

VOCATIONS

God calls all of us to a Christian vocation but some individuals are called to a more intimate communion with him and to loving service in working for the coming of his kingdom. The religious life is taking up a cross; it is not a 'high road to heaven'. It is to put oneself at God's disposal, thereby foregoing marriage, family, personal possessions, and worldly ambition. It is the unqualified following of God, wherever he may lead. Someone thus called may live out his or her life in a community. After some years of testing, they will, if all goes well, take the traditional vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Such a vocation may not be as dramatic as the call to Abraham or Paul but it demands the same sort of trust and following in faith. It is the same call to live for God alone, to set out on a way of unlimited response of love and service---without any clear idea of just what demands God will make. The person who is called and chosen by God is asked to involve her/himself without reserve in God's work of redemption.

From time to time people ask us what qualifications are necessary to lead the religious life. Well, the answer to that is "very few". The aspiring candidate must, of course, be a baptised and confirmed member of the Church of England and she should have sufficient education to understand the implications of the life, the vows of poverty chastity and obedience, and to be able to study various subjects such as liturgy, biblical studies, theology, monastic studies etc. She should have reasonable physical and mental health as the life requires a certain robustness.

There are, however, some disqualifications and some qualities we would look for in a prospective candidate. She must not be married (but may be divorced), nor must she have any dependents such as an elderly parent or young children. She must not have any commitment that in all honour she is bound to fulfil. She must not be in debt nor be wanted by the police!

Among the qualities we would look for in an aspirant would be those mentioned by St Benedict in his Rule which we follow. We would look to see if she 'truly seeks God and whether she shows eagerness for the Work of God, for obedience and for trials'. There should be a seriousness of purpose in her spiritual life with regular commitment to public worship, particularly the Eucharist, to private prayer and to reading the Bible and other books of a spiritual nature. There might be an endeavour to say some 'Office', that is Morning or Evening Prayer or Compline. All this would show eagerness for the Work of God.

The second thing we would look for would be an openness, a willingness to be guided by the person appointed to look after her. On entering a community so many ideas and practices of ordinary life are no longer relevant and the aspirant has to learn slowly and sometimes painfully to acquire a new perspective. During this time of discussing whether she ought to try her vocation she has to trust those in whose care she is even if she does not understand the whys and wherefores. This is all part of obedience.

Thirdly, we would look for a spirit of perseverance when life becomes difficult. We would want to see how she copes with being misunderstood, with the pain of telling family and friends what she intends to do. We would look to see if she had 'bouncebackability' when things go wrong. A sense of humour is a saving grace and life in a convent without one would be rather painful.

Someone who suspects that God might be calling her to the religious life will explore various communities and visit several times while she and the community try to discern if this is God's will for her. Before a candidate is accepted to try her vocation she may have lived as an 'alongsider' for a while so she can have a greater understanding of what the life involves. If a candidate is accepted for admission to the community the postulancy lasts for a minimum of six months and a maximum of a year. If the postulant wishes and the community agrees she may then be clothed as a novice. The novitiate lasts for a minimum of two years, a maximum of three, after which she may apply to be professed in temporary vows. The period of temporary profession lasts for minimum of three years after which she may leave the community, renew her temporary vows for anything up to three years or request to be accepted for life profession

The timetable of the community is as follows, though the times of Offices and the Eucharist may vary on certain days.

5am Rise

5.30 Prayer or Lectio Divina (spiritual reading) until 6.15am

6.15 Matins

6.45-7.30 Prayer or Lectio Divina

7.30 Lauds followed by breakfast and worktime.

9.15 Terce followed by the Eucharist at 9.30

Work time

12.15pm Sext followed by dinner which is followed by None.

Free time, work, study, or prayer.

4.30 Vespers

5.00 Recreation

5.30 Work, study, prayer

6.45 Supper

7.30 Prayer corporately in chapel followed by Compline at 7.50

If you think God may be calling you to be a nun and are interested in exploring the idea please contact Reverend Mother at the address below.

HOLY CROSS CONVENT

HIGHFIELDS

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