DIOCESE OF
LONDON

FAQ for Those Exploring Ordination to the Priesthood in the Church of England



A pastoral guide to calling, discernment, training and next steps

SHARED • PASTORAL • PRAYERFUL

Welcome

Exploring a call to the priesthood can be exciting, stretching and life-changing, and you do not walk this path alone. Discernment is a shared and prayerful process in which you and the Church seek to recognise God's call, with careful pastoral accompaniment along the way.

Where do priests serve?

Priests serve in many different places. While many are rooted in parish ministry, others serve in chaplaincy in schools, universities, hospitals, prisons, the armed forces, airports, cultural centres, government agencies and beyond. This diversity reflects the breadth of priestly ministry in today's world.

Are all priests paid?

Not all priests are stipendiary (paid). Some serve in self-supporting or non-stipendiary roles, combining ordained ministry with other work. Different patterns of ministry can each be faithful expressions of God's call.

What does training involve?

Those recommended for ordination undertake theological education and ministerial formation through an approved college or course. Training is not only academic: it is intended to deepen prayer, character, theological understanding, ministerial skills and readiness to serve. The normal pathway is usually two or three years, with the shape of training influenced by age, formation need, context, funding and readiness.

What is the Church discerning?

The core principle is qualities, not tick-box criteria.
Discernment looks for evidence of vocation across the whole person.

Six qualities

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

Four domains

- **Christ:** relationship with God
- **Church:** ecclesial rootedness
- **World:** mission and public witness
- **Self:** formation and maturity

How does safeguarding fit into discernment?

Safeguarding is threaded through the whole discernment grid. It is explored as part of discipleship, life in the Church, relationships, leadership and risk awareness. Candidates are invited to reflect on safe practice, healthy boundaries and the dignity and flourishing of God's people. It is not a separate hurdle added at the end; it is part of what faithful Christian ministry looks like.

What if there are not many people like me in the Church of England?

You may feel that few people share your background — whether in family, gender, ethnicity, neurodivergence or experience. But you are not alone. The Church of England is blessed with people from many walks of life, and everyone is warmly invited to discern whether God is calling them to ordained ministry. Your story and experience matter, and the Church should seek to accompany you with care and attention as you explore that call.



How does the discernment process work?

The process has a clear administrative backbone, but several stages are deliberately pastoral and preparatory. Forms, reports, safeguarding checks, panel paperwork, communication and follow-up sit underneath the whole journey.

1 **Referral**	2 **Meet your ADO**	3 **Groups & exploration**	4 **Stage One preparation**	5 **Stage One Carousel**
6 **Stage Two preparation**	7 **Bishop conversation**	8 **Paperwork & checks**	9 **Stage Two Panel**	10 **Outcome & next steps**

Who accompanies me?

Discernment is communal rather than solitary. Depending on the stage, you may be accompanied by your sponsoring parish or chaplaincy, your Area Director of Ordinands (ADO), trained Stage One and Stage Two advisers, assessors, the bishop, and specialist psychological support or assessment where appropriate. The aim is clear roles, careful listening and responsible pastoral accompaniment.

What are the two national stages?

	Stage One Carousel	Stage Two Panel
Setting	Online	Two-day residential
Main elements	Six focused conversations + feedback	Interviews, group work and shared residential life
Purpose	Test readiness for Stage Two	Gather evidence across qualities and domains
Preparation	Paperwork and concise examples	More sustained preparation is needed
Feedback	Written report about a week later	Written report about a week later

What happens at Stage One and Stage Two?

Why the Priesthood?

All Christians are part of the "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). Yet throughout Scripture and the life of the Church, some are set apart to serve in a particular way: leading, teaching, shepherding and caring for God's people. From Aaron in the Old Testament (Exodus 28:1) to the elders and presbyters of the New Testament (Titus 1:5, 9) to Christ Himself, our great High Priest (Hebrews 10:12, 1 Timothy 2:5), this ministry is a sacred trust.

The Church of England continues this pattern through the threefold ministry of deacons, priests and bishops. To be called into ordained ministry is both a gift and a holy responsibility: to serve Christ and His Church with love, humility and joy.

