DIOCESE OF LONDON
KENSINGTON AREA

NURTURING THE CALL

Parish Toolkit for Clergy, Lay Leaders and Parish Teams



A WORD TO PARISH LEADERS

This resource is not another programme to run or another target to carry.

It invites us to be more attentive to what God is already doing among the people entrusted to us.

Paul gives us a liberating picture: "*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth*" (1 Corinthians 3:6). God calls; God gives growth. Our part is to pray, prepare the soil, notice emerging gifts, offer encouragement, create safe opportunities and accompany people faithfully.

Jesus speaks of a plentiful harvest and tells his disciples first to pray to the Lord of the harvest (Matthew 9:37-38). Vocation is not a recruitment problem to solve, but a harvest to receive and nurture for God's Kingdom.

Much of this can happen through rhythms you already have: worship, preaching, pastoral conversations, youth ministry, community service, PCC life, mentoring and prayer.

ALWAYS REMEMBER

"We are God's servants, working together; you are God's field."

1 Corinthians 3:9

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INTRODUCTION

Every Christian vocation begins with God's call, and the Church's task is to help people listen for that call. This booklet is designed to help parish clergy and lay leaders nurture a healthy culture of vocation through the ordinary life of the local church — through prayer, preaching, encouragement, storytelling, opportunities to serve, thoughtful reflection and wise accompaniment.

It is not another programme, nor is it about quotas or recruiting people into ordained ministry. Rather, it offers practical tools to help us notice the gifts God has already placed within our congregations and communities, and to create space for people to explore where those gifts might lead. In practice, this means learning a simple movement: pray, notice, name, invite, accompany, give opportunity, discern and send — helping people take the next faithful step without predetermining the outcome.

Scripture for Leaders

Ephesians 4:11–13 places the work of ministry in the whole body. Christian leaders equip the saints; they are not called to carry every ministry themselves.

Theological Voice

In Being Christian, Rowan Williams centres Christian life on baptism, the Bible, the Eucharist, and prayer. Vocation begins in belonging to Christ and being formed as his disciple before it becomes a question of role.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Vocation begins with God, is discerned in community, tested in practice and sustained in prayer. We discern people before we fill roles.

HOPE

That parishes become places where lay and ordained vocations are recognised, nurtured, tested and celebrated — and where people of every age and background are encouraged to ask: What might God be calling me to become and to do?

START HERE NURTURING THE CALL | PARISH TOOLKIT

A SIMPLE PLACE TO BEGIN

Vocational culture is not built to a timetable. These are not stages to complete in order, but simple practices to return to prayerfully. Begin where it makes sense in your parish.

NOT EXTRA PROGRAMME

Use the parish life you already have. A sermon, a pastoral conversation, a youth-group responsibility, a PCC discussion, an Ember prayer or a simple word of encouragement can all become places where vocation is noticed and nurtured.

Practice	A simple action	Tool
PRAY	Pray publicly for the vocation of all the baptised.	Prayer
REVIEW	Use the Parish Vocational Health Check with two or three leaders.	Health check
NOTICE	Prayerfully identify three people whose gifts you have noticed.	Notice
ENCOURAGE	Have one healthy encouragement conversation.	Conversation
CREATE SPACE	Offer one safe, proportionate opportunity for someone to try a ministry responsibility.	Practice

PARISH VOCATIONAL HEALTH CHECK

It is also helpful to name and celebrate what is already in place whilst aiming to do better. A parish vocational audit, or health check, will help you see what needs celebrating and what needs improving. You may use the table below to do this.

Ask	Yes	Partly	No	One next step
Do we pray for vocation in the widest Christian sense?	☐	☐	☐	
Are people given real opportunities to serve and lead?	☐	☐	☐	
Do clergy and lay leaders actively notice and name gifts?	☐	☐	☐	
Are young people trusted with age-appropriate responsibility?	☐	☐	☐	
Is lay ministry visible and valued?	☐	☐	☐	
Can people explore ordained vocation without feeling pressured?	☐	☐	☐	
Do our vocation stories reflect varied backgrounds and traditions?	☐	☐	☐	

Who are we not noticing?

Before asking who could fill a role, ask who God may already be forming. Look beyond the usual platforms: listening, hospitality, practical service, prayer, creativity, justice, administration, care, leadership and faithful witnesses beyond Sunday.

- Who is trusted but rarely visible?
- Who is younger, older, newer, quieter, or different from our current leaders?
- What adjustment, invitation or encouragement would make a first step possible?

Pause and review

From time to time, ask:

- What are we noticing that we had not noticed before?
- Who has received encouragement?
- Are we creating meaningful responsibility, or merely more volunteering?
- What practices are bearing fruit, and what might God be inviting us to do next?

