawson & George Mursell **Hearing the Call** - especially good for younger vocations.

George Guiver, **The Fire & The Clay** - reflection on what it is to be a priest and priestly formation. Has some emphasis on sacraments too if you need to learn more in this area.

Ben Lindsay **We Need to Talk About Race** - a challenge to the church that everyone should read

*Short Guide to the **selection criteria*** - a few lines on each category.

Selection Criteria in full

You will be assessed on these criteria. The list is comprehensive and gives various examples of areas to look at. Read, learn and inwardly digest then get on with doing it!

Criteria for Pioneer ministry

Disability & Jesus

On divorce/ C4 faculty

2010 **General Synod Statement** on divorce and ordination

On LGBTQ+

Rosemary Lain-Priestly, **Gender: The Inclusive Church Resource**

Rachel Mann **Dazzling Darkness**

Jayne Ozanne **Just Love**

The official stuff:

General Synod 1987 **Higton motion**

The Issues in Human Sexuality Report, 1991 – which all candidates are required to read this and agree to abide with it.

Some Issues in Human Sexuality - a guide to the debate, 2003.

Civil Partnerships- A pastoral statement from the House of Bishops of the Church of England, 2005

The Pilling Report, 2013

2014 House of Bishops Statement on same-sex marriage

Shared Conversations

Other sources of information:

Inclusive church

Accepting Evangelicals - is an open network of Evangelical Christians who believe the time has come to move towards the acceptance of faithful, loving same-sex partnerships at every level of church life, and the development of a positive Christian ethic for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Their website has a number of docs and links on the subject of homosexuality within the church. No longer updated but a wealth of information.

Ozanne Foundation - The Ozanne Foundation works with religious organisations around the world to eliminate discrimination based on sexuality or gender in order to embrace and celebrate the equality and diversity of all

Rachel Mann – Rachel is a priest in the CofE who is trans. Her website features poetry, theology and journalism and a list of her books too. A mine of information, do check it out!

The Sibyls - is a UK-based confidential Christian spirituality group for transgender people, their partners and supporters. It seeks to fulfil the two great commandments of Jesus: To love God

and love one another.

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

Phil 1:6

5. GOING TO BAP

Note: at the time of updating this guide (July 2020), we're in the middle of a pandemic and BAPs are being undertaken via our new best work tool – Zoom. There is a fabulous guest post on the blog about this [here](#) so do check it out.

Here we are then. BAP. Less bread roll more sour dough perhaps. You've been through all the meetings, the selection criteria, had the reports written and here you are, off to The Bishop's Advisory Panel. This is the bit where *Ministry Division* get involved. It's not a test per se, it's really just getting a second opinion, a way of the advisors making sure that what has been observed about you during the process fits with what they see of you at BAP. My DDO told me that although in my diocese they only send people to BAP they are sure will 'get through', the law of averages says that some won't. And of course different dioceses have a different way of doing things, I met someone on my BAP who had only seen her DDO once and had been sent over. Of course I don't know if she got a yes or not.

With all that in mind, personally I think the best thing you can do at BAP is to be yourself. If you are preparing for your own BAP you may have heard this said many times, but it really is the best piece of advice, after all, they need to see if you are the same person who has been written about in all their reports. So unless you've been pretending all the way through the DP then be just be you.

The most likely thing you will be feeling as you head off to your BAP is ridiculously nervous. No matter how well prepared you are and how much preparation you have done, BAP does tend to be seen as the 'ta-daaaa' at the end of the process and ultimately whatever the advisors report, will determine your future. That said, it is called a 'recommendation' and the final decision is with your bishop (so be nice to him or her along the way...)

So - nerves. Just remember that everyone will be in the same boat and one of the nicest things is that you will be with a group of people and you are not in competition with each other. My BAP was at Shallowford, which meant a rather long trek across the country, but a lovely rural venue. When I arrived there were a few candidates already there and we sat and chatted over a cuppa in the sunshine. It seems to be suggested that arriving early at BAP is useful to give

yourself time to breathe rather than panicking about timing. I'm slightly obsessed about time so I always arrive early. For some venues there are added bonuses - if you see them that way - for example, at Ely BAP candidates are allowed into the cathedral for free so if you arrive early you can have a bit of quiet time in there first.

