

by Martyn Jarrett
and Gordon Kuhrt

resource sheet 6

what do bishops' advisers look for?

In speaking about selection for ordained and licensed ministry in the Church of England, some people talk of 'Advisory Panels' and what the Ministry Division looks for. Strictly speaking we ought not to say, 'What does the Ministry Division look for?', since the panels are Bishops' Advisory Panels, organised by the Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council to advise the bishops. The advisers, too, are Bishops' Advisers, appointed by diocesan bishops. Every five years each bishop nominates people to act as advisers, and the Church House staff simply draw from the pool of these people for each conference. In their assessment the advisers work within guidelines established by the bishops and make recommendations to the bishops concerning each candidate. The bishop then makes the final decision about what to do, in the light of the recommendation and comments of the advisers.

It's important to remember too, that the recommendation the advisers make is whether the candidate should

be trained, rather than ordained. The decision about ordination or licensing will be taken by the bishop on the basis of advice from the theological college, or course principal and staff where the candidate trains.

Before someone ever reaches an advisory panel he or she will have spoken with their vicar and been seen several times in the diocese over a period of several months, and often considerably longer. The bishop then decides whether or not to sponsor the candidate for an advisory panel on the basis of advice from the diocesan director of ordinands.

The Advisory Panel

Candidates for ordained ministry or accredited lay ministry spend 48 hours at a residential advisory panel. Each panel will have up to 16 candidates, six advisers and a panel secretary. The whole panel takes place in an atmosphere of prayer, worship and friendship. The panel secretary is a member of the Ministry Division advisory staff whose role is to administer the conference,

assist in the worship, and act as moderator to ensure parity between panels and fairness for all candidates. The secretary is not an adviser. The advisers are seeking, through interviews and other activities, to make an informed judgement as to whether each candidate is called and equipped by God for professional ministry in the Church. This involves considering a wide range of issues relating to each candidate.

During the panel candidates will have three interviews of 45 to 50 minutes, each with a particular focus. A senior adviser who may be a man or woman, will give special attention to a sense of vocation and to a candidate's prayer life. There will be an educational adviser especially concerned to assess not only academic ability but also flexibility of mind and confidence in handling questions of faith and belief. A pastoral adviser will be looking into the area of personality. It is important to discover something of the candidates' maturity and personal integration as well as their capacity to relate to other people.

what do bishops' advisers look for?

During the advisory panel candidates undertake a series of exercises. A personal inventory (open ended questions based on the criteria for selection for written response) provides the advisers with some extra material for their assessments.

themselves. This may be especially true in areas where the professional ministries seem particularly hard pressed. Advisers then want to be confident that such candidates have moved on from this realisation and now feel personally drawn by God to meet the need.

cannot acknowledge these areas in themselves, they merely suppress them, and guilt feelings are soon aroused as they say one thing but feel another. The ability to handle the tension between faith and doubt is especially needed by those who will represent the Church in its professional ministries. The advisers will be looking for evidence of candidates having been touched and changed by their experience of faith. Do they live the gospel? Can they communicate?

All Christians are called by God to ministry. Advisers look for distinctive signs that there is a call to ordained or accredited lay ministry within the Church.

Other candidates have a strong inward sense that they personally have been called by God to offer for a specific ministry. The advisers are looking for evidence that their self-assessment is valid: the Church has to check out that their sense of call is echoed by the wider Church.

Spirituality

Anyone claiming a call to Christian ministry must also be a person of prayer. Anything Christians seek to do is born out of being 'in Christ'. Prayer feeds the vision of God's kingdom which Christians seek to extend. A valid test of vocation is how much the sense of call has deepened the candidate's devotional life. Candidates may not have travelled far along that path, but at least they should be taking such a journey seriously. The selectors are not looking for any one method of prayer. Each person is unique. People have the right to expect help in their spiritual lives from those in the professional ministries and those who are not growing in prayer themselves will have little to offer to those who want assistance in deepening their own relationship with God.

Candidates are also asked to complete a written exercise such as a letter or a reference. This gives an indication of pastoral sensitivity towards people in need and ability to present ideas on paper; it is not primarily a test of grammar or spelling! They are also asked to give a five minute presentation on a topic related to one of the criteria for selection, and then to lead a discussion on issues arising from the presentation.

There also needs to be evidence that they have the qualities needed. For instance, all professional ministries require the exercising of leadership and authority. Is there evidence of this capacity? Otherwise candidates may well be mistaken in understanding their call, however strong it seems to be. There will always be a mixture of inner and outward evidence that God is calling someone to ordained or accredited lay ministry.

