

Exploring God's Call

Information for Seekers



Information for Seekers and
those exploring Vocation.



*Creator God,
you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless
until they find their rest in you:
teach us to offer ourselves to your service,
that here we may have your peace,
and in the world to come
may see you face to face;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Amen

TAKING THE FIRST STEP...

Welcome to the surprising journey of exploring your sense of God's call upon your life.

This document sets out some of the basic information which will assist you as you follow these first steps of exploring your call to ministry. It is taken from the more detailed information which may be found in the policy document "God Calling" which is on the ACSQ Vocations website:

www.anglicanchurchsq.org.au/vocations.

This document will give you some idea of the qualities and experiences which might prompt someone to explore ministry, vocation and ordination in an intentional way, and give you details of the first steps of enquiry. You may only have an inkling of a call, or you may have been nominated by someone else; hopefully, this short document will aid in prompting more discussion for you personally and in your community.

Please read through this document and discuss it with your Parish Priest. Having done so, should you wish to take the next step in exploring your calling, please contact:

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MINISTRY OF THE WHOLE PEOPLE OF GOD

The ACSQ seeks ways to raise up, affirm and celebrate strong, vibrant ministry by all God's people.

THE MINISTRY OF THE LAITY

There is one ministry, the ministry of Jesus Christ. In baptism we are made 'members of the Body of Christ', called to share in Christ's ministry. Thus, the ministry of the laity, the whole people of God, is foundational and has been a source of strength throughout the Church's history. We know from both experience and history that it is the ministry of the laity that has often prompted the Church to reform itself, strengthened and confirmed its eternal messages of hope and transformation, and extended its vision.

The importance of the ministry of the laity - within individual faith communities, to the wider Church, and to the world at large - cannot be overemphasised. Every baptised Christian is called to be Christ's presence, whether that be in the home, in the workplace or in the community.

Lay people with particular gifts are encouraged to develop those gifts and to contribute them fully to the life of the Church and to local communities. We celebrate the gifts that members of the laity bring to this mission, while recognising that this does not necessarily mean a call to ordination. In this Diocese, we are committed to finding ways to enable the laity to exercise its vocation. It is a denial of baptismal grace to take the view that a lay person with serious commitment to ministry can have that recognised only through ordination.

THE CALL TO ORDINATION

The ordained ministry represents a unique combination of privilege and responsibility. This makes it both rewarding and challenging. Priest and deacon alike become confidants of many people. People entrust them with their joys and sorrows, successes, and failures. Priests are also responsible for the preaching and sacramental life of the Church, and for the encouragement and enabling of the ministry of all members of Christ's body. All these privileges entail great responsibility. Clergy are not expected to be perfect, but they are expected to have the inner capacity to meet these challenges.

The Anglican tradition understands that a genuine call to ordination comes to an individual within a community. The individual may experience a sense of God's call, which may or may not be confirmed by the local parish and the wider Church. Alternatively, the community may identify people in its midst and encourage them to explore the ordained ministry.

As a Church we seek to help individuals to use the resources of their parishes and diocesan communities in clarifying their call. We also strongly encourage local churches to seek out potential leaders in their congregations who have the particular gifts needed in a changing Church. These leaders with observed ministry gifts - strong prophetic voices, diverse cultural backgrounds, gifts of spiritual leadership, skill in building Christian community or other important qualifications - can be identified and fostered.

Academic accomplishment, a life of caring and compassion, a history of personal struggle and courage, a strong personal sense of being called, are all valuable, but do not of themselves constitute a call to ordination.

The Church as a whole has a responsibility to discern which of its members are called to help lead the body of Christ - that is, to 'equip the saints' - for living out its vocation, not just in the congregation but in the wider world where God-talk and servant leadership are alien and risky. As the 'overseer' or shepherd of the people of God, the Bishop has a particularly important part to play in this process.

THE DISCERNMENT JOURNEY

THE SEEKER – FEELS THE CALL TO ‘SOMETHING’ IN MINISTRY

When people first enquire about ministry, we call them a ‘seeker’ because they are seeking out God’s will for their life. We have faith that God will be with them in this activity, as Jesus promised that if you seek, you will find. (Matt 7:7-8) However, it is not always guaranteed that we will find what we are expecting! This is the time to think about, ‘Am I called to the ordained ministry or is God calling me to continue my ministry as a lay person?’

Seekers’ Day in September is one of the days to come along and enquire further. There are also online and in-person opportunities to gather with others asking the same questions. During this time of exploration, the person’s priest is invited to offer an opinion on the observed faith, gifts, character, and experience of the seeker. For some, the advice at this point will be to pursue some form of ministry as a lay person before continuing further. Further education and formation may be suggested to grow maturity of faith and test vocation further.