PRAY NURTURING THE CALL | PARISH TOOLKIT

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS & PRAYER

Any plan or activity geared toward developing and nurturing vocation should always be steeped in prayer. And there is no better place to start than with examples from Scripture. Below are some examples:

Passage	Theme
1 Samuel 3:1–10	Learning to recognise and answer God's voice.
Isaiah 6:1–8	Encounter, cleansing and being sent.
Jeremiah 1:4–8	Called, known and sent despite reluctance.
Luke 4:18–19	Spirit-empowered service and good news.
John 10:27	Learning to hear and follow Christ's voice.
John 15:5	Fruitfulness grows from abiding in Christ.
Romans 12:3–8	Different gifts are given for the life of one body.
1 Peter 4:10–11	Use whatever gift you have received to serve others.
2 Timothy 1:6–7	Fan into flame the gift of God.
Matthew 9:35–38	The harvest belongs to God; prayer for workers comes before strategy.
1 Corinthians 3:5–9	We plant and water; God gives the growth. Together, we are servants in God's field.
Ephesians 4:11–13	Leaders equip the saints for ministry so that the whole body is built up.

A liberating Principle

These texts resist both passivity and pressure. Faithful vocational leadership plants, waters, equips and prays — trusting God for the growth.

Theological Voice

John Stott's exposition of Ephesians stresses the corporate shape of God's purpose: the Church is God's "new society" in Christ. Ministry belongs to the whole body, not to a clerical few.

ALWAYS REMEMBER

Prayer is not an appendix to vocation; it is the soil in which discernment grows

You may also find it helpful to use the same prayer as often as possible. This helps to embed the words in the minds and spirit of your congregation, and it is hoped that as they say this prayer, it will trigger a sense

of call in them and those around them. Below is a prayer written specially for this booklet by The Rt Revd Dr Emma Ineson, the Bishop of Kensington.

PRAYER

God who calls,
you created us, know us, love us,
and call each one of us by name.

Help us to hear your voice
amidst the noise and busyness of life, to trust that your grace is enough,
and to say yes to wherever you may lead.

Give us eyes to recognise your gifts in others, words that offer courage and encouragement, and patience to walk alongside those
who are wondering what you might be asking of them.

Make us generous in releasing one another
to become the people you have called us to be, so that the whole people of God
may see your Kingdom come, and serve your world with joy.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Prayer by the Rt Revd Dr Emma Ineson, Bishop of Kensington.

Other Church of England resources are available. Please either use the link or scan the QR code.

	Church of England worship & prayer resources **Service resources, prayer journal and Novena for vocations.** **https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/vocations/vocation-resources-churches-dioceses/worship-and-prayer**

PREACH, TEACH AND TELL STORIES

We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard

Acts 4:20

Preaching, especially consistent preaching on vocations, not only highlights the importance of hearing from God about vocation; it also helps congregants identify ways to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow His ways. This is, of course, the basis of Christianity: to identify the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow in His steps as he leads us. Below is a suggested 4-part sermon series:

A FOUR-PART SERMON SERIES

Week	Passage	Question
1	John 10:27	How do we learn to hear Christ's voice?
2	Romans 12:3–8	What gifts has God given this body?
3	Ephesians 4:11–13	Who is ministry for?
4	1 Peter 4:10–11	How do we offer our gifts in service?

Experience has also shown that stories are powerful ways to convey messages and share news. Sharing vocational stories through various means, especially from the pulpit, is not only captivating and memorable; it also encourages others to see their stories in the one being shared and enables them to imagine themselves in that role in the future.

Preaching checklist

- Say explicitly that every Christian has a vocation.
- Include lay, workplace, family, community and ordained examples.
- Avoid implying that ordained ministry is the highest calling.

Why stories matter

- Stories make calling imaginable.
- A short testimony can give someone language for what God may already be doing in them.
- Do not let the priest be the only person who speaks about vocation.
- Invite a wide range of people to describe how God called them and what helped them discern.

Storytelling Principle

National films can widen the imagination; local stories make vocation feel near and possible. Where you can, pair an online story with a real voice from your own parish or community.

While congregants must hear the stories of their leaders, make sure it is not always about the leaders or the clergy alone. Let others share their stories, too.

Below are some examples and ways through which this could be done:

Invite stores from:	Six prompts for a 3-5 minute
• Lay ministers, Readers and pastoral leaders • People living vocation in work, family or community • Young adults and MES / ministry-experience participants • Ordinands, curates, priests and self-supporting ministers	• When did the question of calling first begin to surface for you? • Who noticed or encouraged gifts in you — and what did they say? • What did you resist, fear or misunderstand? • What experiences helped you test the call in practice? • Where did the journey change direction or become clearer? • What would you say to someone beginning to listen to God's call?