Faith

Candidates must be people of personal commitment to Christ, resilient in that faith in all circumstances. It will not be enough to express their faith in slogans. The Church expects of its ministers the ability to communicate their faith clearly in everyday language and with confidence. They should be able to relate faith to their own experience. So candidates must show evidence that theirs is a lasting faith and not a passing fad.

Again, this is true of corporate worship. Candidates not committed to the ongoing worshipping life of the Church are not going to be the best people one day to lead it. Thus private prayer and corporate worship are not viewed as isolated parts of people's lives. Rather, the advisers are concerned to see how far candidates relate the rest of their lives to their individual prayer and worship. People who pray soundly will show a growing awareness of God's presence in all aspects of life and an increasing ability to discuss what is and what is not of God in the current life of both Church and society.

What are the main things that the advisers are seeking in the candidates?

Vocation

All Christians are called by God to ministry. Advisers look for distinctive signs that there is a call to ordained or accredited lay ministry within the Church. Candidates must be seen to hear God's call to serve him in a particular ministry. They must be willing to surrender to that demand. The sense of call may have come in two different ways. Some will have seen the need for more people to serve in the ordained or accredited lay ministry. They will feel they have the necessary qualities and ought to offer

A strong faith is open to growth as God is experienced both in Scripture, worship and in his creation. Faith is not certainty. Those to be ordained or accredited lay ministers must be able to cope with areas of doubt and agnosticism. If they

Personality and character

The professional ministries of the Church need people of maturity. Mature candidates are those with some awareness and acceptance of their strengths and weaknesses, yet neither complacent with nor despairing of them. Some sense of humour about their character may be a help here. There are many signs of maturity. How do people cope with being in the public eye, which will mean continuously receiving both praise and criticism? How well do candidates blend realism and idealism? What are candidates like in coping with authority, both being under and exercising it? Can they receive as well as give in a Church which increasingly emphasises shared ministry?

Professional ministries need stability. Emotional and sexual stability are very important. A self-knowledge of one's emotions is needed, together with the ability to handle them. How far, for instance, do candidates recognise their own anger and handle it well? Suppressed, unowned emotions will only surface destructively. Ordained and accredited ministers must be able to enter into the agonies of others, and yet be able at the same time to exercise a degree of professional detachment. They have to make clear judgements and to perceive how God's enabling grace may be made effective within all kinds of seemingly hopeless situations. Everyone has some traumas in his or her past life, arousing strong emotions, threatening security and testing emotional stability and perseverance. How well these traumas have been integrated into people's personalities will give some clue as to how would-be ministers will stand up to such things as loneliness, sickness, anxiety, insecurity, loss of job structure, loss of faith and the like. Of course, many of these qualities are developed gradually. They do need to be present, at least in embryo, in a measure reasonable for a candidate's age.

Relationships

Professional ministers must be representatives of Christ, able to relate to others without embarrassment and to lead with conviction, compassion and good humour. No matter what their other qualities, these will be largely wasted if a firm but loving personality is lacking. Ministers require personal qualities acceptable to those whom they serve.

The advisers seek people who can both lead and relate without being threatened when others in a congregation are the appropriate ones to take a particular initiative. All sorts of initiative in a parish can be choked when a vicar, for instance, feels threatened by those more able to do certain tasks than him/herself. Ministers have to realise that they are not called to be Jacks or Jills of all trades. Much better if they discern skills in other people and enable such gifts to be realised. Leadership and authority must happily co-exist with sensitivity, discernment, humility and an openness of mind to others and to the Holy Spirit. Ministers need a perceptive understanding of human relationships. There must be an ability to listen and accept people, even those of an utterly different outlook from their own.

The firm foundation for this awareness is the quality of their own private and intimate relationships. Professional ministers are not immune from the stresses of family life. A minister and his or her family will often be required to cope with extra stress caused by being a family with a semi-public profile. An integrated family life is important to the married candidate, or to one with other family responsibilities. An awareness of the personal and social problems of the unemployed and the socially deprived, as well as the feelings and attitudes of different age groups, are all indications of a candidate's capacity for forming healthy relationships. Few, if any, will display all these characteristics. The

advisers do look for potential and assess candidates' ability to develop.

Leadership and collaboration

Candidates should show ability to offer leadership in the Church community and to some extent in the wider community. This ability includes the capacity to offer an example of faith and discipleship, to collaborate effectively with others, as well as to guide and shape the life of the Church community in its mission to the world.

