



The Diocese of
Southwark

Vocations

HANDBOOK

for

BISHOP'S EXAMINING CHAPLAINS

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Introduction

The Role of a Bishop's Examining Chaplain

Thank you for your invaluable involvement in the Diocesan Vocations Team as one of the Bishop's Examining Chaplains. We hope that this handbook will be helpful in explaining your role as an Examining Chaplain and your part within the diocesan discernment process; and in providing you with templates and advice for interviews with candidates and writing your reports. The DDO and Assistant DDO are always happy to help with any questions or problems. Please feel very welcome to be in touch with one of us if you need any help. Contact details are on the previous page.

What is a Bishop's Examining Chaplain?

The role of the Bishop's Examining Chaplain has existed for some time in the Church of England. Established in the 19th century in the era before theological colleges or formal clerical training, diocesan bishops would appoint chaplains whose duty was to undertake "due examination" of candidates prior to their ordination to ensure that they "be apt and meet, for their learning and godly conversation, to exercise their ministry duly, to the honour of God, and the edifying of his Church". Although this "due examination" is now largely carried out by Directors of Ordinands, the Shared Discernment Panels and theological training institutions, the Bishop's Examining Chaplain still has an important part to play in the vocational discernment process.

The principal task of the Examining Chaplain is to provide a 'helicopter' view and impression of a candidate in the final stages of the diocesan discernment process through a one-off, ninety-minute to two-hour interview. This independent evaluation of candidates through a one-off interview is beneficial in that it acts as a counterbalance to the discernment of their Director of Ordinands, who has necessarily journeyed alongside their candidates for many months and built up relationships with them; and also provides a candidate with valuable interview practice with someone whom they will not have met in preparation for a possible Stage 2 Panel. The advice of the Examining Chaplain is, therefore, very valuable in assisting the Bishop to decide whether to sponsor a candidate for selection at a Stage 2 Panel.

Resource Hub

All the documents you will need when preparing for meeting a candidate and for writing your report are available on the Vocations Team Resource Hub. This is an online resource for the wider Vocations team in the Diocese and can be accessed through the Diocesan website. You will find there the template Examining Chaplain's Report, along with the High-level Qualities Grid and the In-depth Qualities Grid. You will need the High-level Grid when writing your report as this will show which aspects of the Qualities fall into the Ministerial Formation and Personal Formation categories. The In-depth Grid goes into more detail and you will need the In-depth Grid for those aspects of the Qualities that relate to Incumbent status ministry.

The New Shared Discernment Process

Candidates are now no longer selected at BAPs and are not assessed against Criteria. Selection now happens at a Stage 2 Panel where advisers assess the extent to which candidates inhabit the Qualities for Discernment.

By the time a candidate sees you, they will already have been to a Stage 1 Panel. This panel does not make a recommendation regarding the candidate, rather the advisers write a descriptive report on the Candidates progress. It is only at the Stage 2 Panel where a recommendation (or not) for the candidate to enter training is made.

The Process

What is an Examining Chaplain expected to do?

The following sections will provide some practical information about the task of the Examining Chaplain within the formal diocesan discernment process, how interviews with candidates are set up, and the areas to be evaluated within the interview.

The Diocesan Discernment Process

By the time candidates meet with an Examining Chaplain, they will have worked with a Vocations Adviser (VA) for three to four months and a Director of Ordinands (either the DDO, Assistant DDO or one of the Area Directors of Ordinands); so they should already have reflected carefully on the Church of England's *Qualities for Discernment*.

There are typically two circumstances in which a Director of Ordinands would refer a candidate to meet with an Examining Chaplain. Most commonly, an Examining Chaplain would meet with a candidate towards the end of the diocesan discernment process, just before the candidate sees the Area Bishop and the Diocesan Bishop makes the final decision as to whether to sponsor the candidate for a Stage 2 Panel.

Occasionally, a Director of Ordinands will be genuinely uncertain whether to advise the Bishop to sponsor a candidate for a Stage 2 Panel, because they do not fully inhabit one or more of the aspects of the *Qualities for Discernment*; and will wish to ask for an Examining Chaplain's discernment in these areas as a 'second opinion'. If this is the case, the Director of Ordinands will make this clear when setting up the meeting, and will let the candidate know of the areas that the Examining Chaplain will focus on in the interview.

