



Congregational  
Federation

# How can I be sure?



Discerning God's call to Ministry  
in the CF



# Are you sensing a different kind of call from what you had known before?

We sometimes speak about there being three different calls in Christian life.

**First and foremost, there is the call to faith in Jesus.** This is a call that all Christians have received, and which we have gratefully accepted. We thank God for one another, as brothers and sisters who have accepted this call. Those who will be helping you to discern whether you have received a further call to ministry than this will begin by celebrating this first call with you.

**Then there is a second call,** once we become Christians, to become committed followers, disciples of Jesus. This call is also given to all Christians, and we should live out this call in our everyday lives, bearing witness to the Lord in our behaviour and words.

This was at the heart of the Protestant conviction that we are 'a priesthood of all believers'. Whatever work or service you are called into by God, it can be undertaken for God's glory, and will honour him (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Seeing a need in your community, and wanting to do something about it, is important, but recognising and being concerned about a need does not itself constitute a third call from God. We are all called to love God and our neighbour, and to share the Gospel with others (Matthew 22:37-37; 28:19-20).

Is it possible that *this* is the call that you are sensing – a call to a deeper life of discipleship and service in your church or community? Those who will be helping you to discern whether you have received a further call to ministry beyond this will consider with you the possibility that it is this second call that you may have received.

**Then, there is a third call,** which only some receive, to a particular ministry within, or on behalf of, the Christian community. The Bible speaks about God giving particular callings and gifts to some in the church (e.g. evangelists, pastors, teachers). These are people whom God, and then the church, set aside for particular service.

# Is it this third call from God that you are sensing?

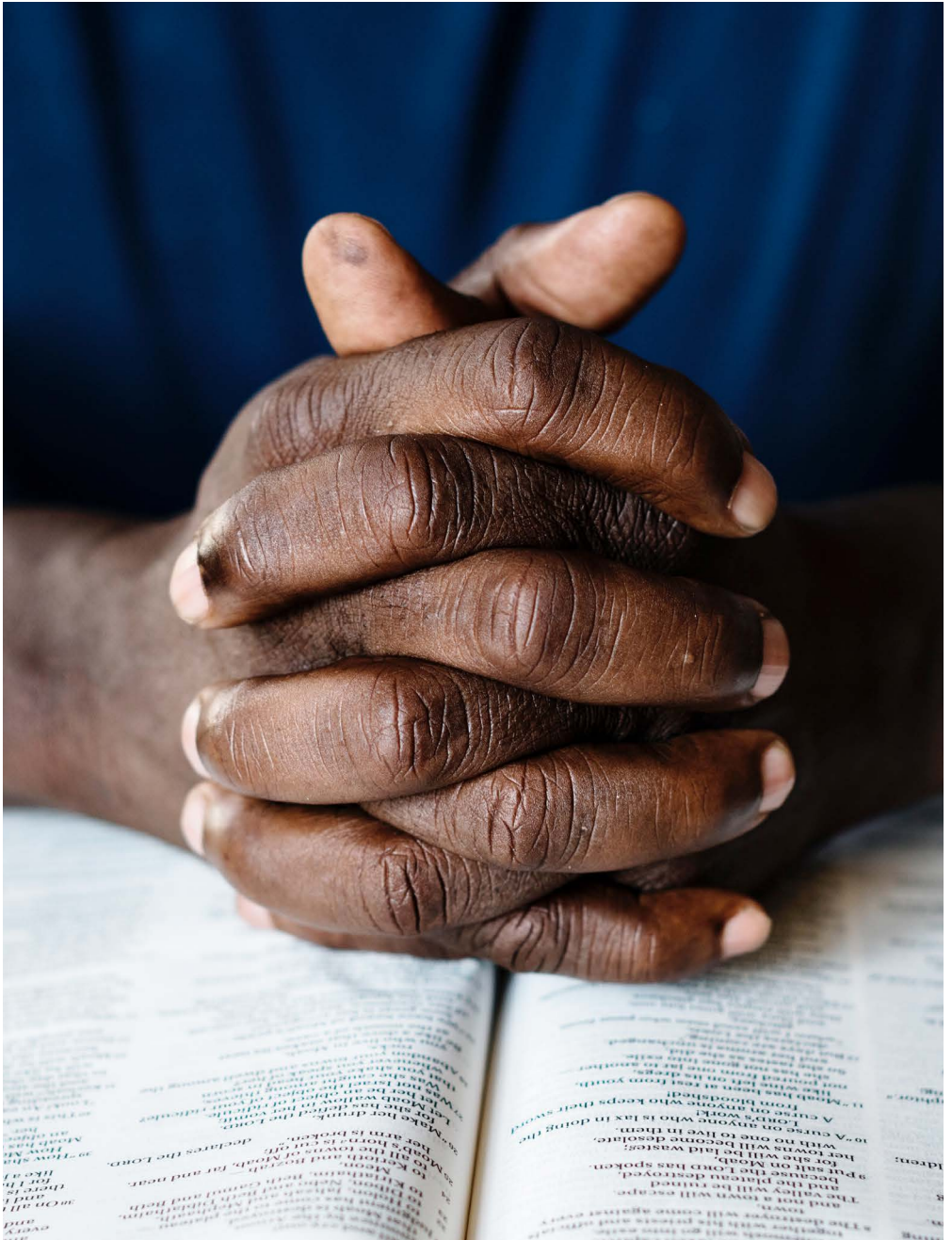
We are here to help you to discern whether you have received such a call. As you pray and reflect on this, there are some clusters of questions that you can be asking yourself, and it is often a good idea to share this reflection with other Christians whose views and experience you value highly.

