

Discernment Process and Framework - longer briefing paper – January 2019

This paper summarises progress, and outlines the current scope of work, in our shared task of reviewing and refreshing the work of discernment for ministry in the Church of England.

This process has been initiated following significant concerns being raised by the Diocesan Bishops around the ‘fitness for purpose’ of our work of discernment for ministry. We need a common discernment framework and process which is flexible enough for the multiple expressions of vocation we are seeing emerge, whilst assuring confidence in this process when candidates move beyond their sponsoring diocese.

Throughout 2018, a group has worked under the direction of Bishop Mark (Tanner), to review the criteria by which our discernment and selection work is guided. The group has comprised the Ministry Bishops, the Selection Oversight Group, a bishop with episcopal experience elsewhere in the Communion, and a member of the SLDP with a Diocesan training role. Thus, it has included Diocesan and Suffragan Bishops, DDOs, Ordinands, Ministry Division staff, trainers, and those representing particular areas of ministry and mission. Consultations have then been held with Sponsoring Bishops, DDOs, and the Ministry Council, alongside much informal consultation, and further consultations are planned for early 2019. The House of Bishops approved this direction of travel in December 2018.

In drawing together this work, we have sought to attend to three sources

- a) We have held before us the ordinals and the CRC’s work regarding the future of Reader ministry.
- b) We have attended both to the strengths of our current system and multiple critiques of the status quo.
- c) We have listened carefully to the needs, hopes, and convictions being expressed by the bishops and the wider church for this area of our life and work, with especial care both for those we have begun to describe as ‘*the unseen-called*’, those called by God but invisible to us in our current activity, and ‘*the excluded-called*’, those deterred by our culture, systems, or practices (whatever our intention or desire).

This paper serves, alongside two illustrative ‘high level grids’ as a briefing paper for the Regional Bishops’ Meetings in January 2019.

A Aim

We are seeking to discern the call of God in the lives of the whole people of God, faithfully attending to any call to ordained and lay ministry regardless of the background and particular circumstances of a candidate’s life.

Thus, we seek to:

1. Recognise and respond to what the Church is asking for in terms of ordinands in today’s world
2. Widen the access to our discernment processes to a broader range of candidates, expressing and exploring God’s call to them as (licensed and) ordained ministers. In this we are particularly conscious of issues around ethnicity, socio-economic background, geography, and disability.
3. And, thus, serve and engage with more of ‘*the unseen- and excluded-called*’ which, in time, will further widen the scope of our work.

In simple terms, we believe that we are merely seeking to keep up with what the Holy Spirit of God is already doing among us, and in so doing to spread the invitation to explore ministerial vocation as widely as we can.

B Methodology

In the work of discernment we hold in tension the three dynamics of *science* (that which we can measure), *politics* (that which we the institution has chosen to effect or prioritise), and *intuition* (wider insight, held in tension with unconscious bias). Each of these dynamics is rightly shaped by our Anglican theology of ministry, ecclesiology, and mission.

C Language

Astute readers will note that the language we are now using around discernment of vocation has been modified in order to reflect the ecclesial and theocentric nature of the process we seek to follow. Thus, for example, we seek to talk of discernment rather than selection, qualities or a framework rather than criteria, advice from a panel rather than ‘getting through’ or ‘being rejected’, a ‘bishop’s decision’ rather than ‘setting aside’ or ‘overturning’.

There are other terms that we need to consider in time; for example the name ‘Division’ may not be the

most helpful descriptor of our central ministerial resourcing unit, and the word 'BAP' is often misunderstood by those less familiar with the terminology than we are.

D Ethos

To this end, we want a framework which is:

1. **Simple** – quickly understood and easily applied
They are a discernment tool which can be used intuitively and flexibly, but provide sufficient depth to be rigorous and trustworthy. Simplicity has become a watchword for us in this work
2. **Clear** – focussed, communicable, and interrogable
They know their purpose, limitations, and they do what they do well and in a manner which all can understand
3. **Trusted** – rigorous, reliable, transparent and consistently applied
They provide a trusted framework in the complex and emotionally charged work of discernment, promoting a transparent and accountable culture
4. **Flexible** – applicable across contexts and with all kinds of candidate
They help us minimise unconscious bias, and highlight the call of God whatever the background of the candidate
5. **Welcoming**
They do not 'put people off' and enable candidates to offer their best as they open up space for vocation to be explored

E Discernment Process

We recognise that this discernment is set within a process which rightly belongs to dioceses under the oversight of their bishop, and that the national church has a role in providing consistency, quality control, and reliable resources, as well as enabling partnership that provides external perspective to Diocesan processes. We also recognise that this balance has not always been experienced as well-balanced and part of the work in trialling new options, described below, is intended to explore this.

