

# **The Role of Examining Chaplain in the Discernment Process for Holy Orders**

## **Introduction**

Examining Chaplains are involved in the discernment process into which people who wish to consider and be considered for ordination into Holy Orders (known as 'applicants' in this enquiry phase) are invited and supported by the Anglican Diocese of Bunbury and its Bishop and Ordination Council.

This document provides an explanation of the role of Examining Chaplain in the Diocese of Bunbury throughout this process.

## **Process**

People seeking information and wishing to start the discernment process initially meet with the Bishop of the Diocese who will then refer them to speak with the Director of Formation and who also refers the enquiry and supporting paperwork to the Ordination Council. It is the Director of Formation (DF) who co-ordinates the different aspects and stages of the discernment process together with the Ordination Council.

Each applicant is provided with an Examining Chaplain/s whose role is to be a companion for the 'trainee' (the new title of an applicant when an applicant has been accepted into the discernment process) throughout the process. The Examining Chaplain/s works with the trainee and the Ordination Council in the discernment process which takes place over months and sometimes years.

## **Application and Discernment**

The applicant makes an application to the Ordination Council for consideration into the discernment process on the Application for Holy Orders form and provides the supporting documentation which is then submitted to the Diocese.

The application process takes time and includes participation in a psychometric test and health assessment. The application form is considered by the Bishop, Members of the Ordination Council and the Director of Formation.

Following receipt of the application, two Members of the Ordination Council will meet with the applicant and where relevant, with the applicant's partner and interview them and provide a report back to the Ordination Council for its consideration.

If the decision is to proceed with the discernment process (no commitment is given at this stage by either party as to the outcome of the process), an Examining Chaplain/s is appointed to share the next stage of the journey with the trainee.

The Examining Chaplains are members of the Ordination Council. Examining Chaplains are both Lay and Ordained persons.

## **The Discernment Process**

There is no hard and fast process or rules for the discernment process.

This is a process that includes the individual, the Examining Chaplains, the Director of Formation, the Ordination Council, the parish where the candidate is worshipping, their supervisor and God. All contribute and listen and pray.

The Examining Chaplains will be in relationship with the trainees until such time as they are no longer a candidate or have been determined for ordination.

The Examining Chaplains meet as part of the Ordination Council, the Bishop and the Director of Formation at least twice a year, and preferably four times a year, at each Ordination Council Meeting, and more frequently as required.

As the candidate is accepted by the Ordination Council into the discernment process, the Examining Chaplain will meet with the individual who is now known as a trainee regularly, following an initial interview meeting. These meetings are to provide support, test discernment and report back to the Council at each of its meetings with a written update and verbal report.

At any point, the candidate may withdraw if they do not wish to proceed; or the candidate may put their discernment journey on hold because of life's circumstances; or, because the Council itself with the assistance of the Examining Chaplains, and with input from the Director of Formation and the parish / supervisor, determines there is no discernible calling.

The discernment process itself can have a number of outcomes:

- i) A vocation has been discerned without qualification
- ii) A vocation has been discerned but with matters to be addressed
- iii) No vocation yet discerned but with vocational options to be explored
- iv) No vocation discerned and the journey to be ceased.

Where the recommendation to the Bishop with the Ordination Council is for i), ii) or iii), the Examining Chaplain will continue to be involved with the trainee for ongoing support. Where a trainee is rejected or ordination is agreed and being finalised, the Examining Chaplain's role is usually at an end with regard to that trainee.

### **The Role of Examining Chaplain**

The role of Examining Chaplain is generally one of encourager and to provide guidance, oversight and instruction. The aim of the Examining Chaplain is to know and understand the trainee, offering practical guidance regarding the process from the Diocese and providing an essential resource of wisdom and experience as the individual seeks to discern their vocation.

The Examining Chaplain meets regularly with the trainee. In these meetings, the Chaplain will seek to understand the trainee's faith journey, offers prayerful guidance and encourages the trainee to reflect carefully and prayerfully on their search. In particular, it is important to understand ordained ministry as just one of the ways in which a God-given vocation may be lived.

In group settings, Examining Chaplains may be invited to participate in the training and group sessions for the ordination discernment journey, and may be invited to attend as observers and occasional contributors. Their main responsibilities in such settings, will be to catch up with their trainees and to observe their behaviours.

Jesus' injunction to be 'wise as serpents and innocent as doves' (Matt.10:16) is an important caution. Sadly, some who seek ordination are more like wolves than shepherds and the Examining Chaplain needs to embrace with enthusiasm the possibility of a vocation, and at the same time not be blind to defects of a person which may make such a vocation unlikely or deeply damaged.

It is important for the Chaplain they do not stand in an ongoing pastoral relationship (as between a Priest and a parishioner) and consequently have both the freedom and the requirement to speak to each trainee with openness and honesty.

The aim of the Examining Chaplain is to help the trainee form a mind able to understand the questions being faced in the formal discernment process. Trainees need to know for example, what the Daily Offices are, and the need to be an Anglican! Such matters should be picked up by the Examining Chaplain and resolved early in the process.

### **Interviews and follow up meetings with Examining Chaplains**

The interviews and follow up meetings are to look at broadly, such matters as:

- Faith
- Spirituality
- Relationships
- Leadership.

Once the trainee has been discerned as being ready for ordination by the Ordination Council, the trainee is called a Candidate and the Examining Chaplain will usually conclude their relationship with the trainee at this point.

**Guideline Topics for Meetings and Follow Up Conversations, face to face or by telephone:**

What have you learnt about yourself recently?

Is there anything troubling you at the moment?

What joyful and awkward moments have you had in ministry?

What is going well?

What is not going well?

Where have you been stretched?

What effect is your ministry having on your home life and friends?

Is there anything troubling you?

What have you learned about your faith?

What has emerged in your relationships?

Examples of leadership?