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The Great Vocations Conversation, launched on Vocations Sunday this weekend invites licensed and ordained ministers to sign up to a series of reflections and prayers on talking and praying about a range of vocations – from the priesthood to living out the Christian faith in everyday working life.

The campaign builds on the 14% increase last year in those entering training for ordination – the highest figure for a decade - and the work of the *Setting God's People Free* programme aimed at encouraging the vocations of Christians who are not called to ordained or licensed ministry. Research has indicated that personal conversation and relationships are among the most effective means for encouraging vocations.

Head of Vocation for the Church of England Catherine Nancekievill said: "Each of us has a unique part to play in building the Kingdom of God. Vocational living means responding to God with our whole selves. Others are often much better at seeing our gifts than we are, so personal conversation is among the best ways to uncover someone's vocation."

Dr Nick Shepherd, Programme Director for *Setting God's People Free*, said: "My hope is that *The Great Vocations Conversation* will help nurture a new generation of vocations, inspiring Christians to live out their faith confidently within their own communities and workplaces. The campaign is a reminder to us all that the whole people of God are called to participate in God's mission to the world."

The Bishop of Guildford, Andrew Watson, who is chair of the Church of England's Ordained Vocations Working Group, said: "As I look back over my Christian journey, I've been so grateful for those who have given me various nudges along the way, encouraging me to take my vocation seriously. *The Great Vocations Conversation* gives us a wonderful opportunity to be one of those people for others, as together we respond to the call of Christ to 'bear fruit that will last'."

Rev Dr Catherine Okoronkwo, a curate in Lichfield Diocese, who was ordained a priest last year, said: "Conversations have played an enormously influential role in my path to ordained ministry, from a chance meeting with the Archbishop of York to talking with diocesan clergy tasked with encouraging vocations in the Church of England.

"Clergy and lay people can play a vital role in helping people to realise their potential and encouraging people to explore their vocation. At the heart of my journey was being open to God's prompting, leading and timing."

Matthew Frost, former Tearfund Chief Executive, said: "I thought only church leaders were called by God – how wrong I was! My church ran a brilliant course through which I finally listened to what God had to say. God has something special for us to achieve.

"Particularly helpful was a guided conversation with other participants to help us locate calling where God-given passion, gifting, context and the command to love our neighbour intersect. I came away with a deep sense of God leading me towards international development, a path demanding passion, gifts, experience and relationships to serve others and God's Kingdom."

Emily Burch, winner of Guildford's Young Preacher of the Year competition, said: "I think it's important for young people to feel encouraged and inspired to express their views and have a voice in the church. Speaking to the ministers in my church has definitely given me confidence and helped me to find my role in church."

Carlisle Diocese's Vocations Director, the Revd Canon Peter Clement, said: "Intentionally talking to people about vocations is key. We have seen the results of doing this in Carlisle, and so we are wholeheartedly launching *The Great Vocations Conversation* in our dioceses on Vocations Sunday."



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