- Has anyone ever suggested that you might want to consider being in such a ministry?
- Has anyone recognised gifts and skills in you and shared this with you? Do you think that their voices could be the voice of God leading you in this direction?
- What criteria are you using to sift through all the voices - including your own voice? How do you discern God's voice in the midst of the noise around you?
- How much time do you spend in prayer about this matter? What kind of assurance have you asked for from God as you try to listen for his direction in the matter?

- Did the call begin with a sense of burden or compulsion? Or is this something that you have always sensed?
- Is this call something that you desire? What motives are driving you in your choices? Did it begin as you considered how much you love your existing involvement in Christian service?
- Do you have peace about this, even though you may also have some doubts? How might you respond to cautionary responses that may come from others? Do you take any criticism or concern as an opportunity to examine your motivations and discernment, or does it make you defensive?
- What are your gifts? Where would you be best suited to serve? What about areas where you think that you are weak – are there any?

Those who will be helping you to discern whether you have received this particular call to ministry will also reflect on these questions with you.





# Which ministry are you sensing that God is calling you to?

In the Congregational Federation we have seven accredited ministries which we recognise as discrete ministries to which people may be called by God.

**Minister**

**Preacher**

**Chaplain**

**Tutor**

**Mission Enabler**

**Spiritual Enabler**

**Pioneer Minister**

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Have you been aware of these different ministries? It will be important to differentiate among them to be able to discern the one to which you believe God may be calling you. These ministries require distinctive types of temperament, graces and skill sets, as well as having core values and principles shared by them all.

## Testing the call

We really *are* here to help you to discern whether you have received such a call. No one wants there to be any mistake or doubt about this matter.

- You don't want to have been mis-hearing God, and then finding yourself unhappy and stressed in ministry, probably badly affecting your family, as well.
- Those who will be benefiting from your ministry, believing that you have answered a call from God, don't want you to have mis-heard God. They are concerned both for you and for those like themselves who are directly affected by your ministry.
- God himself only wants the people that he has chosen, and has been preparing and equipping, to be in one of our ministries.



## Testing the call with your own church

At an early stage of the process of discernment you will be asked to set out your involvement with a local church. Are you a member of a church, and if so, for how long? How well do they know you? Do they recognise your gifts and your sense of call? Are you actively involved in the worship and life of that church?

Because this is the group of Christians who know you best, we expect the Church Meeting to support you on your journey of discernment. We would be surprised if you had not mentioned this to the minister (if there is one) or to the deacons, and if you had not prayed together about this. If your church cannot yet recommend you for ministry, then, understandably, the Congregational Federation would need to explore the reasons for this.

