

IME 2 Handbook

Diocese of Chester



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Key contacts

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If in doubt, email ministry@chester.anglican.org and we'll get you to the right person.

Welcome to IME 2!

Welcome from Bishop Sam

Welcome to the IME2 Handbook! Here you will find information about both the support and the resources that are in place in the Diocese of Chester to help ensure our curates thrive.

Alongside our hope and prayer that you will indeed thrive, you will pick up quite quickly that responsibility and permission are two other themes that emerge continually. They are of course themes that overlap and complement one another.

Any form of Christian ministry, but ordained ministry especially, is about responsibility. You are charged with exercising the responsibility that, under God, has been entrusted to you in partnership with the bishop and with your lay and other ordained colleagues for the sake of the world, for the good of the church and all for the glory of God. The IME 2 programme is designed to provide and resource you with the basic structure and content. But how well it goes is a shared responsibility. So, as well as basic things like showing up to events, for the tone and quality of your engagement, and to contributing to discussions and reviews honestly and constructively, please take responsibility for your well-being and your learning and growth.

Which is where permission comes in. No programme can cover everything or scratch where you are itching all of the time. So where there are gaps, please know you have permission to tell us. If there are other things you would like to explore, please know in advance that you have permission to ask us. If there are things that are not working as well as you or we would like them to, you already have permission to let us know. If you are struggling, we've given you permission in advance to voice it. If you need help, you have our earnest permission to seek it. If we can pray, please contact us without reservation. If you are particularly grateful for an experience gained or for words spoken then you certainly have our permission to drop colleagues a note of appreciation!

Take responsibility. Exercise permission. Learn. Grow. Thrive.

And in and through all things, may you draw ever closer to the one who calls you, to the one who sends you and to the one who is faithful.

+Sam
Bishop of Stockport
Chair of the Committee for Ministry

Welcome from Jenny Bridgman, Director of Ministry

Welcome to IME 2!

Opening this handbook marks a significant moment in your journey. Perhaps you are shortly to begin your curacy, or you are reading this in the days following your ordination as deacon. Maybe you were ordained a year ago, or two, and wondering where the time is going! The energy, thought and prayer that you and others have put into your formation to this point may lead you today to a sense of celebration, exhaustion, relief, fulfilment, apprehension, and excitement.

The journey does not end at ordination, but it does enter a new phase. The days and weeks following your ordination are something of a staging post on that journey: a moment to pause, to reflect and to take stock of the responsibility and the privilege you carry as an ordained minister. Take note of these moments: the putting on of your collar, the fastening of your stole, the humble hospitality you offer and receive, the prayer you offer for the people you serve, the times you are recognised by strangers as a trusted person, a representative of Christ and the Church.

IME 2 marks the next phase of your training. Your time at college, IME 1, helped you to build the foundations for a lifetime of ministry as deacon and priest. IME 2 continues to build on those foundations as you learn both through being and doing, and through reflection on your being and doing.

This handbook presents much of the 'framework' on which you will hang your learning and your reflections. We hope it offers enough structure for you to feel safe and supported, but also enough freedom for you to develop and grow more fully into the minister God is forming you to be.

We call this phase Initial Ministerial Training, but we hope that this period of initial learning will instil in you the habits of lifelong learning and growth that will sustain you through your ministry. Take every opportunity to learn and 'have a go'. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Take time to reflect on the question "where is God at work?" Know that you cannot do this in your own strength, rest and pray regularly, and rejoice in the opportunities you will have to share this journey with your colleagues.

Above all, if you are unsure of anything, please ask! You are loved and prayed for and I give thanks for the partnership in which we share.

Jenny Bridgman
Director of Ministry

Expectations and Roles

The purpose of IME 2 is to:

- Assist in the development of the skills and competencies for undertaking a post of primary responsibility or an assistant clergy post.
- Assist personal formation in and for ministry.
- Foster good patterns and practices for future ministry.
- Broaden possible horizons for ministry.
- Equip those who will lead the church through the coming years in the light of changes in church and society.

Curacies are subject to time-limited tenure for this period of training. In the Diocese of Chester this is currently a three-year period. During this time, it is the responsibility of the Diocese to provide appropriate training to enable the curate to proceed to a post held permanently under common tenure, or other suitable post of responsibility.