One thing to remember is that each person's experience of BAP will differ vastly. I've included several blog posts at the end of this chapter of others' experiences, do have a read as they give good first-hand experience and some advice on different venues too, but remember that yours might well be different.

Preparing for BAP

Before you even set foot on your travel to BAP, you will be given a whole heap more forms to fill in – I had an email arrive from my DDO with 13 attachments in – I kid you not – 13???!

In the week before I went, I seemed to veer from excitement, to panic, to last minute cramming, to complete disdain, and back to panic. Which seems to be common amongst BAP attendees, after all it's the end of a very long road. It's helpful to read through any notes you have made in the process, re-read key books, and make sure you have answers prepared to some obvious questions – why do you want to be a priest? what is your understanding of being a priest? and so on. I took a folder with me with some basics in and just re-read it on the first evening after I had arrived. To be honest I don't think I took any of it in but it made me feel happier knowing it was there if I needed it (although the red wine may have had something to do with that too...).

Above all, do remember that you are there because of God. God has called you and you have followed that divine calling. So just trust in the Lord, allow God in, embrace God with you in this experience, and it will undoubtedly be more peaceful!

Advice

I think the best thing I can do in this chapter is give a list of advice, gathered from the experience of many candidates. Here's a list of some of the most important things people said.

- Don't listen to **horror stories**. People will be delighted to share their BAP experience with you before you go, but be firm about not hearing the bad stuff. It really doesn't help and just makes you anxious. Remember every venue and every advisor is different, and so are you. Just because someone was made to cry once in 1994 or your vicar's best mate's auntie couldn't answer a key question, doesn't mean it will happen to you. I think one of the strangest things I heard was one candidate being asked: '3 ducks in a row, which one are you?'. Make of that what you will!

- **Check out your venue**. Each has its own foibles. At Shallowford take earplugs – trains run through the night and if you are unlucky enough to be in the room 15 ft from the line you will appreciate them more than you know! At Ely, curtains are thin so an eye mask would be good.

- Take **paracetamol** with you. It is an intense process and I wasn't the only one with a stonking headache by lunch on day two.

- Take some **comforts** with you – chocolate and red wine in my case; gin, Netflix, your own pillow, good book or newspaper for others. Not only will you probably need them at some point, it helps to take your mind off things

- Take **time out** – everyone says it but make sure you do it. An hour to chill out, read a book or go for a walk can make all the difference.

- **Naps** – as above – don't feel bad about having a nap, several people did at my BAP and if you need one don't feel guilty. There will be time during the day to yourself, so use it as you need. I found I didn't sleep at all the first night – excitement or nerves I don't know but the nap was a lifesaver.

- **Get to know people** on the first afternoon/eve. I found it really helped when doing presentations and discussions the following day, we were all willing each other on and of course had a better idea where people were coming from. In addition I definitely made a few friends, although you are usually discouraged from staying in touch with people just in case some of you don't get through. I ended up getting the train back with several candidates, having initially planned to veg and rest, it was actually really nice to debrief with people who had been through the same. Personally I think this helped when I got home too as I didn't then off load totally onto my poor husband!

- **The Bar** – Most venues have a bar on site or a pub nearby. It's up to you whether you go and there's usually a 50/50 split. I went the first night as I wanted to chat to people and I knew I'd be too tired the next. If going off site, sound out people and go somewhere together so you can support each other.

