

by James Jones

resource sheet 2

what kind of people?

In the ordination services for deacons and priests there are important passages from the Bible. Reading and re-reading them and meditating on them provides invaluable spiritual exercises in the process of discerning God's call: Isaiah 6:1-8; Romans 12:1-12; Mark 10:35-45; Isaiah 61:1-3; Malachi 2:5-7; 2 Corinthians 5:14-19; John 20:19-23.

Listening to the direction of God through the daily study of the Scriptures is singled out by the bishop in the ordination charge. Therefore, it is appropriate to see whether or not there is an appetite for this in a potential ordinand. Those seeking ordination do well to reflect on these passages and to ask God to show how they relate to their own calling.

The passage of Scripture that has most influenced my own understanding of the apostolic call to be a priest or presbyter in the church is from one of the letters Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. The first letter to the Corinthians (4:15-17)

has St Paul writing to the factious, conceited and loveless Christians at Corinth:

'Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus.'

I became your father through the gospel

This is not a sexist or a gender statement for in 1 Thessalonians 2 Paul also wrote: 'as apostles of Christ we were gentle among you like a mother caring for her little children.' More than ever the Church needs ministers with the desire and the gift to lead people to faith in Jesus Christ. Do you love Jesus Christ? Do you enjoy people? Have you already had some experience of helping people come to, and grow in, faith? These are important indications of the call.

I urge you to imitate me

Even though Paul knew he was far from perfect he would urge others to model themselves on him – a forgiven sinner. Throughout his letters it is clear that he saw a line of succession – imitate him and you will be imitating Christ, imitate Christ, the icon of God and you will be imitating God himself. It may not be fashionable or politically correct to draw attention to this, but my own conviction, rooted in Scripture, is that those aspiring to the ordained ministry of priesthood ought to bear the hallmarks of Christ-likeness.

There ought to be a desire, nurtured by Word and sacraments, to become like Jesus. In old-fashioned language, it is a desire to be holy. Of course, we walk and follow Christ with clay feet. But, unlike those who feel that public and private life can be separated, we know that the whole of our life is under scrutiny. That is why purity in our relationships and probity in our handling of money are important criteria in those seeking ordination.

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For this reason I have sent Timothy... who is faithful in the Lord

Just as Paul sent Timothy, so the Church through ordination sends you to join that line of succession that traces back to Christ himself. When you visit the sick and comfort the dying you will be doing so in the place of Christ; when you preside at Holy Communion you will stand at the Holy Table and repeat the words of Christ himself.

The call must arise out of prayer and drive you to prayer. People will have and live by different patterns but the ordinand must be a prayerful person.

The proper reaction to this in an ordinand is a mixture of awe and anticipation. Ambition to do this without any sense of unworthiness suggests egotism; to be completely daunted and overawed to the point of feeling that this is impossible suggests that the call is not yet there.

He will remind you of my way of life in Christ

'He will remind you of my way of life in Christ which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.'
1 Corinthians 4:17

Everything that Paul taught was consonant with his life. The gift of being both pastor and teacher is indispensable to ordination to parochial ministry. Again, some evidence of being able to teach the Christian faith either in a house group or with children and young people is an important indicator of this particular call.

Timothy followed in Paul's footsteps. His own life of word and deed were to be a powerful reminder of Paul's 'way of life in Christ Jesus.' Interestingly, the word 'remind' is the same one that Paul uses of the way the bread and the wine *remind* us of Jesus. The life and the teaching of Timothy and Paul were to remind us of Christ. This is the pattern for all of us called to ordination.

You will be ordained not as a manager or communicator or even as an enabler or as a counsellor (although these gifts will not go amiss). You will be ordained by the bishop to 'grow up into Christ's likeness' and to 'be an example'. Your life and your teaching, your pastoral and sacramental ministry are all to point people to Christ. To this end the Church is looking for people with a desire to make Jesus known. That desire must be latent in every intending ordinand.

The Church is not looking for humourless, pushy people but those with winsome and open personalities who can laugh with those who laugh and weep with those who weep, those who can listen and enjoy listening to other people's stories and who can tell a good story themselves.

Some of the most moving words in the Ordinal are spoken by the bishop to the candidate:

'You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God. Pray therefore that your heart may daily be enlarged and your understanding of the Scriptures enlightened.'

The call must arise out of prayer and drive you to prayer. People will have and live by different patterns but the ordinand must be a prayerful person.

The spiritual life is the source of the strength. When the former dries up so does the latter. It is important to hear, therefore, how a person has coped with conflict, disappointment, frustration and tragedy and to hear how they have interpreted God's presence and action in their lives at such times. There is no definitively correct answer. But the way a person describes their journey may well be suggestive of the call of God.

Ordained ministers will find themselves as both leaders and managers. A manager lives by the art of getting things done through others willingly and well. But the church is fundamentally a voluntary organisation (the biggest in the country) and managing volunteers is like herding cats! The Church (to mix the metaphors) runs on the oil of goodwill. Managing volunteers is very different from managing salaried people. Therefore, the priest needs to evidence the skills of motivating people differently in a culture where the principal motivation is financial.