Keep Storytelling Healthy

Ask permission and agree on what may be shared. Do not expect anyone to disclose trauma, family details or private discernment material. Keep the invitation open: the purpose is to help people to listen, not to recruit them into a predetermined outcome.

Films & videos Open online	**Stories of Kingdom Calling** Open online

NOTICE NURTURING THE CALL | PARISH TOOLKIT

PRAY AS YOU NOTICE

Before naming gifts, ask: “Lord, who are you asking us to notice, encourage and make room for?”

SEE WHAT GOD MAY ALREADY BE DOING BEFORE ASKING PEOPLE TO DO MORE.

A Biblical Lens

1 Samuel 16:7 reminds us that God does not judge by outward appearance. Vocational discernment therefore looks beyond confidence, accent, education, age, status or familiarity, and attends to character, grace, fruit and calling.

What to notice

- Character: humility, reliability, teachability, courage.
- Grace: compassion, prayerfulness, faith, joy.
- Fruit: do people receive something life-giving through their service?
- Capacity: communication, leadership, judgement, resilience.
- Desire: where does service bring energy, holy restlessness or sustained interest?

Who might I encourage?

- People who quietly carry responsibility without title.
- Those whom others naturally trust or seek out.
- People growing through adversity or change.
- Younger adults who are taking faith seriously.
- People from backgrounds not well represented in current leadership.

NAME GIFTS WITH EVIDENCE

Better than “you should be ordained”

Try: “I have noticed the way you listen to people and help them make sense of faith. Others seem to trust you. Have you ever wondered whether God may be asking you to explore that gift more deliberately?”

WIDEN WHO GETS NOTICED

A vocation-nurturing parish expects people to recognise God’s gifts in one another. Clergy are not the only people who can notice: PCC members, lay ministers, youth leaders, small-group leaders, chaplains and other members of the congregation can all offer wise encouragement. A useful discipline is to ask regularly: “Who are we not noticing?”

Do	Don't
• Ask explicitly: Who are we not noticing? Who is missing from the people we instinctively encourage? • Listen to youth leaders, lay ministers, school and chaplaincy partners, community organisers and peers. • Be alert to homophily: we often recognise leadership most quickly in people who resemble existing leaders.	• Confuse confidence, accent, education or familiarity with vocation.

A HEALTHY VOCATIONAL CONVERSATION

What vocation may sound like

"I keep feeling drawn towards..." • "People seem to come to me for..." • "I cannot quite let go of this concern..." • "I feel most alive when..." • "I wonder whether God might be..." • "Someone said something to me that I cannot forget."

Begin with what you have genuinely observed — character, fruit, service, capacity or desire.

1. Ask open questions. "What gives you life?" "Where do you sense God at work?" "What are you curious or resistant about?"
2. Name possibility rather than outcome. Encourage exploration without predetermining ordination, licensing or employment.
3. Protect freedom. Make clear that "not now", "not this", or a different form of service can be faithful outcomes.
4. Agree on one small next step: prayer, a conversation, a new responsibility, mentoring, an Explore gathering or diocesan signposting — and agree when you will follow up.

ONE CONVERSATION A MONTH

Make vocational encouragement an ordinary habit: aim for one intentional conversation each month — 12 conversations with 12 people over a year. Pray first, name what you have genuinely observed, ask an open question, agree on one next step, and follow up.

POWER MATTERS

Clergy carry spiritual and relational authority. Invitation can be life-giving, but it can also create pressure. Healthy encouragement is transparent, non-coercive and allows the other person real agency.

Good signs

- They become more prayerful, truthful and free.
- They can name both gifts and limits.
- They grow through responsibility and feedback.
- Others recognise fruit, not merely charisma.

Pause if

- The conversation is becoming a promise of outcome.
- The person feels obliged to please the priest or parish.
- Safeguarding, health, family or capacity concerns need proper attention.
- The parish mainly needs someone to fill a role.

QUESTIONS FOR A VOCATIONAL CONVERSATION

You do not need to ask every question. Choose two or three, listen carefully, and allow the conversation to unfold without forcing an outcome.

Beginning with God

- Where have you been noticing God at work in your life recently?
- What gives you life and energy in your discipleship?
- Is there something you keep returning to in prayer?
- Where do you sense a holy restlessness, concern or invitation?

Noticing gifts

- What do other people tend to come to you for?
- What gifts do others seem to recognize in you?
- When have you felt particularly fruitful in serving others?
- Is there something you do naturally that you have never thought of as a gift?

Exploring calling

- Have you wondered whether God may be inviting you to explore this more deliberately?
- What attracts you about that possibility?
- What makes you hesitant or resistant?
- If there were no pressure towards a particular outcome, what would you be curious to explore?