There are also a small number of candidates each year whose circumstances mean that they would attend a Candidates' Panel rather than a Stage 2 Panel. This might be, for example, where a minister from a different denomination is seeking to transfer their ministry to the Church of England, where an Anglican deacon/priest from an overseas province is seeking to exercise ministry in the Church of England, or where a candidate, who has withdrawn from ministry in the Church of England for a period of time, is seeking to resume their ministry. The Assistant DDO, who normally looks after Candidates' Panel cases, will ensure that the Examining Chaplain is fully briefed on the particulars of the case, and explain the areas of the *Qualities* against which the candidate will need to be assessed.

Setting up the Interview

An Examining Chaplain will normally be contacted in the first instance by a Director of Ordinands about arranging an interview with a candidate. As there often needs to be a swift turnaround of papers for a candidate at this stage of the discernment process, it would be much appreciated if an Examining Chaplain were able to meet with a candidate and complete the report within **two weeks** of the initial referral. **Please do say honestly if this deadline is unrealistic when a Director of Ordinands makes an initial approach.** It is better for the Director of Ordinands to seek a different Examining Chaplain than to have to badger an Examining Chaplain for a report in order to forward it to an Area Bishop in time.

Once the Examining Chaplain has agreed to meet with a candidate, the Director of Ordinands will email the candidate, copying this to the Examining Chaplain, asking the candidate to contact the Examining Chaplain directly for an appointment. Please let the Director of Ordinands know if the candidate does not make contact within a reasonable time. The appointment should be arranged to allow for an interview of about **90 minutes to two hours**. The interview may take place in your home, or a meeting room can be booked for you at Trinity House. If you would like to use a room at Trinity House, please contact Odette Penwarden on 020 7939 9400 or odette.penwarden@southwark.anglican.org.

Structuring the Interview

Once an interview with a candidate has been arranged, the Director of Ordinands will send the Examining Chaplain the candidate's Stage 2 form. A sample of the Stage 2 form is in the Resource Hub. The information contained in this form provides background information and evidence on which to structure questions at the interview. The interview should cover all six Qualities over each of the four Domains, unless the Director of Ordinands has indicated the particular areas that need to be discussed. You will find a copy of the high level and in-depth Qualities for Discernment on the Resource Hub. The Examining Chaplain's Report template can also be found on the Resource Hub along with a version that has notes in it to assist you.

In assessing how fully the candidate inhabits the Qualities, please ensure that your judgements are evidenced as fully as possible from the candidate's Stage 2 form and/or the interview.

Reporting

Writing up the Examining Chaplain's Report

Once you have completed your interview work with the candidate, you are asked to write a formal report on the candidate, with a recommendation or non-recommendation that they should proceed to a Stage 2 Panel. Please send your completed report to the candidate's Director of Ordinands with a copy to the DDO. There is no need to send your report to the Area Bishop, as the candidate's Director of Ordinands will do this together with other paperwork.

Your report remains strictly confidential to the Bishop, the DDO and the candidate's Director of Ordinands. It should not be shared with the candidate, though their Director of Ordinands may provide feedback from the report to the candidate, especially if developmental needs are identified. As a confidential working document, the report is destroyed once the candidate has completed the formal discernment process.

The report is structured as a pro-forma with specific areas for comment. The report template is available from the Resource Hub.

Please speak to the DDO or Assistant DDO if there are any aspects of report writing with which you would welcome further help or guidance.

Following Candidates' Progress

What happens once a VA has finished working with an enquirer?

Once a candidate has met with an Examining Chaplain, the work of the Examining Chaplain with that candidate comes to an end, so it is not appropriate to maintain any formal contact with the candidate.

Examining Chaplains will, however, be sent copies of Diocesan correspondence with candidates with whom they have worked - such as a letter from the Bishop relaying a Stage 2 Panel result - so that they can follow the progress that their candidates go on to make.