Particular qualities

Everything so far could be said of professional ministry in general. Within specific ministries, ordained and lay, there are particular strengths for which selectors search. Candidates for non-stipendiary ministry need an understanding of that vocation in relation to the place of work and the parish base. Those called to local non-stipendiary ministry obviously need to meet appropriate local criteria. Candidates seldom have all the gifts needed in their fullness. In the case of younger candidates especially, it is often a matter of assessing potential rather than fully developed and proven qualities.

No blueprint

Do remember there is no 'blueprint' for the perfect candidate. The advisers need guidelines to serve as grounds of enquiry for assessing candidates. But guidelines are neither immovable nor immutable. Candidates may be strong in one area, weak in another. They may be fair all-rounders. There are as many combinations of the qualities sought as there are candidates who come. Under the Holy Spirit's guidance, the advisers seek to evaluate the gifts and potential given to each by God. By the same Spirit's guidance, they seek something of God's purpose in the future for all who come to the advisory panels. The question they will ask each candidate is whether ordination or licensing will most effectively allow their gifts to

what do bishops' advisers look for?

develop so that they may become the people God is calling them to be.

Why not?

Some people come to a panel and face the pain of not being recommended for training when they ought not to have come at all. Maybe parish clergy and diocesan staff are not firm enough, or some candidates will not listen to their counsel. The result is that advisers meet the following characteristics which usually mean the candidate cannot be recommended.

Dogmatism that is unrealistic about conversion, supernatural guidance and spiritual gifts. A clear testimony and confident sense of vocation is important, but there must be some humility, some sense of the value of the Church's confirmation of the candidate's own sense of call.

Immaturity in relation to God, the Church and the world. Some candidates have only come to faith or returned from lapsing about 12 months or less. There has been little opportunity for them to develop their service in the Church or to work out their faith in the world. This means that references are uncertain, thin or even negative.

Narrowness of experience. This is not just a problem for young candidates. Some people have little idea of the Church beyond their own parish, other traditions within the Church or views different to their own on the meaning of vocation, priesthood and spirituality. However young or old, there need to be wide interests in people and in issues of life, in Church and state.

Carelessness of thinking, reading and preparation. Some of the application forms are appalling. They should be drafted, discussed with someone else, and then checked and finalised. Careful thought and discussion with one or two Christian leaders about a range of issues of Christian life and ministry is important. Candidates need to know what they have read recently (title and author) and be able and glad to discuss it thoughtfully.

A severe mercy

If the advisers are in doubt, they do not recommend. To have the wrong people in professional ministry is bad for them, for the Church and for God's glory and kingdom. To be quite severe is to be merciful. The advisers are concerned for God's best and right way for the candidate and the Church – not to trip people up, but to seek a clear

mind about God's will. The advisers are required to work and pray for unanimity. Remember that they only recommend to the bishop and that those who are not recommended can return to another panel, where it will be a different team of advisers.

A candidate may meet advisers who are perplexed by the candidate's particular spiritual or theological emphasis. However, if that candidate's experience and convictions are within the legitimate boundaries of Anglicanism and are expressed with sensitivity, charity and some humility, the person will not fail to receive a recommendation for training for that reason. The advisers are much in prayer for the candidates, and for wisdom for themselves. Please pray for them: in sincerity and truth.

Also see Ministry Division's website: www.cofe-ministry.org.uk

The Rt Rev Martyn Jarrett has served as senior selection secretary of the Advisory Board of Ministry and is now Suffragan Bishop of Beverley.

The Ven Gordon Kuhrt was Archdeacon of Lewisham, has some years of experience as a Bishops' Selector, and was Director of the Archbishops' Council Ministry Division before retiring in 2005.

resource sheets

Download sheets free of charge from www.cpas.org.uk/vocationresources or buy a complete set of printed sheets at www.cpas.org.uk/shop. For bulk copies of individual sheets, phone 01926 458461 or email mnorris@cpas.org.uk.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| 1 Guidance | 7 On being not recommended for training | 13 Infant baptism |
| 2 What kind of people? | 8 Non-stipendiary ministry/OLM | 14 Theological training |
| 3 Women and ministry | 9 Ministers in secular employment | 15 Pre-training reading |
| 4 Calling for all? | 10 Church Army: pioneering evangelists | 16 Grants for training |
| 5 Able and willing | 11 Readers in the Church of England | 17 Fostering vocation |
| 6 What do Bishops' Advisers look for? | 12 Church of England: obstacle or opportunity? | 18 Situations vacant |
| | | 19 Ordained pioneer ministry |

CPAS resource sheets ©CPAS. Not to reproduced by any means (including photocopying) without written permission from CPAS. You may not post electronic versions of this document on any website, but instead may post a link to www.cpas.org.uk/vocationresources.