To this end, there are several expectations of both curates and training incumbents:

Attendance

Stipendiary curates are expected to attend and engage fully with the IME 2 programme. Please put these dates in your diary now. Attendance at these events is expected to take precedence over other commitments. To accommodate SSOM/MSE curates, some evening and weekend provision will be offered. Training incumbents must release curates from parish commitments to attend the IME 2 programme, and encourage full engagement with this. Any absence should be discussed with Ministry staff at least two weeks prior to the event, with the exception of short-notice emergencies.

Training incumbents are also expected to attend and engage fully with initial and ongoing training. Dates for this will be communicated well in advance and should take priority in the diary.

Documentation and Reporting

Curates and training incumbents must engage with the relevant paperwork and processes throughout curacy. These will include: maintaining a **Ministry and Training Agreement**, compiling a **portfolio** of evidence, and annual **reports** and **self-reflections**, all of which feed into the AEC (Assessment of the End of Curacy) process.

Opportunities for Experience

A curate is not 'an extra pair of hands'! Training incumbents must offer opportunities for the curate to gain a breadth and depth of experience relevant to their ongoing training needs, with appropriate time for reflection and feedback on this experience. Few contexts can provide all the experiences needed, and so training incumbents and curates are encouraged to seek out opportunities at deanery and diocesan level as appropriate.

Supervision

Effective supervision will be: regular (timed appropriately to the curate's stage of development), diaried and planned for, boundaried, and focused on the curate's development, including encouragement, constructive advice on areas to work on, space for reflection and review and identification of future opportunities. It is the responsibility of both the curate and the training incumbent to ensure that regular supervision happens – and for this to be in specific meetings rather than in a general staff or ministry team meeting.

Healthy Culture

Training incumbents are expected to model best practice in their approach to self-care and developing a safe and healthy culture. Curates are expected to develop their own habits and disciplines to sustain them in the long term. For both incumbents and curates, this includes, but is not limited to: keeping core safeguarding training up to date, seeking out opportunities for ongoing training in this area, modelling a healthy approach to time off, holidays, prayer, retreats, conflict, self-care and care of others.

Key to this is a reflective and self-aware approach to the complexities of power dynamics in all areas of ministry, including a recognition of the power dynamics between training incumbent and curate, and within any wider ministerial team.

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It is our experience that curacies can often run into trouble when one or more of the above factors are compromised. Where things begin to go wrong, early intervention can make a big difference. Help and guidance is always available from the Diocesan Ministry Team, and curates and training incumbents are expected to seek help early where issues arise.

SSOM and MSE Curates

We delight in the ministry of those who train on a self-supporting basis, or as Ministers in Secular Employment. In terms of training provision we make no distinction between stipendiary and SSOM/MSE colleagues: all are valued and all are welcome (and indeed often required) to attend training events. In 2025/2026 we are trialling a number of training events specifically for SSOM/MSE curates, to give opportunity for sharing and learning about the distinctive challenges and joys of this ministry.

SSOM and MSE curates may face particular challenges, and they and their training incumbents are welcome to approach the Bishop's Officer for SSOM at any point for advice and support. SSOM/MSE curates and their incumbents should take note of the Diocesan SSOM Guidance Notes, [published on the diocesan website](#), for advice pertaining to their particular circumstances. We also recommend both SSOM/MSE curates and their training incumbents read John Lees' *Self Supporting Ministry: A Practical Guide*.

The IME 2 Programme

The IME 2 programme is compulsory for full time stipendiary curates, and attendance of SSOM curates is strongly encouraged, with the exception of training sessions in Year 1 (initial training for deacons) which are compulsory for all curates.

We try to offer evening or weekend options for most IME 2 events, to ensure SSOMs in full time employment are included. SSOMs are never expected to take time off paid work in order to attend an IME session.

The programme consists of some initial training for deacons, and then a rolling programme across the year groups.

Dates and venues are available on the relevant IME 2 Programme document, which will be emailed to you and made available on the [IME 2 pages of the diocesan website](#).

Annual IME 2 Day

Curates and training incumbents from across the diocese will gather for an annual day of worship, encouragement and learning together. Attendance at this day is compulsory for all curates and training incumbents.

Curate Reflection Groups

All curates are part of a learning group led by a member of the bishop's staff team. Membership is rotated on an annual basis, and one curate is asked to convene each group in consultation with the relevant member of bishop's staff. Group membership, and details of materials, will be circulated at the beginning of each academic year. These groups are an important element of your curacy and allow you to get to know colleagues in the diocese, and them to know you.