- **Small talk** – you will do a lot of chatting, be it with other candidates or at supper where you are actively encouraged to sit with different people or advisors at each meal. So brush up on your conversation starters and avoid the controversial.
- **Morning/Evening Prayer** – happens each day and you will be told it's the only thing that isn't compulsory. But that said I think it would probably be foolish not to go at all. Most people I spoke to went to most prayer times and skipped one or two if need be. I missed one as I was just too tired and I have to say didn't feel remotely guilty. It can feel like going through the motions due to the pressure you are under, but in one morning prayer I had an amazing experience of God pouring out his spirit on everyone present and was quite astounded! And I'm not the only one to really encounter God during their BAP – it is still a time of meeting with God, so it's good to remember that.
- **Presentation** – Take a timer for your presentation – they will time it to the second but useful to know for yourself how long you have left as they will stop you if you go over. Pen & pencil also useful too for discussions (ok I know most of us use mobile phone 'notes' but even in this day and age that often has mixed reactions, pen & paper can't be misconstrued). Do not interrupt anyone as they will pick up on this but make sure you engage in conversations. This can be tough as you all want to get a word in but do your best. If facilitating the discussion make sure quieter people are included, showing you can chair a good discussion.
- **Pastoral exercise** – I was told by my DDO 'begin and end with grace and put what you like in the middle' however I used this advice and they pulled me up for being too judgmental. It's a really tough one to gauge and pretty unnatural as you are writing a letter when in normal circumstance you'd call or visit. Just use your best instincts is my advice!
- **Enjoy it!** I'm naturally a people-person which helped, but do try and enjoy the experience if you can. If you go with the attitude that you will enjoy it you will undoubtedly find it easier. Some of us are drained by lots of people so do take the time you need to have time by yourself too.
- **Rest afterwards** – Everyone I spoke to found the whole thing exhausting. Make sure you have the day off afterwards or have someone to look after your kids, or whatever you need. You *will* need that day, I really think it's an essential and worth taking a day off work for. One person even described it as like having jet lag and another slept for a whole day after!
- **Debrief** – You will probably have a chance to debrief with your DDO but it's a good idea to arrange in advance to see someone within the first few days, spiritual director, incumbent or close friend for example. It will really help you to process it all, (as well as saving your partner

if you have one) from the endless thoughts you will have, especially as you will have to wait, possibly weeks, for a result. We'll come on to that in the next chapter.

LLOYD'S STORY

Lloyd Brown is an ordinand in the Diocese of Durham studying at Cranmer Hall. Before starting training he was a Ministry Experience (MES) intern in the Diocese in Europe.

My BAP was in Staffordshire, so I had a long and anxious train journey from our home in Belgium. However, arriving was like entering the eye of a storm – clouds of worry before and after, but those three days were an island of relative calm – everything was focussed on the task at hand.

My biggest worry had been the presentation and group exercise, but I was amazed at how relaxed it felt – there was an incredibly supportive camaraderie between candidates throughout! When it was time for my first interview I was VERY nervous. The assessor sat stone-faced and pressed me on several questions so I was sweating buckets by the end. By the third interview though I'd become quite relaxed, as had my assessor, who asked me several questions about places I'd never been, before working out she had the wrong candidate's forms! Through it all, the advice to 'be yourself' turned out to be the best I got. BAP doesn't allow you not to be, the only option is vulnerable honesty, which was sometimes painful, but in the end quite freeing.

Coming from Belgium, I took a LOT of chocolate with me, and it helped. A piece before an interview, a piece after (sadly, none during). I preferred to be alone when not in interviews or at meals, so I spent a lot of time in my room. I would read books to relax, and before each interview my routine was to scan through my BAP forms, then spend 15 minutes in silent prayer in the chapel, just to centre myself with God a bit. When it was all over some of us candidates shared the relief by chatting together like old friends in the summer sun. I realised I was actually sad to leave.

STEVE'S STORY

(NOT HIS REAL NAME)

Steve was not recommended at BAP, but continues to explore his vocation to ordination.

I went off to my residential BAP feeling ready and hopeful, the discernment process in my diocese was very encouraging and my church and incumbent supported me and were praying for me, along with a few friends.