Testing through experience

- Where have you already had an opportunity to practise this gift?
- What brought energy or joy? What felt difficult or draining?
- What feedback do you hear consistently from other people?
- What are you learning about both your gifts and your limits?

Whole-life discernment & next step

- How might this calling connect with your work, family, relationships and responsibilities?
- Who else knows you well enough to help you discern wisely?
- What might be the next faithful step rather than the final destination?
- What could you try safely and realistically, and when shall we meet again to reflect?

Listen more than you speak

A vocational conversation is not an interview, and the priest is not required to diagnose a person's calling. Pray, listen, name what you genuinely see, ask open questions, and help the person identify the next faithful step.

WHEN ORDAINED MINISTRY BECOME A SERIOUS QUESTION

Use the Diocese of London FAQ for those exploring ordination as a companion resource. It explains priesthood, where priests serve, stipendiary and self-supporting ministry, training and curacy, the discernment process and practical next steps.

CREATE SAFE OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

PRAY AS YOU NURTURE: Pray before and after responsibility is given: for wisdom, freedom, growth and the grace to learn from experience.

> **Scripture in practice**
>
> Paul's encouragement to Timothy is to "rekindle the gift of God" (2 Timothy 1:6). Gifts often become clearer as people are trusted, supervised, stretched, encouraged and given wise feedback.

SAFEGUARDING, POWER & AGENCY

- Use clear role descriptions, supervision and boundaries for any ministry experience.
- Match responsibility to age, experience and safeguarding requirements.
- Explain who is accountable and how concerns can be raised.
- Ask permission before sharing someone's personal or vocational information.
- Do not use "testing vocation" to justify unpaid labour, blurred boundaries or excessive demands.
- Keep the person's formation — not the parish staffing gap — at the centre.

A useful test

Would this opportunity still be good for the person's discipleship and formation if it did not lead to ordained or licensed ministry?

CREATE RESPONSIBILITY, NOT MERELY VOLUNTEERING

Start small

- Read or lead intercessions with feedback.
- Plan one element of worship.
- Shadow a pastoral visit or chaplaincy setting appropriately.
- Lead a short Bible reflection or small-group session.
- Take responsibility for a defined community or mission task.

Then deepen

- Move from helping to owning a clearly defined task.
- Pair practice with preparation and feedback.
- Allow real decision-making within safe boundaries.
- Review what brought life, what was difficult and what others received.
- Agree on the next proportionate step.

MINISTRY PRACTICE MENU

Practice	First step	Deepening step
Worship	Reading, intercessions, welcome	Plan / lead a defined element
Teaching	Share testimony or short reflection	Lead a Bible study / preach with supervision
Pastoral	Shadow / assist appropriately	Take responsibility within clear boundaries
Mission	Join a community project	Lead a defined activity or partnership
Children & youth	Support a team	Plan and lead an age-appropriate session
Leadership	Observe a meeting	Own a small project and report back

Reflect after practice:

1. What happened?
2. What gave you energy or joy?
3. What felt difficult, uncomfortable or draining?
4. Where did you notice God at work?
5. What did other people seem to receive from your ministry?
6. What feedback would help you grow?
7. What might you try next – more, less, differently, or not again?

The priestly task

Do not use feedback simply to judge whether someone is "good enough". Help them interpret experience, notice growth, receive challenges and remain free

A SIMPLE PARISH APPRENTICESHIP

Formation → Opportunity → Responsibility → Invitation → Discernment

Stage	What we will do	Date / Person
Formation	Choose one area for learning or preparation.	
Opportunity	Create a safe first experience.	
Responsibility	Entrust a defined task or ministry.	
Reflection	Meet for feedback and theological reflection.	
Invitation	Name any emerging vocational question.	
Discernment	Agree on the next step — including the possibility of stopping.	

Three conditions

- The apprenticeship must serve the person's formation, not fill a staffing gap.
- Safeguarding, boundaries and supervision must be appropriate to the ministry.
- Ordination must never be assumed as the desired outcome.

At the review ask:

- What have we learned about gifts and limits?
- What feedback is consistent across different settings?
- Is there enough evidence for a further step?
- Would another form of lay or workplace vocation be more faithful?
- Who else should be involved in discernment?

BEGIN EARLIER

Begin earlier and look beyond Sunday: children, young people & younger adults

- Let young people read, pray, welcome, create, serve and contribute to worship.
- Give older teenagers real roles in mission, CYP teams and church projects, with safeguarding and supervision.
- Invite young adults to shadow leaders, plan an event or lead a defined project.
- Include vocation in confirmation preparation and youth discipleship.
- Ask youth leaders: Who is growing? Who needs encouragement? Who needs another opportunity?
- Where suitable, connect younger adults to MES or other structured ministry experience.

