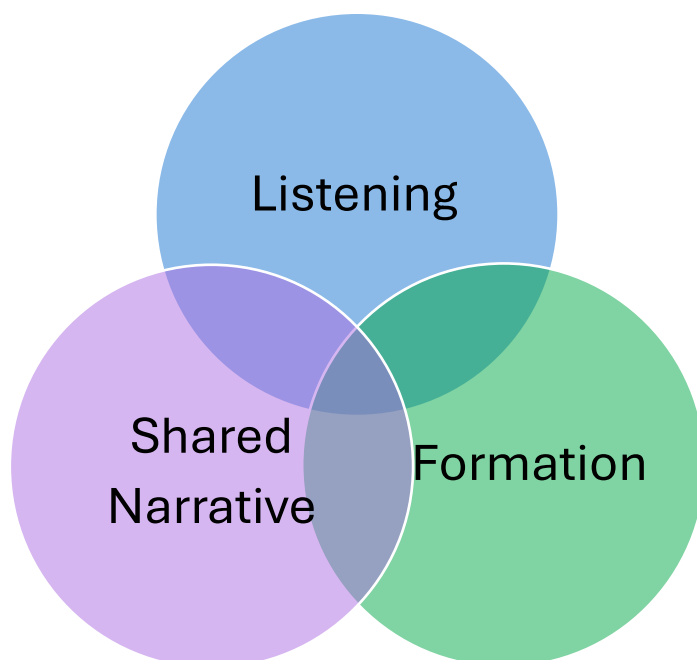


Guidance Notes on Raising the Temperature of Vocational Conversations

A brief guide to good conversations on vocation



The Work of Discernment

This short document offers a way of having a conversation about vocations so that it goes somewhere. When there is movement or traction it raises the temperature of the conversation and the reality of God's call on our lives starts to become enticing and possible and filled with hope. The three dimensions or elements are described here as overlapping spheres of **Listening, Formation and Shared Narrative**. If attention is given to each, it creates a forward movement and allows an early exploration of a whim to gather some momentum. This document is intended for anyone to use, it is not about knowing technical information about 'The discernment process' of the Church of England. It is for anyone whose role might involve listening to someone describe how being a follower of Jesus Christ is making demands on how they live. This is the work of discernment.

1. Listening



In his book *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, William Issacs¹ makes the case for beginning any conversation by establishing a sense of our own inner silence in order that we might truly hear, receive and accept the words of others. This is especially so when we meet with someone with whom we expect to discern what God might be calling them towards. Therefore, in helping us to take them and our role seriously, it is important to put a bit of space between the previous demands of the day and beginning the vocational conversation.

Sometimes it's not possible to do that before you begin the conversation, in which case pause an emerging dialogue and create a few moments of intentional silence to turn off the internal clamour, breathe deeply and tune into the other person, yourself and the physicality of where you are meeting.

As part of intentionally stilling yourself, you might choose to notice:

- What am I feeling about this person/ conversation?
- What memories and associations do I need to be aware of?
- What thoughts do I need to consciously lay down?
- How might I hold the presence of Christ in this place?

Having established some stillness in yourself you will find it easier to hear not just the words of the person you are speaking with but

¹ William Isaacs (1999) *Dialogue and the art of Thinking Together* published by Currency



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also to distil what impact they have on you and where you are experiencing a connection to God in the conversation. This brings into the listening a responsibility to listen to the Spirit. To be aware that part of your role as listener is to see where connections are made with our understanding of God.

Notice:

Where and how do you experience God in this person?

In words, use of scripture, but the wordless speech of presence?

Is something of the transcendence of God revealed in their story?

What are you hearing of their inner life, inclination and emotions, and what impact is it having on you?

Overcome your own blockages by being present and attentive, so you can listen with an attentive heart.

Deep listening in the tradition of the biblical prophets, challenges status quo and opens new possibilities for healing wholeness and well-being (Rabbi Nahum Ward-Lev)

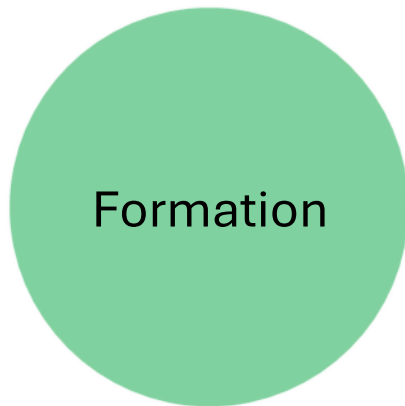
What is this person like?

What does their faith mean to them?