Most of my BAP experience was good, apart from one of my interviews which made me feel uneasy. Two weeks later I got a phone call from my bishop saying I was not recommended.

I was sad, disappointed and embarrassed though my bishop was lovely. My main issue after getting the 'no' was that embarrassment - so many people I know already work in the Church of England and were so positive about my calling and felt sure I would be recommended. So, it took me a couple of days to build up the courage to message people and tell them - I knew I would get loads of well-meaning phone calls from people (which I did) and initially I didn't have the strength to face that. Apart from a photocopied article about not getting recommended, which I read but can't remember any of, I didn't get much additional support, though I don't know if I should have asked for any? My DDO did help me find a spiritual director and they have been a huge blessing and help to me. Otherwise I have had to take my own steps to move on.

Discernment is strange - you hand over your hopes and dreams for the future to other people, who you don't really know, and have them decide if you can go ahead and do it. So to then be told by those people that they don't feel you can do this thing is really disorientating to say the least! I still feel called though, so I am continuing to explore it.

WHAT NOW?

Pete Greig & Dave Roberts, ***Red Moon Rising***

This might seem a strange book to insert here, an account of the start of the 24/7 prayer movement but if you need to be assured of the importance of prayer – read this. Plus it might take your mind off the process for a while or be a good reflection for BAP. I read this and was so inspired to pray more, but in a funny way it also reinforced my calling as I read about another's calling which just could not be denied.

Stephen Cottrell, ***Hit the Ground Kneeling***

Leadership in a Christian sense, I read this on my ordination retreat but be good for BAP too.

Sending Candidates to BAP

A guide for those sending Candidates to BAP, but a useful read also if you are the candidate!

Posts from my own blog:

Pre BAP thoughts

After BAP

Nicola Hulks

David Cloake

Other blog posts

Bryony Taylor

Liz Clutterbuck

Rachel Hartland

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

John 14:27 (NRSV)

6. WHAT NEXT? POST BAP AND BEYOND

Coming away from BAP I initially felt such a sense of relief, it just felt like this date had been hanging over me for so long and finally it was gone. I knew it would be around ten days before I heard from the bishop (reports from BAP advisors are put together, then sent to Min Div before going back to your bishop, who then contacts you direct or the DDO does) and I found I was actually able to relish that time. It was the first time for months where nothing was expected of me in the process. I don't think I appreciated beforehand how much it had been weighing on me, until it was done.

I do think going into it all with the right attitude helps, as I came away from BAP feeling that I was myself and I did all I could. There was nothing I could have read or studied that would have changed my answers, I had learned all I needed to, read all I could and was true to myself. So I think I felt, 'if I don't get through I won't feel I wish I had said this or that...'

However we all process things differently and of course the opposite can happen, you can question what you said, or forgot to say, worry about the answers you gave, or what the advisors thought of you or whether missing evening prayer will count against you (it won't). At the end of the day, no amount of encouraging words will help that, and it might be that you are anxious until the day you hear the outcome. That is why it is so important to debrief with someone. In my diocese we were all required to see the DDO within a week or so, and go over everything, which was very useful. If you can't see your DDO, or maybe as well as, do see your spiritual director or incumbent who can help you process any anxieties or feelings. And as always, pray and ask others to pray too. Stressing for weeks while you wait to hear the result isn't fun, so ask for God to fill you with peace (John 14:27).

The outcome

There are three possible outcomes from BAP: Recommended for training; Recommended with conditions; or Not recommended. Let's start with the 'Not' first.

Not Recommended

Look, no one likes to consider this but as I've already noted, even if your diocese only sends

people to BAP who are dead-certs, the chances are that some will not get through. Please do think about this in advance. I have two friends who have not been recommended, one who was at my BAP as well and I have seen them both, in different ways, really struggle with this. The thing is, even if you go into it fully aware of what could happen, or feeling really chilled out and trusting God in it all, if you don't get recommended it will probably feel like a kick in the teeth. After all this process requires you to pretty much bare your soul so someone saying 'no' is going to be tough. It will feel personal. It won't make sense. It can threaten your faith, I mean just imagine the questions you might ask yourself:

Did I not hear from God?