LOOK BEYOND SUNDAY

Where gifts may be visible

Where gifts may be visible

- Church schools — leadership, compassion, communication, service.
- Chaplaincies — listening, presence, faith under pressure.
- Charities — justice, advocacy, organisation, community leadership.

And also

- Workplaces — integrity, influence, mentoring, public discipleship.
- Community groups — bridge-building, service, practical leadership.
- Home & family — care, resilience, hospitality, intergenerational faith

Ministry Experience Scheme (MES)

For 18–29s: practical ministry experience, training and mentoring to help discern God's calling.

Open MES page

WHERE THIS MIGHT LEAD

THE RIGHT GIFTS FOR THE RIGHT PURPOSES

As God's people, we live in an imperfect world, and none of us has the full array of God's gifts. Sometimes people come forward with their gifts, hoping to be involved in a certain ministry, and are met with the disappointment of a "no, this is not for you." Please note that discernment is fruitful even when the answer is "no", "not yet", or "something different". A clearer lay, workplace, family or community vocation is not a failed outcome. In such cases, with our safeguarding hats on, we should care for the people God has entrusted to us and, where appropriate, encourage them to explore other areas of ministry where their identified gifts could be a better fit.

Name the breadth of Christian calling

- Prayer, teaching and pastoral care
- Children and young people's ministry
- Evangelism and community mission
- Workplace and public discipleship
- Hospitality, administration and leadership

Also honour

- Recognised / authorised lay ministry
- Care for neighbours, justice and service
- Family, civic and professional life
- Chaplaincy and community leadership
- A faithful "not now" or "not ordination"

Vocation is not a ladder, and ordained ministry is not the destination of every call. The Spirit distributes gifts across the whole body for the common good (Romans 12:4–8; 1 Corinthians 12:4–7). Help people explore where faithful service may take shape.

EVERYDAY DISCIPLESHIP Workplace, family, neighbourhood and public life	**PARISH LEADERSHIP** Churchwarden, PCC, administration, stewardship and governance	**CHILDREN & YOUTH** Children, young people, families and intergenerational ministry
PASTORAL & CHAPLAINCY Listening, care, schools, hospitals, workplaces and communities	**LICENSED LAY MINISTRY** Preaching, teaching, worship, mission and pastoral leadership	**MISSION & PIONEERING** Evangelism, community mission, new worshipping communities and fresh expressions
RELIGIOUS LIFE Community, prayer, service and a vowed or intentional pattern of life	**ORDAINED MINISTRY** Distinctive deacon, priesthood, SSM, chaplaincy and ordained pioneer ministry	**FORMATION / WAITING** Deeper discipleship, further formation, redirection or a faithful "not now"

"Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received."
1 Peter 4:10

For current pathways and formation, explore the Diocese of London Vocations pages and the Children, Young People and Families resources.

DISCERNING THE WHOLE PEOPLE OF GOD

Discernment begins with listening to God, not simply assessing suitability. Making space for silence, Scripture, and prayer alongside evidence and counsel is essential.

As Scripture and Gordon T. Smith remind us, it is about identifying God's gifts in His people and allowing those gifts to flourish and serve the whole body of Christ.

All ideas shared above could, at various seasons of Church life, create opportunities for the people's gifts to be discerned, nurtured and equipped for the use of God's people in the work of His Kingdom

Scripture for discernment

1 Thessalonians 5:21 gives a simple pattern: test what is before you and hold fast to what is good. Discernment allows both affirmation and redirection.

Theological voice

Gordon T. Smith's Consider Your Calling asks whole-life questions - what God is doing, who we are, our stage of life and circumstances - so that vocation is discerned with God and others, not reduced to choosing a church role.

TRY RUNNING A LOW-THRESHOLD EXPLORE GATHERING

Time	Element	Purpose
10 min	Welcome, prayer, theology of vocation	Broaden the frame
15 min	Two or three varied vocation stories	Make calling imaginable
15 min	Guided reflection / small groups	Create space to listen
15 min	What can I try? Pathways and opportunities	Move to practice
10 min	Questions and signposting	Clarify next steps
5 min	Prayer / no-pressure close	Protect freedom

Use these with a pcc, staff team, chapter or clergy group

THE QUIETLY TRUSTED PERSON

A long-standing church member is not a confident public speaker, but people seek them out; they are deeply prayerful, and their pastoral judgement is consistently sound. They have never considered authorised ministry.

Discuss

What evidence is present? What assumptions might make this person easy to overlook? What small opportunity could help test the gift?

THE ENTHUSIASTIC YOUNG ADULT

A 22-year-old who is energetic, eager to lead, and often talks about ordained ministry. They have limited experience of responsibility and can become discouraged by feedback.