THE ENQUIRER - FEELS THE CALL TO ORDAINED MINISTRY

If an individual believes, after prayerful reflection, that they are called to ordained ministry in the Anglican Church, and this call is affirmed by others, they may be invited to enter the Vocational Discernment and Reflection program, held in February and March each year. Through four intensive Saturdays, enquirers test their vocation through theological reflection, group discussion, journaling, and interviews, so that their suitability for a possible future in ordained ministry can be ascertained by themselves and the Church.

Before considering entering this stage, individuals should be realistic about what the future may look like and what is achievable. Financial, family, study, and other commitments should be considered intentionally and realistically.

MINIMUM EXPECTATIONS OF ENQUIRERS

While Christians at any stage of their faith journey may explore vocation and ministry as a ‘seeker’, an individual will not be invited to begin the formal Discernment and Reflection program until they have had sufficient exposure to, and experience in, Anglican theology, church life, mission, and leadership.

Expectations will depend on individual enquirers, but in general, a candidate entering Discernment will:

- be committed to Christ, the Christian faith and the mission of the Church;
- have a demonstrated commitment to personal prayer and Bible reading;
- be a baptised and confirmed member of the Anglican Church, or have been formally received into the Anglican Communion;
- have a significant history of active involvement in an Anglican parish or faith community - usually at least two years;
- have the endorsement of their Parish Priest or chaplain;
- relate well to others, showing emotional and spiritual maturity;
- have experience in church leadership, either in liturgy, administration, mission or pastoral care;
- demonstrate capacity to undertake theological study at a tertiary level.

If invited into the Discernment and Reflection program, the individual will build on this foundation with confidence as they explore what future ministry God may have in store for them.

SPOUSE AND FAMILY

Expectations of clergy spouses and clergy families have changed greatly in recent times. While clergy spouses are encouraged to develop their own areas of ministry and interest within the life of the church, the suitability of an applicant for ordination is not determined on the basis of the abilities of their spouse or the willingness of their spouse to express their ministry within the same context as the applicant.

However, the work of an ordained person is demanding in ways that can put strain on a partnership. For this reason, questions to the applicant and spouse or potential spouse about present and anticipated challenges for them and their family, and about how they deal with tough questions together, are not only appropriate but essential.

THE ENQUIRY AND DISCERNMENT PROGRAM

The Enquiry and Discernment stage is intended to provide a climate of support, encouragement, and reflection. A number of people will assist enquirers to take the next steps in clarifying their vocation.

After a suitable period of enquiry (usually at least one year), the enquirer may be invited by the Archbishop to attend a series of Discernment and Reflection days.

During the course of the formal Discernment program, the enquirer will:

- participate in four Reflection days with other enquirers;
- submit three essays entitled:
 - My Life Story
 - My Understanding of God
 - My Understanding of Priesthood (or Diaconate as appropriate);
- submit copies of relevant documents relating to spiritual growth, health, and safe ministry.

THE VOCATION DISCERNMENT CONFERENCE

At the conclusion of the Discernment and Reflection program, enquirers wishing to proceed and who are endorsed by the interviewers, are considered for an invitation from the Archbishop to attend the Vocational Discernment Conference (VDC). They are, from this point, considered candidates who are quite serious about their suitability and readiness to enter the Formation for Ordination program and all the commitment that entails.

Prior to attending the VDC, candidates will participate in a psychological capacity interview and in-depth interviews with three of the Archbishop's VDC Advisors. The VDC consists of a full day of group discussions, written tasks and group work. The Advisors work in teams of three, prayerfully considering all the information provided to them, and forming their own impressions of each candidate. They make a recommendation to the Archbishop about the suitability and readiness of the candidate to enter Formation the following year.

Based on all the information and reports available, including the advice of the Vocational Discernment Conference Advisors and Director of Discernment, the Archbishop decides whom to invite to proceed to the Formation stage. While the Advisors, Bishops and the Director of Discernment make recommendations to the Archbishop based on sound evidence and prayerful reasoning, it is the Archbishop's decision who will be invited to begin Formation.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

The process of selection of candidates for ordination is carefully undertaken, with input from a wide variety of people. Equity and transparency are key factors in ensuring that people understand exactly what characteristics and qualities are sought when discerning vocation in the Church.

The ACSQ therefore refers to nine selection criteria when discerning the qualities of candidates. While these are prayerfully applied, they are a framework and not a definitive checklist. It is God who calls people, and God's Holy Spirit who inspires others to see the potential in possible ministers, both lay and ordained.