The priest is also a leader and the essence of leadership is 'followership'. People follow people with a vision. But in the Bible vision is not about strategies but exclusively 'of God'. A desire to know God and an appetite for theology are vital to apostolic and priestly ministry.

Holy matrimony?

Although it is widely recognised that spouses will follow their own calling (hence they are not invited to a Bishops' Advisory Panel), there is no doubt that the vocation to priestly ministry has a major impact upon the whole family. Public ministry brings its own blend of opportunities and demands to the household of a minister, therefore the married partner must be in sympathy with the calling. If this support is not there, then the marriage may experience greater stress when the pressure is on. Furthermore,

it is clear from the New Testament that the example to be shown by the minister extends to how he/she is within the relationships centred on the home. This inevitably has implications for the home and the family. It is a facet that needs to be borne in mind by the increasing number of older candidates who have a partner and older children who have been used to a very different life-style.

Ministry and Vocation – a short book list

The Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council publishes a booklet called *Ministry in the Church of England*. This is also downloadable from the website.

For those being considered as candidates for a Bishops' Advisory Panel then familiarisation with the *Criteria for Selection for Ministry in the Church of England* highlights the main areas for consideration by the selectors: ministry within the Church of England, vocation, faith, spirituality, personality and character, relationships, leadership and collaboration, mission and evangelism and quality of mind. These are outlined and explored in the ministry booklet.

Ministry Division,
Church House,
Great Smith Street,
LONDON SW1P 3NZ.
T 020 7898 1412 (General office).

In addition to the brief book list printed below it is well worth studying the official reports of the Church of England on specific issues, especially ministry and ordination. For example, *The Priesthood of the Ordained Ministry* (Church House Publishing), *Formation for Ministry with a Learning Church* (CHP), and various other Synod Reports. Anyone seriously considering ministry in the Church of England is well advised to read the church newspapers, the *Church Times*

or the *Church of England Newspaper*, which are available from newsagents. This is a good way of keeping up to date with issues on professional ministry and current debates on other subjects.

Vocation

Called or Collared,
Francis Dewar, (SPCK).

An exploration of the meaning of calling as a whole without restricting the idea to ordination.

Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help your Church Grow, C Peter Wagner,
(Regal Books).

A unique book on finding and releasing the gifts for church growth. Helpful biblical and practical advice on identifying and using gifts, valued by those on both sides of the charismatic debate.

Fit for the Purpose,
Ian Aveyard, (St John's
Extension Studies).

A workbook on Christian vocation and how to respond when God calls.

Ministry

An Introduction to Christian Ministry,
Gordon Kuhrt, (CHP).

A highly readable introduction to ministry in the Church of England.

Being a Priest Today,
Christopher Cocksworth and Rosalind Brown, (Canterbury Press).
A comprehensive exploration of priesthood.

Jesus-driven Ministry,
Ajuth Kernando, (IVP).
An exploration of ministry using Mark's Gospel, chapter one.

In the Name of Jesus,
Henry Nouwen, (DLT).
A thought-provoking look at Christian leadership and ministry.

Ministry in Three Dimensions,
Steven Croft, (DLT).

The Life and Work of a Priest,
John Pritchard, (SPCK).

The Fire and the Clay, the Priest in Today's Church,
George Guiver, (SPCK).

The Christian Priest Today,
Michael Ramsay, (SPCK).
An excellent series of ordination addresses and other talks, written from a thoughtful Anglo-Catholic perspective. Its particular focus is on what a priest is rather than what he or she does.

...in the Bible vision is not about strategies but exclusively 'of God'. A desire to know God and an appetite for theology are vital to apostolic and priestly ministry.

Transforming Priesthood,
Robin Greenwood, (SPCK).

Practising Community,
Robin Greenwood, (SPCK).

The Future of Ministry, Gavin Wakefield (editor), (Grove Books).
Four leaders look ahead and reflect on what ministry may look like in 25 years.

what kind of people?

Freed to Serve, Michael Green,
(Hodder & Stoughton).

Out of print but available second-hand. Considered by many as the best book on this subject. It is written from a biblical perspective and with an understanding of Anglican patterns of ministry. Very helpful on the nature of ordained ministry.

The Anglican Church

Something in Common,
Adrian Chatfield,
(St John's Extensions Studies).

An accessible introduction to the principles and practices of worldwide Anglicanism.

Being Anglican, Alastair Redfern,
(Darton, Longman and Todd).

An introduction to the history and breadth of the Anglican Church.

Pre-training Reading, David Gillett,
retired bishop, former principal of
Trinity College, Bristol, (CPAS).

This is the title of CPAS Resource Sheet no 15. It provides a brief select list of useful introductions to biblical studies, doctrine, Church history, worship, spirituality, mission and religion, and pastoral theology.

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Bishop of Liverpool.**

resource sheets

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