Discuss

How can the parish affirm desire without rushing discernment? What formation, responsibility and feedback would be proportionate?

THE PERSON WHO DISCOVERS A DIFFERENT CALL

Someone explores ordained ministry for a year, but through practice and reflection, it becomes clearer that their calling is to workplace leadership, teaching, and community service.

Discuss

How will the parish celebrate this as vocational fruitfulness rather than a failed route to ordination?

SUSTAIN NURTURING THE CALL | PARISH TOOLKIT

MAKE VOCATION A LEADERSHIP-TEAM HABIT

Pray as you sustain
Keep emerging vocations before god as part of the parish's regular rhythm, while respecting confidentiality and consent.

A 20-MINUTE PCC / STAFF/WARDENS CONVERSATION

Vocational culture belongs to the whole church. Use this conversation to inspire leaders to notice and nurture calling in others.

KINGDOM PERSPECTIVE
Lesslie Newbigin described the church as "a sign, an instrument and a foretaste of the kingdom." Nurturing vocation is therefore not institutional self-preservation; it is helping the whole people of God become available for god's mission in the world.

a. Where have we seen spiritual growth and new responsibility in the last six month

b. Which people are quietly carrying significant gifts that we may not be naming — and who are we not noticing at all?

c. Which ministry opportunities help people grow rather than merely fill rotas?

d. Are younger adults and people from varied backgrounds being trusted with responsibility?

e. What are our routes into lay training, ministry experience and ordained discernment?

f. What one change would most strengthen our vocational culture

Assign the habit
Include a five-minute "people we are developing" item quarterly. Ask ministry leaders to name emerging gifts, not only vacancies. Review who receives opportunities. Celebrate development, not just recruitment to rotas.

USE THE CHURCH'S CALENDAR & BUILD AN ANNUAL RHYTHM TO HELP THE AUDIENCE FEEL CONNECTED AND PART OF A SHARED JOURNEY.

When	Simple practice
Throughout the year	Keep vocation in the prayers of the people and make calling part of ordinary preaching, testimony and conversation.
Vocations Sunday	Celebrate Vocations Sunday on the Fourth Sunday of Easter. Preach and pray about the calling of the whole people of God, share varied vocation stories, and offer clear next steps for exploration.
Ember Days / Embertide	Use the Church's traditional Ember Days as recurring opportunities to pray for those serving in lay and ordained ministries, for those preparing for ordination, and for new vocations.
Pentecost	Connect the gifts of the Spirit with service, ministry, mission and the sending of the whole Church.
Petertide / ordination season	Pray for those to be ordained and use the season to widen the conversation about lay and ordained calling.
Monthly	Share one 3–5 minute story of calling — lay, workplace, family, community or ordained — and encourage one intentional vocational conversation.
Quarterly	Leadership-team review of people, opportunities and gaps: who is growing, who is being encouraged, and who might we be missing?
Annually	Review inclusion, safeguarding and who is being noticed; consider a Vocations Sunday, Season of Calling or Explore gathering with clear next steps.

USE THE CHURCH'S YEAR

The Church's calendar already gives natural moments to speak about calling: Baptism of Christ, Lent, Easter and Vocations Sunday, Pentecost, the ordination season, Ember Days, patronal festivals and All Saints. Rather than create a parallel programme, use these moments to help people connect discipleship, gifts, service and sending.

EMBER DAYS

These are traditionally observed on the Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays in the weeks before the Third Sunday of Advent, the Second Sunday of Lent, and the Sundays nearest to 29 June and 29 September. Common Worship also encourages their use as general days of prayer for those who serve the Church in lay and ordained ministry and for vocations.

Let the Church's year carry some of the weight: pray, preach, tell stories and invite response at the moments the liturgy already gives us.

YOUR PARISH VOCATION PLAN

ACTIONS

Choose a few actions that fit your parish context, then listen, learn and review.

Action	Our next step	Who will help?
Pray/preach/tell a story		
Notice and encourage three people		
Create one safe ministry opportunity.		
Hold regular vocational conversations and follow up		
Strengthen one route into lay or ordained exploration		
One action for younger / more diverse vocation		

QUARTERLY LEARNING LOG

What are we learning?

- Which practices are actually changing the culture?
- Who is being noticed now who might previously have been missed?
- What is creating pressure, confusion or extra activity without formation?

What will we do?

STOP — one thing that is not adding value.

START — one small practice worth testing.

CONTINUE — one habit that is bearing fruit.

MEASURE CULTURE, NOT JUST NUMBERS

Fruit may include deeper discipleship, clearer lay vocation, wider participation, healthier conversations, greater agency and safer pathways — as well as people entering formal discernment. Ask annually: Are more people praying about vocation? Receiving personal encouragement? Being entrusted with meaningful responsibility? Able to identify a faithful next step?