The Director of Discernment, Bishops, Examining Chaplains and VDC Advisors are deeply cognisant of the selection criteria, and when interviewing, reading and observing, remain open to the Holy Spirit to reveal the capacity of each individual. There is a calling and vocation as much as anyone's, for which they prayerfully ask God's guidance.

People exploring vocation will do well to read the criteria carefully and seek out opportunities to discern and develop these areas in themselves. In doing so, no matter where they end up serving, they are growing in and into their greatest capacities.

CRITERION A: VOCATION

Candidates should be able to articulate a sense of vocation to the ordained ministry and reflect on the effect of this on their life. They should be able to speak of the development of their inner conviction and the extent to which others have confirmed it. They should be able to show an understanding of what it means to be a deacon or a priest. Their sense of vocation should be obedient, realistic, and informed.

CRITERION B: MINISTRY WITHIN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH

Candidates should show an understanding of their own tradition within the Anglican Church, an awareness of the diversity of traditions and practice, and a commitment to learn from and work generously with difference. They should be able to speak of the distinctiveness of ordained ministry within the Anglican Church and what it means to exercise public ministry. They should be able to reflect on changes in contemporary society and the implications of this for ministry and the Church.

CRITERION C: SPIRITUALITY

Candidates should show evidence of a commitment to a spiritual discipline, which involves individual and corporate prayer and worship. They should be committed to a developing pattern of disciplined prayer, Bible study and the regular participation in Holy Communion. They should be able to show how they discern God's activity in their life, how their spiritual practice has changed over time and how it is changing them. They should be able to reflect on how engagement with the world and others both affects, and is affected by, their practice of prayer. Their spiritual practice should be able to sustain and energise them in daily life and future ministry.

CRITERION D: PERSONALITY AND CHARACTER

Candidates should be sufficiently self-aware, mature, and stable to show that they are able to sustain the demanding role of an ordained minister. They should be able to demonstrate how they have faced change and pressure in a balanced and flexible way and how they manage stress. Candidates should be seen to be people of integrity who can generate trust and display honesty. They should be able to speak of how they have coped with difficult life experiences, how they have reflected upon them and incorporated them within their life and understanding.

CRITERION E: RELATIONSHIPS

Candidates should show the capacity to build healthy personal, professional, and pastoral relationships. They should demonstrate an awareness of the need for, and ability to establish and sustain, appropriate boundaries between personal and professional life and within pastoral relationships. They should be able to manage conflict and show an ability to negotiate difficult relationships. Candidates should demonstrate good interpersonal skills, the willingness to learn from experience, and a commitment to building inclusive relationships within diversity. They should show the potential to exercise effective pastoral care. Candidates must be willing to live within the discipline of [*Faithfulness in Service*](#).

CRITERION F: LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

Candidates should demonstrate an ability to offer leadership in the Church community and in the wider community as appropriate. This ability includes the capacity to offer an example of faith and discipleship which is inspiring to others and witnesses to the servanthood of Christ. They should show a commitment to identifying and nurturing the gifts of others and be able to collaborate effectively. Candidates should be able to identify their own leadership style and reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of this. They should be able to be flexible and adaptable in leadership and demonstrate ability to guide and shape the life of the Church.

CRITERION G: FAITH

Candidates should show an understanding of the Christian faith and a desire to deepen their understanding. They should demonstrate a personal commitment to Christ and a mature, robust faith which shapes their life and work. Candidates should show an ability to reflect critically on their faith and make connections between faith and contemporary life. They should demonstrate a capacity to communicate their faith engagingly and effectively.

CRITERION H: MISSION AND EVANGELISM

Candidates should demonstrate a personal commitment to mission that is reflected in thought, prayer and action. They should show a wide and inclusive understanding of mission and the strategic issues and opportunities within contemporary culture. Candidates should be able to articulate the good news of the Kingdom appropriately in different contexts and speak of Jesus Christ in a way that is exciting, accessible, and attractive. They should enable others to develop their vocations as witnesses of the good news. They should show potential as leaders of mission.

CRITERION I: QUALITY OF MIND

Candidates should have the necessary intellectual capacity and quality of mind to undertake satisfactorily a course of theological study and ministerial preparation and to cope with the intellectual demands of ministry. They should demonstrate a desire to learn through the integration of academic study and reflection on experience and a commitment to this as a lifelong process of learning and formation. Candidates should show flexibility of mind, openness to change and challenge, and the capacity to facilitate learning and theological reflection within the Church community.

GOING FURTHER

The next step is to prayerfully consider your gifts, talents and dispositions, and to talk further with your priest, family, friends and other spiritual guides. Attending a Vocation Conversation group or Seekers' Day would also be beneficial. Contact details are at the start of this document, or through your faith community leader.

May God bless you as you journey into your calling and vocation.