How do you hear their expression of calling (to ministry)?



2. Formation



In this part of how we accompany someone discerning a call we pay particular attention to what changes are going on in their life in anticipation of their call. It's what Francis Dewar says in *Live for a Change*, once you have asked the question about calling 'sooner or later, is the key – generous willingness to live the answer, rather than theorise about it'². Discernment cannot happen from a theoretical or stationary position but from beginning to change direction in anticipation of the what the calling might look like. Pay attention to questions such as:

How is their life in Christ shaping them?

Are they already showing dispositions that anticipate a change (or ministerial life)? And what do they look like?

What is there of this that needs affirming and developing?

What do they reveal about their openness to a life of growing and changing?

What invitation can you offer to engage with new thinking and experiences? Can you open a possible new experience for them, either in their encounter with prayer and spirituality or leadership? Can you share some of your experiences of growth and change?

² Francis Dewar (2006) *Live for a Change* p154



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Is there a willingness to step out in faith, and do something different to test the call?

At this point, discernment starts to get exciting as the explorer perceives some changes in themselves and hopefully hears from others what they notice about the change. As the accompanier on this journey it's your role to reflect what you are noticing about this. As you do this starts to create the third area of a discerning conversation; a Shared Narrative.

3. Shared Narrative



One of the key ways in which a calling is strengthened is when silent intuition is put into words. This begins a move from an idea existing primarily in the inner voice of an individual to the shared space between two or more people. In your work of listening to the candidate/explorer you create the occasion for them to give voice to what might have not been shared with anyone before. In listening and reflecting to them you will help them build up a more rounded understanding of the reality of them moving forward. Encourage them to share the idea with others whom they trust and ask them to notice their reactions. Here are some questions that will help with this:

How do others sense and see their story of calling?

How do they tell their own story of calling?

How Realistic, Informed Obedient, (RIO) is it?



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Realistic: does their calling match their time of life, availability, personal situation?

Informed: what information will you need to give them about the role they are considering in their calling? Can you share some of your less well-seen experiences of ministry?

Obedient: Do their expectations of the ministry they are being called to, match the CofE? Do they understand what is involved in being say an LLM or Priest?

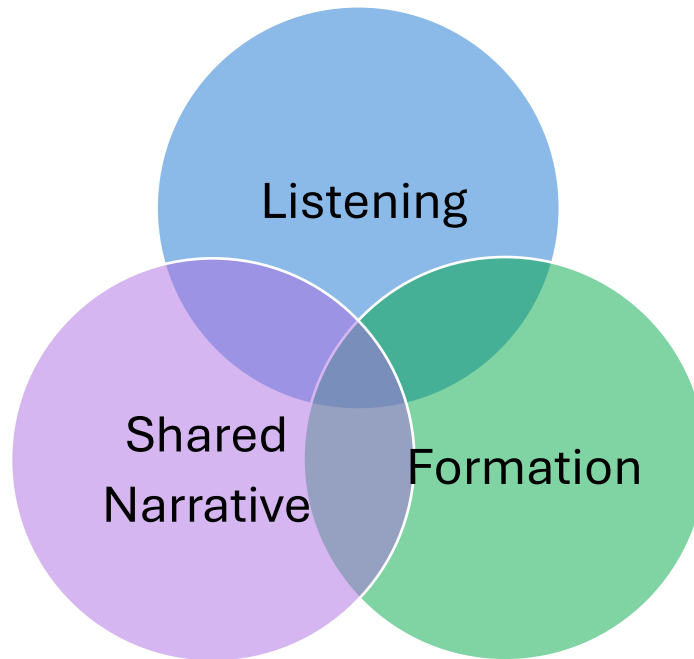
Final Comments

St Paul writes in Romans of the journey of formation through suffering, endurance and character being founded on an experience of peace with God. Our conversations seek to draw others into the fullest expression of this life and into a 'hope that does not disappoint us because God's Love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us'. Romans 5.5

This is just a very brief guide on how we spend some time being attentive to what the experience of awakening to God's love draws people towards. It is the work that God does through the love that has been poured into our lives, but by giving it attention we can help shape purpose and direction. That's a very worthwhile activity for the peace of an individual and of the world!



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If you can hold in mind the three spheres of the discernment conversation as **Listening, Formation and Shared Narrative** it will help give a breadth to the conversations you hold. By far the most important is to be ready to listen and not just tell. But you also have important things to share and a willingness to share some of your own journey will help ease the flow of conversation. Like a lot of things, as they warm up, they gain energy and new possibilities.

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