PCC VOCATIONAL HEALTH REVIEW

A detachable annual review for PCCs, staff teams and wardens. Use it at an away day, during Embertide, before Vocations Sunday, or whenever you want to ask what God may be growing among you.

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." — 1 Corinthians 3:6

Question	Yes	Partly	No	Evidence / One next step
Do we pray publicly for vocation in its widest Christian sense?	☐	☐	☐	
Do sermons and testimonies make lay, workplace, community and ordained calling imaginable?	☐	☐	☐	
Are gifts noticed and named with evidence by more people than the clergy?	☐	☐	☐	
Are children, young people, older people, disabled people and people from varied social and ethnic backgrounds given accessible, proportionate opportunities?	☐	☐	☐	
Do our ministry opportunities form people rather than mainly fill rotas?	☐	☐	☐	
Can people say "not now", "not this" or "something different" without feeling they have failed?	☐	☐	☐	
Do people know routes into lay formation, LLM, ministry experience, chaplaincy, parish leadership and ordained discernment?	☐	☐	☐	
Are safeguarding, consent, boundaries and reasonable adjustments built into opportunities?				
Do we accompany people after signposting or referral?				
Who are we not noticing?				

REVIEW THE FRUIT

What are we seeing God grow? • What one practice will we START, STOP and CONTINUE? • What would greater freedom, participation and fruitfulness look like here?

KNOWING WHEN TO SIGNPOST

If the person is exploring…	Possible next conversation
A first question about gifts/service	Parish priest, lay leader or mentor.
Recognised or licensed lay ministry	Appropriate lay-ministry / Director of Ministry route
Structured ministry experience	MES / relevant local opportunity
Ordained ministry	Area Director of Ordinands / diocesan discernment route
A safeguarding concern	Parish / Area safeguarding route
A need for broader counsel	Trusted mentor, spiritual director or appropriate adviser

COMPANION GUIDE — EXPLORING YOUR CALLING

When someone begins asking vocational questions, offer* Exploring Your Calling: A Practical Guide to Christian Vocation. *It helps the individual listen, ask, try and reflect without forcing a timetable or assuming ordained ministry. Use this parish toolkit to nurture the environment; use the companion guide to support the person's next faithful step.

BEFORE REFERRING

Before referring someone:

- Ask permission before sharing someone's details.
- Explain what the next step is — and what it is not.
- Do not promise an outcome.
- Stay pastorally engaged after the handover.

Accompany without taking over.

Do

- Pray with and for the person.
- Help them gather evidence from real ministry.
- Encourage other trusted voices.
- Normalise uncertainty and time.
- Keep relationships intact whatever the outcome.

Avoid

- Becoming the only person who "knows their call".
- Coaching them to give the "right" answers.
- Treating discernment as a parish success metric.
- Sharing information without consent.
- Withdrawing support if the route changes.

FOUR QUESTIONS PARISH LEADERS OFTEN ASK

These questions turn vocational culture into ordinary parish practice. None requires a new programme. The aim is attentiveness: leaders pray, notice, encourage and make room; God gives the growth.

1 IMPLEMENTATION

What does noticing and naming gifts look like?

- Notice what is already happening in ordinary parish life, not only who volunteers for visible roles.
- Look for humility, reliability, prayerfulness, compassion,
- fruit, judgement, courage and sustained desire.
- Name evidence: "I have noticed…" rather than assigning a role or outcome.
- Examples include welcome, intercession, listening,
- administration, youth leadership, teaching, hospitality, justice, practical service and workplace witness.

2 INCLUSIVITY

How do we broaden who we notice and invite?

- Make "Who are we not noticing?" a regular leadership question.
- Invite observations from youth leaders, lay ministers,
- school and chaplaincy partners, community organisers and peers.
- Offer proportionate opportunities, clear expectations
- and reasonable adjustments.
- Review who receives invitations and responsibility; do not confuse confidence, accent, education or familiarity with vocation.

3 PRACTICAL STEPS

What does a healthy vocational conversation look like?

- Begin with what you have genuinely observed.
- Ask open questions: "What gives you life?" "Where do you sense God at work?"
- Name possibility, not outcome; protect freedom to say
- "not now", "not this" or "something different".
- Agree on one small next step and a time to follow up. Listen more than you speak.

4 MEASURING IMPACT

How do we know vocational health is growing?

- Measure culture, not simply formal discernment numbers.
- Look for more prayer, personal encouragement and
- meaningful opportunities to serve.
- Ask whether younger people and people from varied backgrounds are being noticed and trusted.
- Look for clearer lay and whole-life vocation, safer
- pathways, greater age cy and faithful next steps.

The goal is not to manufacture vocations or fill a pipeline. We cultivate the field faithfully, trusting that the harvest belongs to God and serves God's Kingdom.

