

Church of Ireland

The House of Bishops

PROTOCOL FOR RECEIVING PRIESTS WHO HAVE BEEN ORDAINED IN EITHER THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH OR THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

Introduction

This protocol sets out the process for receiving into the ministry of the Church of Ireland, priests who have been ordained in either the Roman Catholic Church or the Eastern Orthodox Churches.

The process involves four stages: (1) assessment by the diocesan bishop; (2) the House of Bishops; (3) Training; and (4) Licensing.

The process may vary, depending, for example, on the following:

- whether the applicant has recently been in active ministry in the Roman Catholic/Eastern Orthodox Churches, or
- whether he has, for a significant period, been worshipping in the Church of Ireland, and active in a parish.

It is important, and will be required, that applicants have a real sense of the parochial reality and worshipping life of the Church of Ireland before they are permitted to proceed.

Applicants who are still 'active' in ministry of the other church (Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox) are required to ensure, not least for the sake of ecumenical courtesy, that they deal fully and transparently with their own ecclesiastical authorities. Proceeding with undue haste from the ministry of one church to another is not permitted.

Stage 1: Assessment by the diocesan bishop

At local level, the process may vary from diocese to diocese. It will, however, include the following:

- 1.1 In the first instance, an enquirer or applicant should make contact directly or indirectly with the bishop of the diocese in which he resides.
- 1.2 The applicant should supply a full C.V.
- 1.3 The applicant should supply the names of at least four referees:
 - 1.3.1 Two of these should, if at all possible, be senior clergy or bishops of the church to which the priest currently belongs (Roman Catholic or Orthodox).
 - 1.3.2 One should be a layperson who has observed the ministry of the applicant in his former situation.
 - 1.3.3 One should be a priest of the Church of Ireland – usually the enquirer's rector – who has come to know the applicant well.

- 1.3.4 It may also be appropriate to seek references from lay member(s) of the Church of Ireland who know the applicant.
- 1.4 The applicant will complete an application form, and also provide a written summary of his reasons for seeking to minister in the Church of Ireland.
- 1.5 The bishop will seek written references from each referee and may wish, with the applicant's consent, to follow them up as appropriate.
- 1.6 The bishop (with, as necessary, others appointed by him or her) will carry out in-depth interviews concerning:
 - 1.6.1 Doctrine and spirituality;
 - 1.6.2 Attitude to authority and discipline which may include issues touching personal relationships (for example, if the applicant intends to marry in the context of leaving their former ministry);
 - 1.6.3 The Book of Common Prayer and Ordinal, and the contents of the latter relating especially to Holy Scripture;
 - 1.6.4 Familiarity with the Church of Ireland, and of wider Anglicanism; and
 - 1.6.5 Overall motivation for seeking to minister in the Church of Ireland.
- 1.7 The applicant will be required to undertake a psychological assessment with such a professional, as the bishop shall designate. It is especially important that the bishop is assured, if necessary through professional psychological guidance, that the applicant has the necessary quality of adaptability to work fruitfully in the context of a different ecclesiastical culture and discipline.
- 1.8 The bishop may determine whether further advice is necessary, such as medical or academic assessment.
- 1.9 If the bishop decides to proceed further, s/he should then refer the application to the House of Bishops with written and verbal reports and a recommendation, together with the completed application papers from the applicant.
- 1.10 At the appropriate stages an applicant is required to undergo the Garda vetting or AccessNI vetting process (as appropriate), and also to undertake the Safeguarding Trust (Church of Ireland Child Protection) training programme.

Stage 2: The House of Bishops

- 2.1 If the House of Bishops decides, in principle, to support an application, then it will appoint two bishops, other than the applicant's diocesan bishop, and one other person – often the Director of the Theological Institute – to serve as an assessment panel.
- 2.2 The panel may meet the applicant as a single group, or the non-episcopal member may interview him alone. An experienced layperson may be added to the panel.
 - 2.3.1 The panel will be supplied with all documentation in the possession of the diocesan bishop and the House of Bishops concerning the application.
 - 2.3.2 The assessment panel will interview the candidate.
 - 2.3.3 The assessment panel may request further professional assessment.

- 2.3.4 The outcome of the psychological assessment previously undertaken shall be available to the panel or, alternatively, a further psychological assessment may be requested.
- 2.3.5 The assessment panel will make a written report to the House of Bishops and, if this is positive, it should include recommendations as to training requirements.

Stage 3: Training

- 3.1 The content of the training will be agreed between the applicant's bishop and the Director of the Theological Institute in the light of the recommendation in (2.3.5) above, and in the form of an individual Study Agreement.
- 3.2 Training should usually last a residential academic year, or its equivalent in non-residential/modular terms.
- 3.3 The necessary parish placement during training should be non-ministerial it should not involve the formal leading of any liturgy or the wearing of priestly liturgical attire. (It is not yet time for the applicant again to exercise their priesthood yet they cannot be perceived as any kind of 'student reader'). That said, it is important that there be adequate training during this period in the liturgy and worship of the Church of Ireland. The placement should offer opportunities to attend a rich variety of parochial worship, to accompany an incumbent in his/her duties and to sit in on as many aspects of parish life as possible. The applicant may, of course, read the Scriptures in church, lead the intercessions of the people or assist with the distribution of Holy Communion; these being things which any faithful member of a congregation lay or ordained may do with appropriate permission.
- 3.4 However, particularly if the applicant has only recently ceased to minister in his own church (Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox), the period of training should be regarded as creating a definite break between the exercise of priestly ministry in one context and its resumption in another. Such a break is of very considerable psychological and spiritual importance. The House of Bishops may also recommend that the period of training be accompanied by one-to-one mentoring with a person of appropriate experience, such as a retired bishop.

Stage 4: Licensing

- 4.1 The licensing ceremony should be public, possibly in either the diocesan cathedral or the parish to which the priest is going to serve as curate-assistant, whether in a stipendiary capacity or otherwise.
- 4.2 It is important as it marks the actual moment of entry into the ministry of the Church of Ireland.
- 4.3 The bishop will wish to order this liturgy to suit the context, but it should certainly involve a Ministry of the Word, Presentation by the archdeacon and other chosen sponsors, affirmation by the people, the reading of the Declarations in the Ordinal - that is the Bishop's Charge as normally used with candidate priests and the Examination. There must be no laying on of hands and any prayers concerning the priest's continuing ministry within the Church of Ireland should be on the lines of those used in praying for a new ministry at an Institution.

- 4.4 Following licensing, the priest should – if serving in a full-time stipendiary capacity – serve as a curate-assistant for at least two years. If the ministry is other than full-time, the diocesan bishop should ensure there is an equivalent and adequate period of supervised ministry under a training incumbent before the priest is considered for institution to an incumbency or an equivalent area of personal responsibility.
- 4.5 Upon completion of training, the transferring priest may, in the first instance, be offered an appropriate curacy by his own diocesan bishop. The diocesan bishop has no obligation to provide such a curacy.

Where no such curacy is available, or when, following consideration of the diocesan bishop's offer and by mutual agreement, the transferring priest turns down the offer of the curacy initially offered, he or she is free either to seek a position in another diocese in the Church of Ireland.

The House of Bishops retains oversight of whether either of these options is the most prudent course of action, or whether the priest concerned should seek a curacy in the same manner as any candidate priest seeking a title in the Church of Ireland.

Conclusion

This protocol presupposes that the applicant wishes to become a licensed and fully active priest of the Church of Ireland, entering upon a long-term ministry within exactly the same parameters as those training for ordination in the Church of Ireland itself.

**The House of Bishops of the Church of Ireland
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