A 14% increase in numbers training for the priesthood has been welcomed by the Church of England. An anticipated total of 543 men and women will begin studies this Autumn at colleges across England.
Welcoming the increase the Bishop of Guildford, Andrew Watson, said:

"I am delighted at both the number and the range of those whom God has been calling into ordained ministry over the course of the past year. Here are men and women who are choosing to put their faith on the line, so as to bring hope and spiritual nourishment to individuals and communities alike. In an increasingly uncertain world, nothing could be a greater privilege than walking alongside people in their joys and sorrows, from birth to grave."

An increase of 17% in women coming forward for ordination was welcomed by Catherine Nancekievill, Head of Vocation for the Church of England:

"The Church's aim is to reflect our diversity in the priesthood and whilst we have a long way to go in achieving this, I am delighted that increasing numbers of women now feel that a life in ordained ministry is for them. This is a big step in breaking down the stereotypes, which is crucial in order to attract underrepresented groups."

The figures show that 25% of the cohort beginning training this year are under 32. The increasing age profile of clergy has been a significant motivator for the Church in focusing on growing ordained vocations. Catherine Nancekievill said:

"The Church takes seriously the signs that God is calling Millennials to consider careers that offer the opportunity to work for the common good. We now have an officer working to raise awareness of what training for ministry can offer to young people. Our popular scheme which offers on the job ministry experience is to undergo substantial growth this year."

Sir Philip Mawer, Chairman of Allchurches Trust which is providing funding for the Church's Ministry Experience Scheme commented:

"Young people are known to care deeply about finding a role in which they can help make the world a better place and for an increasing number that means going into ministry. We look forward to working with the Church as they develop the Ministry Experience Scheme to offer a path to lay or ordained ministry for a greater number and ever wider range of people."

This increase in people coming forward for ministry training comes after the launch in 2015 of Renewal and Reform, a body of work which aims to breathe new life into the Church through growing lay and ordained vocations, increasing flexibility in funding and reducing red tape to enable local churches better to serve their communities.