FIVE ORDINARY HABITS

These five ordinary habits are always helpful and should be the foundation of all prayerful efforts to discern vocation.

1 PRAY INTENTIONALLY

- Keep vocation before God in worship, intercession and parish prayer.
- Use Scripture and testimony to make calling imaginable.

2 NOTICE & NURTURE GIFTS

- Pay attention to grace, character, service and emerging capacity.
- Name gifts with evidence and humility.

3 CREATE OPPORTUNITIES

- Give people safe, proportionate chances to practice ministry.
- Entrust responsibility rather than merely filling rotas.

4 PROVIDE SPACE

- Make room for questions, reflection and discernment without pressure.
- Let the next faithful step be enough.

5 SUPPORT THE JOURNEY

- Accompany, signpost and remain pastoral, whatever the outcome. Lay vocation is not a feeder lane to ordination.

Always remember

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." 1 Corinthians 3:6

RESOURCES NURTURING THE CALL | PARISH TOOLKIT

ONLINE RESOURCE BANK

Scan a QR code or use the live link in the digital copy.

Called resources Open online	**Films & videos** Open online
Stories of Kingdom Calling Open online	**Worship & prayer** Open online
Ministry Experience Scheme Open online	**Creating a culture of vocation** Open online

WHAT ALREADY EXISTS.

The Church of England's "called" resources provide films, worship and prayer material, youth resources, a Good Practice Guide and campaign assets. This Parish Toolkit is designed to complement those resources, not duplicate them.

FURTHER READING

Andrew Watson & Magdalen Smith, *The Great Vocations Conversation: A Year of Inspiration and Challenge for Ministers* (London: Church House Publishing, 2018), ISBN 9781781400951. A practical companion for sustaining regular conversations that help people recognise and explore God's call.

COPYRIGHT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

The 'one vocational conversation a month' practice referenced in this Tool Kit is inspired by Watson and Smith's work. All rights in the original publication remain with the relevant copyright holder(s). No text from the book is reproduced verbatim.

SELECTED READING & EXPLORATION

The theological voices in this guide deepen a simple conviction: vocation is God's work before it is ours, and the Church's task is to help the whole people of God hear, test, and live that call.

Keep the list selective. These resources help people move from a first question about calling towards deeper discipleship, Anglican understanding and, where appropriate, more focused discernment.

Theme	Suggested resources
Whole-life vocation	A Call to Live: Vocation for Everyone — Steve Walton; Fruitfulness on the Frontline — Mark Greene
Discernment	Consider Your Calling: Six Questions for Discerning Your Vocation — Gordon T. Smith Called or Collared? — Francis Dewar Faithful? Foolish? Called? — Mark Tanner When Jesus Calls — Marcus Throup
Anglican identity	All Things Anglican — Marcus Throup Common Worship Ordinal Study Guide
Ordained ministry	The Life and Work of a Priest — John Pritchard On Priesthood: Servants, Shepherds, Messengers, Sentinels and Stewards — Stephen Cottrell FAQ for Those Exploring Ordination to the Priesthood — Diocese of London
Prayer & discipleship	Being Christian — Rowan Williams God of Surprises — Gerard Hughes
Pathways & support	Church of England Vocations • Ministry Experience Scheme • Church Army • Religious Life • Church of England training pathways • Mentoring Directory
Church, discipleship & mission	Being Christian - Rowan Williams; The Message of Ephesians - John Stott Mission in Christ's Way: Bible Studies - Lesslie Newbigin

NURTURE THE GROUND

The aim is not simply to fill a pipeline. Paul reminds us that we are servants working together in God's field, and that God gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6–9). Our task is to cultivate communities where people hear Christ, practise their gifts, receive wise invitation and respond faithfully to God's call. Lesslie Newbigin described the Church as "a sign, an instrument and a foretaste of the kingdom." Nurturing vocation is therefore about more than producing candidates: it is about releasing the whole people of God for faithful service in God's Kingdom — in church, work, home, neighbourhood and the wider world.



"The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this."
— 1 Thessalonians 5:24

A COLLECT FOR VOCATIONS

Almighty God,
you have entrusted to your Church
a share in the ministry of your Son, our great high priest: inspire by your Holy Spirit the hearts of many
to offer themselves for the ministry of your Church, that, strengthened by his power,
they may work for the increase of your kingdom and set forward the eternal praise of your name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

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This working edition draws on Church of England and Diocese of London vocation resources and on photographic material supplied for this project. The visual approach intentionally reflects the breadth of Christian vocation — lay people, young people, intergenerational ministry, community service, worship and ordained ministry. Final image credits, permissions and consent should be confirmed by the Diocese of London Communications team before public release.