Am I wrong? What if I just don't hear from God?

What does God want me to do now?

Have I wasted the last (insert figure here) years?

Is God actually there?

I would like to say that the church will pick you up and help you move on, but sadly in all my research I haven't found one person who has found this to be the case. The church does highlight the need to support people in this circumstance but for whatever reason it doesn't seem to happen all that well. The handbook also notes the importance of your support structure and the people around you who can help. So, please please, please, even if your diocese doesn't appoint someone to help you, please seek help – through your spiritual director, or someone impartial who can help you take stock of your feelings. **I cannot stress this enough: get help!** I have seen, even just watching from afar, how painful this is and how one's faith can be tested in this. So do not bear it alone. Feelings of anger, frustration, sadness, not understanding, questioning faith or one's relationship with God, inadequacy and much more, are totally normal and you should not be expected to deal with this by yourself.

And do remember that whilst you might be angry with God, God isn't angry with you. One of my favourite scriptures right now, which has stood with me in time of trial is from Psalm 91:4...

*He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.*

Psalm 91:4

Even if you can't bring yourself to talk to God, try and imagine yourself just sheltering, under those protecting wings. I love this quote from Pope Francis:

Although the life of a person is in a land full of thorns and weeds, there is always a space in which the good seed can grow. You have to trust God.

Pope Francis

If you feel you are surrounded by thorns and weeds, just trust God in whatever way you can, there is still a seed there...

One of the best things I've read on this is the [CPAS sheet on not being recommended](#), which likens the pain to grief and covers a whole load of things you may find yourself feeling. There is also a Grove Booklet 'When the Church Says no' which is not just about discernment, it looks at church roles in general, but does refer to BAP. This, like all Grove booklets is a brief overview, a short guide, and whilst it probably won't drag you from a pit of misery it might just give you some starting points, some areas to think about or a scripture to focus on.

In addition to how you feel, do think about the effect on your partner or family, friends and support network, who may well have similar feelings to you. They also need to work through this and you are not the right person to do this with them as you need to work through your own feelings first. But be understanding that those close to you will need to work through it all too.

Of course you may still want to pursue the same path and you can discuss this with your DDO. In most cases you are required to wait, reconsider, discern some more and then come back before attending another BAP, you also cannot attend another BAP for two years.

Recommended with conditions

You can be recommended for training but with some provisos, for example you need to get

experience here, or get a better understanding of 'X'. Usually any conditions are looked at during your training. However if you have any queries do look at them straight away, the last thing you need is to get to the end of training and find what you thought was going to happen, isn't (as has happened to someone I know).

Recommended

You got a yes, fantastic, but don't think you can relax, you haven't even begun!

Again, even with a 'yes' do take time to debrief and think everything through. I actually took a year 'out' before training, as for me the process had been quite quick and I don't think I was prepared for going to college just yet. Taking a break is acceptable but you do need it agreed by your bishop and have a good reason. Clearly taking a break isn't right for everyone but do take some time to think things through, it is not unfeasible that you could go to BAP in May, get recommended and then be starting college in September. Equally you could have the opposite, you could have a BAP early in the academic year and then have to wait months to go to college. One candidate felt slightly lost as she had almost a year between going to BAP and starting college, with little DDO contact in the meantime. So do just prepare yourself for different scenarios.

For me, getting a 'yes' was huge. As I'd always approached the process with an air of 'well it's in your hands God' it was only when I was recommended that I felt it had been right all along. The emotions and relief were huge and also surprising. Be prepared for all kinds of emotions and feelings to come up, even when you got a 'yes'! As above, give yourself time to process it all, as you will very quickly be forced into questions of college, finances and so on.

The BAP report

Whatever happens you will be sent a copy of your BAP report (as will your DDO and your bishop), which will follow you for a few years whatever the outcome. If you didn't get recommended but want to still pursue this path you will be required to address any issues raised in the report.