Stage One Carousel

Stage One is online and focused. The overview describes six 15–20-minute carousel conversations, followed by feedback about readiness for Stage Two. The conversations explore your call through practical examples rather than abstract answers.

- Priesthood / distinctive diaconate — what attracts you to ordained ministry and how your exploration has clarified that attraction.
- The Church of England — its mission and ministry, and the place of your worshipping community within it.
- Communicating faith — how you express Christian faith and communicate it in ways others can understand.
- Practical and pastoral care — how you exercise wisdom and compassion in real-life human situations.
- Living as a disciple — how you resource and develop yourself and others as Christian disciples.
- Safeguarding — drawing on safeguarding training and your own experience of safe practice.

Paperwork is sent beforehand. Candidates benefit from concise stories, grounded examples and a settled sense of why the call is being explored now. A good internet connection, preparation time and some space to recover afterwards are practical necessities.

Stage Two Panel

Stage Two is a two-day residential process with interviews, group work and sustained observation. Interviewers work in pairs, and the group exercise is an important part of the panel because it lets advisers see how candidates listen, contribute, collaborate, and engage in communal discernment. The process gathers evidence across the qualities, domains and the candidate's way of relating to others. A written report normally follows around a week later.

This is intended to be discerning rather than adversarial: you are not simply trying to "pass a test".

What should every candidate know?

Shared — You and the Church are both seeking to listen for God's voice.

Agency — You retain the right to say yes or no at every stage.

Pace — Not everyone travels through discernment at the same speed.

Outcome — The answer is not always "yes", and sometimes it is "not yet".

Cost — The process can be demanding and at times intrusive; honest preparation matters.

Formation — Many candidates know themselves, their gifts and their call more clearly by the end.

What happens after discernment?

What outcomes are possible?

The outcome should make clear what has been discerned and what happens next. The overview identifies five possible outcomes:

- Recommended for training.
- Recommended with conditions to be completed before training.
- Recommended with conditions to be addressed during training.
- Not ready at present.
- No signs of vocation to ordained ministry discerned.

Whatever the outcome, it should be interpreted pastorally and honestly: what has been affirmed, what remains unresolved, and how you will be accompanied afterwards.

How is a training pathway decided?

Training pathways depend on age, formation need, context, funding and readiness. The overview includes two- and three-year routes, full-time residential training, full-time context-based training, part-time non-residential training, and an Elizabeth Stream for candidates over 58. The key question is not only "Can I train?" but "What formation pathway will best serve the call being discerned?"

How is training funded?

The following RMF bands in the overview are a practical guide only. Individual cases still require diocesan and national confirmation.

Age on 1 Sept	Normal pathway	Fees	Maintenance
Under 32	3 years full-time	Yes	Yes
32–39	2 years full-time	Yes	Yes
40–54	3 years part-time	Yes	No
55+	2 years part-time	Yes	No

What happens after training?

Ordination is not the end of the journey, but the beginning of a lifetime of ministry. After initial theological training, a period of continued formation called curacy typically lasts three years. In the first year, you are ordained as a deacon, and in the second, you are ordained a priest. During this time you serve under the guidance of an experienced priest, learning and growing through practice, reflection and prayer.

What should I do if I think I may be called?



Begin with prayer. Share your thoughts with trusted friends, family members or mentors and listen to their insight. Then speak with your parish priest or vicar. If they affirm your sense of calling, they can refer you into the diocesan discernment process.

Explore more information online:
london.anglican.org/vocations/ordained-ministry/

What happens next?

The discernment process is thorough because the Church is taking both your vocation and the needs of those you may serve seriously. It can take up to 18 months. There will be preparation, conversations, reports and periods of waiting, but the aim is not to catch you out. It is to help you and the Church listen carefully, test what is emerging and reach greater clarity together.

Above all, vocation is a journey, not a destination. If you are hearing even the faintest whisper of God's call, you are invited to take the next faithful step. The Church longs to encourage, support and pray with you as you seek to follow Christ's call.



"The candidate and the Church both seek God's voice."

This FAQ draws on the accompanying Shared Discernment Process overview.
Pathway and funding arrangements should always be confirmed for the individual candidate.