

# Voicing a Vocation

## Key Findings

This study found that amongst those who responded almost all people who had experienced a calling struggled to describe what had happened to them. They learnt to do so using the approaches and voices within the recommended reading and those responsible for discernment within dioceses. The reading, whilst very interesting, is unwieldy and largely represents traditional approaches to vocation and ministry. There are an embarrassing number of missing voices within it.

Among a representative group of people responsible for discernment in dioceses, almost all reported that they believed their peer's theologies of vocation and ministry to be more formal and rigid than their own.

Within the discernment process the Criteria for Ordained Ministry in the Church of England seems to be the centre of attention, with those discerning vocations appearing to be trapped in a situation that requires them to perpetuate 'BAPspeak' in order that their candidates can demonstrate to others that they meet them. BAPspeak is a limited language game that has become polarised into notions of *priest* rooted in the Old Testament and *presbyter* rooted in the Pauline Epistles. It effectively excludes different approaches to vocation and ministry.

The notion that people might be called to a Gospel ministry that emulates that of the Gospels' account of Jesus ministry before his death, is largely ignored. This type of Gospel ministry is however, deeply embedded in the ordination and licensing liturgies, especially that of the Deacon. In addition, the overwhelming evidence suggests that people are inspired by this type of Gospel ministry, and it is what they try to engage in when they 'get through the gate'.

There appears to be a generational gap with retired clergy reporting having been called by the church, and younger ministers reporting an experience of calling that they describe as being internal.

## Recommendations

- 1) The quickest way to recognise which tradition a writer is rooted in is to notice which words they capitalise. I recommend that official literature follow a neutral convention.
- 2) Clumsy use of language can be confusing and lead to misunderstandings. The meanings of some words are disputed. I recommend the adoption of a common language protocol on official documentation, and brief explanations of alternative meanings where necessary.
- 3) The recommended reading, certainly on the main website, is unwieldy and difficult to navigate without a 'map' or explanation. It could usefully be supplemented by other forms of communication, for example short teaching videos. I recommend a review of the resources offered to candidates to help explore and discern vocation and ministry.

- 4) There is a dearth of diversity in the recommended reading. I recommend this be actively found or commissioned.
- 5) It is good to be transparent about the Criteria for Ordination in the Church of England. However, they do not help a candidate think about vocation, rather they measure whether they have done that. I recommend that the ordination and licensing liturgies be more intentionally central to the discernment process.
- 6) There are well-developed theologies of vocation and ministry rooted in Old Testament priesthood and Pauline leadership models. I recommend work be commissioned to explore ways of thinking and speaking about vocation and ministry that are explicitly rooted in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry before his death.
- 7) The two well-developed theologies focus on those to be ordained to the priesthood. I recommend work be commissioned to explore, consolidate and develop the evolving role of the distinctive diaconate.
- 8) It may be timely for the Church of England to consider its institutional vocation. I recommend a way be found to bring representatives of both existing and missing approaches and voices together, to prayerfully consider the matter; The Pentecost Project perhaps?

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