If you are going on to study then your college will get a copy of this report too. Anything that is flagged up (and things will probably be flagged up even if you are recommended) you will

need to address during training. It might be that you lack experience in one area or did less well in one of the BAP tasks, and you will be expected to look at this before you embark on a curacy. Whatever your result, reading the BAP report can raise up a number of emotions in you. Whether positive or negative it's a good idea to take time to really digest it before responding to anything, even in your own mind. Read it a few times, ask yourself what they were getting at with any particular comments, *then* respond to it.

Some candidates who were not recommended found the BAP report very difficult. Of course no one likes criticism but when you are already down, reading the negative things people have to say about you, at a time when, as I said, you have 'bared your soul', is not going to be anywhere near easy. If you need time to process before really looking at it then do take time. Of course you may also find it positive, even if there were areas of concern. I certainly found this and despite some criticisms I didn't 100% agree with, I generally felt they had understood me and felt very affirmed.

Colleges – choices – residential vs regional

The next step once you are recommended, is college. You may have been encouraged to look at potential colleges already but if not, get looking asap. Most colleges have open days where you can go and look around but do check out websites in advance too. Your diocese or bishop may have preferred options but actually the choice is down to you, even though they may push for one or another. So, do your homework and find where you feel will work for you (and your family if applicable.)

There is always an ongoing debate over residential or regional training and I won't go into that in detail as I've written about it on my blog previously but as someone who went to a regional training college, don't be fobbed off into thinking that it's the poor second cousin of ministerial training. For some (including me) it really was the only option and if it's approved by the Church of England (it is) then there really is no debate. You need to weigh up what is right for you and the best way to do this is to look at all the options thoroughly. Visit colleges, speak to existing students and find out exactly what it will mean for you. At this stage you will also need to start a whole new process of looking into funding, grants, housing and all sorts.

In addition to this, if you are a younger woman you may well be asked about plans for children. Several candidates in this category were told they could not train residentially if they planned to have children in the near future. Seemingly this was to do with the finances of training but I'll just leave that one with you. If you want to know more about life as a mum (or potential mum) in ministry I've now written a book about it all called 'Breaking the Mould – Learning to Thrive as a Ministry Mum'.

Off you go

So... let me finish by saying, at whatever point you are in the process, I wish you well! I can honestly say it was one of the hardest but most amazing things I have ever done. I hope that this guide has been: not too positive, not too negative, but honest and useful. As I said earlier if this *is* to be useful then I would love to hear feedback – if there's something incorrect, something I've missed or something you would like to add in, do get in touch.

I'll end with this: a few years ago my DDO highlighted this by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Referred to variously as prose, poetry and prayer, it just felt so right for this process.

Trust in the Slow Work of God

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

*We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.*

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

*We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through some stages of instability
and that it may take a very long time. And so I think it is with you.*

*Your ideas mature gradually – let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.*

*Don't try to force them on, as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will) will make of you
tomorrow.*

Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be.

*Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.*

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)

SEBRINA'S STORY

Sebrina Miller is a Black ordinand from the diocese of Birmingham, studying full-time residentially at Trinity College, Bristol. She traded in flexischooling her girls and running a Baby Bank for study, while her husband has left his full-time job to look after their children.

Some will find themselves within dioceses with strong opinions on ordinands' training options. I was blessed to have a DDO who simply said: *You need to find a place you can fit and flourish.* When looking for a college, be mindful that placements, church and continual formation will bring much challenge. The institution you pick needs to feel secure.

I'm a researcher/planner so I looked into/visited eight different colleges (expensive work for a one-income family!), across the full breadth of the churchmanship spectrum, and considered both residential and mixed mode. Others in the process just visit one or two.