## Testing the call with your own Area

The formal side of applying to be considered for accreditation begins by completing a simple form and submitting this to the Accreditation Group of the Congregational Federation. When this form has been received, reviewed and prayed through, an interview will be arranged within your Area. The interview will be conducted by people from the Area who are involved in ministry and broader service, including the Area's Pastoral Care Coordinator. Apart from anything else, they will be able to help you with any questions that you may have regarding the whole discernment process.

Among matters discussed and prayed through with you, the interviewers will ask you about your wider involvement, beyond your own church, in the life of the Congregational Federation. We are interested to see what your commitment has been to our wider community if you are seeking to become one of our accredited ministers.

If, following this interview, your Area cannot yet recommend you for ministry, then, understandably, the Congregational Federation would need to explore the reasons for this.



# Testing the call across the Congregational Federation

If there has been a sense among those involved with you so far that you may very well have received a call from God to accredited ministry, and if you yourself are still convinced of this, then, a year after the Area interview, you will be asked to complete and submit a second form, bringing your journey up to date. Following on from this, there will be an invitation to a national interview with your Area Pastoral Care Coordinator and two other members of the Accreditation Group.

This is the final discernment opportunity regarding your suitability for being accepted onto the Roll of Ministries. At this national interview, you will review together your journey of discernment, your current involvement in ministry, your understanding of Congregationalism today, your involvement in the wider life of the Congregational Federation, and your overall suitability to be on the Roll of Ministries.

This is not an impersonal interview, but a shared time of prayerful consideration, and a seeking for a common heart and mind about the will of God for your life. It may be that all agree that this is right for you at that time, or it may be that the consensus is that the timing is not quite right – yet. It may even be that those given the responsibility to discern this with you decide that they do not consider this to be the call that you have been hoping for.

If the decision is one of the latter two possibilities, it will be hard not to be disappointed. But we will ensure that there is support for you in working this through. If God has something else for you, we will be praying with you that this becomes apparent, and that you will be willing to follow him as he leads you in that other direction.





# Discerning your training and experiential needs

None of us is ready to meet the challenges of ministry without a measure of nurture, training and equipping for service. Discerning what would benefit you as you prepare for ministry is part of our overall discernment process.

The Congregational Federation has developed its own theological course, commonly referred to as our 'training course'. This course satisfies the requirement for theological training for those who are preparing for accredited ministry.

It may be that you have already done some theological or biblical study, and if that is the case, you may be able to have some exemptions from the full course. But you will be expected to undertake some guided study, whatever your background, and this is likely to include at least some of the modules in the course. We will work together to decide what is still required in your preparation for ministry.

The course is run by the Congregational Institute for Practical Theology (CIPT), based at our centre in Nottingham, and all the details can be found in the course Prospectus, which you can access from the Congregational Federation's website.



## How practical will this training be?

- Ours is a course in practical theology; everything is oriented towards life and ministry.
- The course is deliberately part time and is a moderated distance learning course. We only gather together for four weekends each year.
- This is all so that you can do your studies while staying at home. Therefore, families are not uprooted, you can stay in employment, if you are employed, and you stay with your church. For us, your study, reflection, family life and church involvement should be integrated at all times.
- Your church stays involved with you throughout your course as you work together with your personal action plan.

## How can I be sure?

It is not easy being in ministry, and we need to be sure before we make a full commitment. If you really believe that God may be calling you to accredited ministry with the Congregational Federation, then spend quality time in prayer about this. Listen out for God's clear call.

Ask God to speak to you through the Bible. But share your responses to what you sense God may be saying to you with someone whose view you really respect. Ask others to be praying with you about it.

When you are ready, contact us so that we may join this fellowship of prayer and discernment. Together, we will seek God's will for you, and we will support you as best we can in this journey of faith and commitment.

**Underlying all of this – trust in God to lead you and to  
'equip you with every good thing to do His will'  
(Hebrews 13:20-21).**





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