The shape of this process will be familiar to all already involved in ministerial discernment and we will explore its evolving shape more fully together, but in outline it is

1. Local Affirmation and exploration
2. Diocese Preliminary Analysis
Filters including Safeguarding
Vocational discernment
3. Nationally assured Vocational discernment
4. Bishop & team Decision, communication, care
5. Nationally assured Training

F Qualities / Dimensions / Framework

This work has been derived with the ordinal in mind, with a view to broadening access both to the *unseen-* and the *excluded-called*, focussing on what we are praying for in our ministers, and an eye on not losing the strengths of our current criteria. The working group has arrived at a basic form and outline content, and they have been warmly received both by DDOs in consultation and by a meeting of Sponsoring Bishops, both with Sponsoring Bishops meeting at the College and the House of Bishops giving the direction of travel their assent.

The process has given rise to a discernment framework which many bishops will have explored more fully in previous conversations. At one level it can thought of as six new criteria or qualities, each of which are being considered in four-dimensions, although we urge caution at simply thinking of the framework in this way; to do so removes many of the benefits of a new way of approaching vocational discernment. There are a number of benefits of thinking in a two-dimensional frame.

In brief, though, we are looking at six qualities deliberately expressed in accessible language; namely:

1. The call of God
2. Love for God
3. Love for People
4. Wisdom

5. Fruitfulness
6. Potential

For each of these, we explore how they are worked out in a candidate's relationship to the Church, the World, God, and the Self; their role as Minister/Leader/Collaborator, Missioner/Servant/Witness, Innovative courageous Disciple, and Healthy Individual.

As noted, this gives rise to a 'discernment framework', which is a rather more helpful concept than 'selection criteria'. This framework can be considered visually or in words, and opens the possibility of visual feedback from the discernment process.

Within such a framework different 'contours' of ministry rapidly become apparent. The shape for a reader-vocation, for example, has a different feel to that for someone called to stipendiary priestly ministry. Appendices B and C comprise draft illustrative 'high-level' grids for priestly discernment and distinctive deacon discernment.

G Trials

Alongside this work we are also seeking to trial a number of options which can help us address questions being raised by the bishops and others. Most immediately we are looking to test-run some regional non-residential panels in the early part of 2019 to explore regionality and residence. We will then be looking to trial various options including using pairs of advisors and revising the exercises used.

H Other bits of work

There are various other pieces of work in process, notably

1. Exploration of complex questions around psychological and psychometric work, not least in terms of psycho-sexual matters.
2. Gathering data and monitoring processes, both in terms of:
 - a) the effectiveness of activity measured against stated intention
 - b) robust and specific measurables for the trials we run

+Mark Berwick (on behalf of the Criteria Review Working Group)

Priest	World	Church	Christ	Self
Call to Ministry <i>We should see the whole grid as exploring vocation</i>	Public and representative role – into forgotten corners Engaged	Distinctiveness, diversity and discipline Informed	Call as a disciple of Christ and enabling all to be disciples Faithful	Can articulate an inner sense of call Called
Love for God <i>Picks up Holy, Faithful</i>	Able to help people live out the good news by making connections between faith and life Prophet/Interpreter	Rooted in the worship of the Church and the traditions of faith Worshipper	Reliant on God marked by an infectious, life-transforming faith Disciple	Prayerful, Bible Study Holiness
Love for People <i>Picks up compassion</i>	Able to share faith in Christ and to accompany others in their faith Companion	Trusting relationships and enabling, collaborative leadership Collaborative	Welcomes Christ in others, listens, values and respects, cares for the poor and marginalised Hospitable	Emotional Intelligence, Empathy and self-acceptance Emotional Intelligence
Wisdom <i>Picks up maturity</i>	Robustness, courage Courage	Leadership that enables healthy churches, handles conflict, sees big picture, lead in mission Leader	Curious and teachable, open to new learning Teachable	Stamina, stability, integrity Integrated
Fruitfulness <i>Picks up impact and effectiveness</i>	Storyteller of God’s love and builder of God’s kingdom Storyteller	Potential to exercise sacramental, liturgical and effective teaching ministry Sacramental/Minister	Embraces the different and enables others to be witnesses Open	Resilience and stamina Resilient
Potential <i>Picks up openness, growth, and capacity</i>	To see where God is working in the world and responding with missionary imagination Missional	Manage change, take risks, entrepreneurial Entrepreneurial	Growing in faith, Open to navigating the future in the company of Christ Flexible	Adaptable and Agile Adaptable