IME 2 Portfolios

All curates are required to keep a portfolio of evidence through their curacy. These belong to the curate and should be organised in a way that works for them. Portfolios themselves are not submitted for the AEC process, but they will inform the process and provide evidence where there are questions about whether a particular aspect of the Qualities has been successfully met. Ministry staff, training incumbent, bishop, or other diocesan officers may ask to view portfolios and curates are at liberty to choose which parts of the portfolio they disclose: some parts may be kept confidential.

The variety of evidence required with the opportunity for review of portfolios provides a process which should not see anybody reaching the end of the curacy with a question mark about successful completion of AEC, without clear documentation of the issues and evidence of the training and support offered to demonstrate the required competencies.

Suggested contents for the portfolio

Safeguarding Certificates issued within the last three years for: - Leadership safeguarding training - Raising awareness of domestic abuse - Safer recruitment and people management You may also like to complete other training (for example, in specialist areas such as mental health first aid, unconscious bias, local authority safeguarding modules, etc) and include evidence in this portfolio.	
Year 1 A copy of the Ministry and Training Agreement (MTA) A reflection on the Bishops' Book Groups A copy of the year 1 self-reflection A copy of the training incumbent's report	Year 2 A copy of the Ministry and Training Agreement (MTA) A reflection on the Bishops' Book Groups A copy of the end of year 2 self-reflection A copy of the training incumbent's year 2 report
Year 3 A copy of the Ministry and Training Agreement (MTA) A reflection on the Bishops' Book Groups A copy of the end of year 3 self-reflection A copy of the training incumbent's year 3 report	Curates may include a variety of further supporting evidence including: Personal theological reflections Examples of service preparation, relevant sermons, minutes of chaired meetings etc. Written sermon feedback from a variety of people Own materials developed (e.g. small group teaching aids) Letters/cards received Evidence of additional courses attended
Appendix Include here your Log of Experiences and Training and your Supervision Logs (these will provide evidence of experience, learning and growth).	

Progressing Through IME 2 and the Assessment of the End of Curacy (AEC) Process

The Formation Framework

The Formation Framework explores a person's formation in ministry through "Qualities" to be inhabited. Inhabiting a quality speaks of a life-long process that is ever deepening, lived out through being immersed in a wide variety of lived contexts and relationships, all of which shape formation. There are seven Qualities: *Love for God, Call to Ministry, Love for People, Wisdom, Fruitfulness, Potential and Trustworthiness*. These qualities are explored in the context of a candidate's relationship to *Christ, the Church, the World and the Self*.

In IME Phase 2 the Qualities Grid is used as a vocational tool to discern areas of and for growth and development during curacy and to provide the grounds on which to affirm the readiness of ministers to take up assistant minister, incumbent status, or ordained pioneer minister posts in the Church of England. Curate portfolios should be compiled around each of the seven Qualities, and reports will be written within this framework.

It has always been the case that certain qualities which curates inhabit do not fundamentally change as they journey through the process – they may deepen or find expression in a new context. But it will still be important to evidence that the quality remains, as well as evidencing new skills displayed.

As well as emphasising knowledge and skills, it is also important for curates and those who supervise them to be aware of their potential and growth: how are they developing in ministry and what might they need in place at each stage to nurture emerging skills? It might be helpful to keep in mind a four-fold approach to formation of: being, doing, knowing and growing.

You will be given a copy of the IME 2 Qualities Grid at the start of your curacy, and it will also be available on the [IME 2 pages of the diocesan website](#).

The Pathway through IME 2: Paperwork and Key Meetings

Assessing curacies is an ongoing process, which culminates in the final AEC process, which begins in January of Year 3. It is important to note that the AEC process is reliant on the ongoing processes of paperwork and meetings, and curates and training incumbents need to engage with these throughout the three years of curacy.

The key elements are:

Ministry and Training Agreement

These need to be in place before a curacy begins. They are updated at least every 6 months, and must reflect the curate's ongoing training needs. They need to be submitted annually to the Ministry team, and at every stage of revision they will draw on learning needs drawn from reports and conversations between the curate, training incumbent, and others.