Know what is important to you. My priorities were:

- Academic rigour
- Family involvement in college life
- Inclusion of women
- Awareness of racial issues

Race ended up being the determining factor as this was the area that most colleges were woefully lacking in. There is a general lack of diversity on staff, and within enrolled students. Open Days and prospectuses rarely make mention to BAME students. My white husband was presumed to be the candidate at all colleges he visited alongside me. TEI's have some way to go in ensuring safe and inclusive environments for Black students; race and class might make you feel inadequate when on Open Days. Know your worth and your calling.

I chose the place I trusted most, actively working towards fuller inclusion, recognising their weaknesses. The sacrifice was moving our family to an unknown city. Originally I only considered options that allowed a stay in Birmingham or moving to my hometown (for childcare support), but I felt God say to broaden my options. His ways are not our ways.

I would encourage everyone to be open to visiting and exploring what God might be doing that isn't your natural instinct. Trust the nudges of The Spirit in it all. Think about your future ministry, and work out where will best prepare you for that.

CAROLINE'S STORY

Caroline Buckland is an ordinand in the Diocese of Bristol and is currently studying at Trinity College part time. She works three days a week as a district nurse, is a wife, mum and a creative.

I was present, by accident, when the first female priest officially celebrated the Eucharist in the Church of England. Twenty something years later I heard God call me to do the same. On reflection I think he called me that day too.

Being what I called a *confirmed pew warmer* with no leadership role in the church meant evidencing his calling was difficult. My DDO was tough on a good day and I remember leaving their office in tears on one occasion having been examined quite intently.

I eventually went to BAP on my 50th birthday, treating myself to a first-class ticket to Ely. When I left to return home, I knew it was what God wanted me to do and I was prepared to return if needed, however tough those three days had proven to be. They really confirmed my sense of calling. When the DDO called to say it was a yes, I screamed down the phone! Not the response he was expecting I think as he was in the middle of a silent retreat!

I was never offered stipendiary ministry because of my age, so I continue to work three days a week whilst studying part time. I had a difficult education and left school at 16 with a random collection of CSE's. I have discovered above all that God truly does equip those he calls. He has broken the chains that I have lugged with me over forty years regarding my perceived lack of education and not being good enough. I have just finished my second year of three at theological college and am getting good grades.

I don't know what my future holds but God is good and has shown me his faithfulness to those who answer his call.

WHAT NOW?

NO at BAP

CPAS Sheet '*On being not recommended for training*'.

An excellent resource

Helen Thorp, *When the Church Says 'No'*, Grove Booklet

a useful tool written by a woman with much experience in vocational discernment.

Philip Yancey, *Where is God When it Hurts?*

this book looks at a range of seasons in which we might wonder where God is

Blogs

The Pilgrim Explorer Blog has a number of posts on his experience of going through discernment, the ones on not getting recommended are heartbreaking but totally honest, and a very worthwhile read either to prepare yourself for what could happen or to help you after BAP.

Land of Confusion

Please Sir Can I Have Some More

Unpastoralized

Posts on college and training

Intro - residential or regional training, full or part time, is one better than the other?

Regional Training at SEITE - a look at regional training from a student's view point.

Residential at Oak Hill - a look at residential training from a student's view point.

Residential at Cuddesdon - a look at residential training from a student's view point.

A Mixed view - from someone who has been at both

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Specifically on **ordained ministry in CofE**

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CPAS :

On Being Not Recommended for Training

SHAPE

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ETC - is a diverse and inclusive network that aims to provide encouragement and opportunity for Christian leaders, as they train for and develop their ministry. Annual conference and social

media presence.

Grove Booklets

Inclusive church

Jane Ozanne

Mentoring:

NEXT leadership mentoring

Church of England mentoring

Ozanne Foundation

Rachel Mann

Shared Conversations

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WATCH

TV

All suggestions from a range of candidates:

Rev

Broken

Vicar of Dibley

Buffy the Vampire Slayer (recommended by several people so there must be something in it!)

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On BAP:

Pre BAP thoughts

After BAP

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David Cloake on BAP

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Liz Clutterbuck on BAP

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