

# **Authorised Pastoral Assistants – Diocese of Norwich**

## **The Bishop of Norwich's Code of Practice**

The Bishop of Norwich requires that:

- All ministries, ordained and lay, will be exercised within a collaborative team, although the size and shape of the ministry team may vary at a local level.
- Authorised Pastoral Assistants will work with the support of the Incumbent (or Priest in Charge or Vicar in a Team Ministry) and PCC and be accountable to the Incumbent.
- APAs will be selected by clergy and lay people together.
- Those selected will undertake training using the diocesan APA training course.
- They will also have received enhanced DBS clearance and completed relevant safeguarding training before applying for authorisation from the relevant Area Bishop's office and Bishop of Norwich.

## **APA Selection and Training**

The APA candidate should:

- show a clear commitment to personal growth in faith and discipleship.
- be recognised by the leadership of church and congregation(s) as committed to serving God's mission through the work of the parish/benefice/deanery, as well as in their own daily life.
- be committed to working collaboratively as a member of a team.
- be eager to encourage the gifts of others.
- show evidence of pastoral gifts and skill, and the potential to develop them.
- have an appetite for life-long learning in a Christian context and be enthusiastic about following a course of training and formation.
- normally be a communicant member of the Church of England.
- comply with the House of Bishops policies on safeguarding.

## **Selection**

The primary responsibility for selecting, authorising, supervising, and supporting the APA lies with the parish priest. Where there is a clergy team, or wider ministry team, the selection of potential APAs should be discussed confidentially within the team. Where there is no team, the incumbent will ideally have some wise churchwardens or other people who know the parish/benefice well, with whom they can discuss people who might be selected, before taking those names to the PCC.

In selecting potential APAs, the area where they might exercise that ministry should be considered: a single congregation, a single parish, or the whole benefice.

Given that ministries tend to expand in practice, it will normally be best to assume that authorisation will be to the benefice, and therefore the incumbent's and PCC(s)'

discernment process should also ask whether this person is capable of ministering in this wider framework.

Depending on who has initiated the discernment process, a conversation with each person being proposed is central. (It may start with a person volunteering to be an APA or it may come from the parish priest or be suggested by another person.)

As well as this local discernment process, the incumbent and PCC should follow the current diocesan safer recruitment process as set out in the safeguarding policies page of the diocesan website.

This includes an expectation that the candidate will do the appropriate level of safeguarding training, which for an APA means an enhanced DBS check is required.

To help with this discernment process, we have a sample role description for you to adapt as appropriate to your parochial context, and to the skills and gifts of the prospective APA.

Only when the incumbent, other appropriate team members, and the person being selected are all in agreement, should the proposal be taken to the PCC.

The PCC should be able to have a confidential discussion of the appropriateness of each person without them being present. It will be sufficient that the minutes of the meeting simply record that:

- *the PCC affirms the selection of the person, with the name(s) of each person selected,*
- *the safer recruitment procedure and relevant safeguarding training will be completed before making an application for authorisation.*

Specific content of the discussion need not be recorded but the decision does need to be minuted. The APA safeguarding policy suggests this form of wording for the minute:

*“This PCC supports the application of ... Insert Name ... to be an Authorised Pastoral Assistant in this parish and commends them for training. It has received satisfactory references for them, which attest to their good character, and give assurance there is no reason why they should not serve in this parish as an APA.”*

In exceptional circumstances (though the process referred to makes this unlikely) the minutes of the PCC may need to record that a person has not been selected.

In that case a simple statement that the PCC was unable to agree to support the candidate's selection is all that needs to be recorded.

The final decision about whether an application should be made rests with the parish priest in consultation with lay and clergy colleagues in leadership in the parish/benefice.

Where a parish is in vacancy, applications would be considered and supported by the Rural Dean in consultation with others in the parish(es). In such cases specific arrangements for the support and oversight of candidates in training and after

authorisation must be put in place. The application process may also be delegated to a person appointed by the Rural Dean.

### **Training**

APAs should complete the APA course produced by the Diocese of Norwich, which currently consists of six sessions.

The Incumbent is responsible for arranging this training (though not necessarily delivering it) and should be satisfied that it has been completed.

The following Safeguarding training should be completed before applying for authorisation:

Basic Awareness, Foundation, and Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse online modules.

The Incumbent can apply to the relevant Area Bishop's office for authorisation once the training has been completed and once the prospective APA is booked onto the Leadership Safeguarding training, via the Bishop of Norwich's office.

Once the Bishop has responded with a letter of authorisation, the Incumbent can proceed with a service in which the APA is commissioned.

### **Ongoing support**

It is recommended that each APA has a simple role description setting out the mutual expectations the APA and the incumbent may have of each other, and what ministry they will be carrying out. This should ideally be fully reviewed annually.

It is strongly encouraged to gather a team of those engaged in ministry together in the parish, clergy, Licensed Lay Ministers (Readers), AWAs and APAs. Such a team might meet (for example) once a term or quarter, for prayer, reflection and the sharing of ministry concerns.

### **Commissioning in the Parish**

The commissioning of APAs is carried out by the parish priest, ideally during a principal act of worship in the parish or benefice where the ministry will be carried out.

A simple liturgical form for commissioning is provided.

### **Liturgy for Authorisation**

A set of prayers for authorisation may be used either as text for incorporation into the parish's own service sheet, or as a separate and printable sheet.

The provided form of words is a template that may be adapted for local use.

As written, it is intended to follow the Creed, or another authorised Affirmation of Faith, at a principal service in the benefice. If it is used in other contexts, it may need some additional adaptation. In the sample form or prayers provided here, it would replace the Prayers of Intercession at the Eucharist.

Equally, the rite of commissioning as provided here does not require the congregation to have their own copies, and can be used with only the clergy, APAs and leader of the intercessions having a printed copy of the text.

## **Reauthorisation**

We ask that reauthorisation, is carried out at the same time as the renewal of the DBS check (Enhanced), as it is a requirement for all public ministry of whatever character to have up-to-date checks and safeguarding training.

This means that APAs will normally be authorised for a three-year period.

This dovetails with the need for any relevant DBS and safeguarding training which now also takes place on this timescale. A few months before the authorisation lapses, the incumbent and APA should begin a review process. Normally the relevant Area Bishop will send out a reminder that this process is due.

However, it is not necessary to wait for a reminder to begin the process.

There are two forms for the reauthorisation process:

- A template for the review conversation.
- A reauthorisation form that needs to be completed and returned to the relevant Area Bishop's office. Without this form being returned (together with its GDPR consent) we will not be able to keep an APA on our list of authorised ministers.