

Growing numbers of young people are seeking ordination to the priesthood, as the Church of England makes progress towards achieving a key target of recruiting more candidates for ordained ministry, according to new figures published today.

The number of people aged under 32 years old recommended for training for ordination this year rose by nearly a third, or 32%, to 169, compared to 128 in 2016, [a report on vocations](#) from the Church of England shows. This means nearly one in three, or 29%, of those entering training for the priesthood this year are expected to be under 32 years old.

The overall number of people recommended for ordination training is up 7% on last year, from 541 to 580. This follows a 14% increase the year before, putting the Church on course to achieving a key target of recruiting 50% more candidates for ordination by 2020.

The figures have been published alongside [Ministry Statistics for 2017](#) showing just over 20,000 active clergy in the Church of England, with women making up nearly a third, or 30% of the total. But the number of clergy in paid positions in 2017 fell by 50 from 7,790 to 7,740 compared to 2016.

Nearly a quarter, or 23% of paid clergy in senior posts, such as Bishops, Cathedral Deans or Archdeacons were women in 2017, compared to 12% in 2012.

Meanwhile the vocations report shows that women are set to be the majority entering ordination training for the second year running, with 54% of this year's recommended candidates being female.

Director of the Church of England's Ministry Division, Julian Hubbard, said: "I am delighted that the Church of England has seen a rise in the number of vocations to the priesthood for the second year running. We are particularly pleased to see the increase in the number of young women and men entering training.

"We give heartfelt thanks for the prayers and the hard work of all in the churches and dioceses who have been involved in guiding these candidates along their journey and pray that God will continue to bless and guide them to build a growing Church for all people in all places."

Catherine Nancekieveill, Head of Discipleship and Vocation for the Church of England, said: "The Church of England is investing in worshipping communities across the country from coastal towns to rural areas and urban housing estates. This rise in vocations to ordained ministry is a welcome answer to our prayers and hard work across the country to ensure that we continue to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to every community."

Those who have been approved to enter training include 21-year-old Ben Brady, who will start a three-year residential course at Ridley Hall in Cambridge, in September. He took part in a year-long placement with the Church of England's Ministry Experience Scheme working as a pastoral assistant in Moss Side and Whalley Range in Manchester.

He said: "The experience I gained working as a pastoral assistant, leading services, preaching and helping with occasional offices such baptisms

and funerals as well as visiting people in hospital has helped confirm my calling to the priesthood. The growing number of younger people entering training is a sign of hope for the future.”

Katharine Tingle, 25, from South Devon, is to start training for the priesthood at Queen’s Foundation in Birmingham in September. She has been working as the young adult outreach coordinator with Wolverhampton Pioneer Ministries after taking part in the Ministry Experience Scheme run by St Albans Diocese.

“The Church of England has made serious moves both at a national and a local diocesan level to take young vocations seriously,” she said. “I had been thinking about ordination since I was a teenager – the Ministry Experience Scheme allowed me to split my time between working at the university chaplaincy in Hatfield and with an urban priority parish in Hatfield where I helped with projects including a mother and toddler group.”

Jo Burden, 25, has completed her first year of training for the priesthood at Cranmer Hall in Durham. She was first asked if she had a vocation to ordained ministry when she was a student at the University of York.

“I was still at university at the time, studying for a chemistry degree and I was volunteering at my local church as a server. A couple of the priests said independently, in the same week, ‘have you thought maybe that you may have some sort of a calling?’. I took part in the Hereford Diocese Ministry Experience Scheme after university and I was able to experience the day to day life and work of a parish, from working with young children, taking Sunday school and even leading a funeral.”

Rev Cat Darkins, 26, from Haverhill in Suffolk, is now working in a parish in Herne, Kent, after being ordained a deacon earlier this year. She also gained experience working as a pastoral assistant.

She said: “The Church of England has done a lot of work to encourage young vocations – I didn’t come from a church background, my family were not churchgoers. I am finally doing what I have been called to do.”

Notes to editors

The Church of England is aiming to achieve an increase in the diversity of those entering ministry and a 50% increase in the total number of candidates for ordained ministry by 2020 as part of its Renewal and Reform programme aimed at ensuring the Church remains a growing church for all people.

The number of women appointed as bishops in the Church of England has risen to 17 with the announcement in July 2018 of Beverley Mason as Bishop of Warrington. Four women occupy posts as diocesan bishops including the Bishop of London, Sarah Mullally, the third most senior post in the Church.