Incumbent reports

These are written in the spring/early summer of years 1 and 2, and dates for submission will be given well in advance. Pro-formas for these are available on the [IME 2 pages of the diocesan website](#). They are an opportunity to record and affirm a curate's experience, learning and growth, and to offer pointers for areas to work on in the next stage of curacy. Reports should always have been read by and discussed with the curate before being submitted, and where a training incumbent has significant concerns, these must be addressed early and not left to the reporting stage.

Curate self-reflections

These are written in the spring/early summer of years 1 and 2, and dates for submission will be given well in advance. Pro-formas for these are available on the [IME 2 pages of the diocesan website](#). They are an opportunity for curates to reflect on their experience, learning and growth, and to identify the areas in which they need or would like further experience and training.

Key meetings

Ministry staff are always available to meet with curates and training incumbents as required. Candidates for priesting will meet with the ordaining bishop in the spring of their first year. All curates will then meet with the relevant suffragan bishop in the September of their third year of curacy.

AEC Process

In the January of year 3, curates and training incumbents will be invited to write their final report and self-reflection. This paperwork is submitted to the Director of Ministry, who will meet together with the curate and training incumbent to complete the sign-off process. The relevant Suffragan Bishop will then be notified, and will make the final decision about whether a curacy can be successfully signed off. This process will conclude by Easter of year 3. Stipendiary curates are usually invited to apply for their first post of

responsibility during this time, and offers of a post may be made subject to the successful completion of curacy.

When applying for posts, curates should be aware that even non-parish posts may require a Bishop's licence, and possible moves should always be discussed with the relevant member of Bishop's Staff, or the Director of Ministry, at an early stage.

Candidates' panels and change of sponsorship status

Occasionally, a curate sponsored to BAP with "Assistant" status for ministry may feel a growing vocation to "Incumbent" status ministry. In these cases, the bishop would usually require the curate to undergo a national Candidates' Panel. Curates who wish to explore this should discuss it with their suffragan bishop no later than September of year 3.

Phase	Date	Paperwork and Key Meetings
Pre-ordination year	Sept (or ASAP after)	MTA Part 1 is drafted and sent to Diocesan Ministry Team
	Sept	Deacons begin portfolio
	Sept	MTA part 1 and 2 is finalised and sent to Diocesan Ministry Team by end of Sept
	Feb/March	Deacon submits pre-priesting review to Bishop's House by end of March Training incumbent submits Y1 report to Bishop's House by end of March
	April/May	Deacon meets with sponsoring bishop
	June	Deacon and training incumbent submit revised MTA to Ministry Team by end of June, based on Y1 report and self-review
Year 2	June	Deacon Y2 self-reflection to Ministry Team by end of June Training incumbent submits Y2 report to Ministry Team by end of June Director of Ministry prepares summary reports on curate progress for suffragan bishops
	June	Deacon and training incumbent submit revised MTA to Ministry Team by end of June, based on Y2 report and self-review
Year 3	September	Curates meet with suffragan bishop
	January	Curate may begin to apply for posts pending AEC process
	January	AEC process begins
	April/May	AEC process concludes
	Jan – June	Exit interviews may be requested with Director of Ministry and/or Archdeacon and/or other
	June	Latest end point of curacy, if not extended, is end of June.

Safeguarding and Conduct

The Diocese of Chester takes the safeguarding of all children and vulnerable adults extremely seriously. You are required to prioritise and support our safeguarding policies and procedures. You will be required to commit to regular safeguarding training and ensure that your training is always up to date. It is your responsibility to ensure you are familiar with the specific safeguarding policies of your own context and the safeguarding lead in your parish.

Contact details for the diocesan safeguarding team are as follows:

Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser

Sean Augustin

07704 338885

safeguarding@chester.anglican.org

Clergy Conduct and Wellbeing

The [Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy](#) should be read and reviewed regularly for your own safeguarding.

The most up to date [information booklet for clergy](#) can be found on the diocesan website. This includes information on sick leave, parental leave, lone working, etc

You should be familiar with the Church of England [Covenant for the Care and Wellbeing of the Clergy](#).

You need to be clear about your responsibilities to comply with [Data Protection](#), and how GDPR is administered within your training context.

You also need to be familiar with the [Diocesan Social Media Policy](#), and you can sign up to the [Church of England's Digital Charter](#) here.

In addition to the above, you **MUST** ensure that you have your own email addresses for the purposes of ministry, which is in your name only and which cannot be accessed by any other person.

Support

It is essential that you are able to establish and maintain support systems that will sustain you in ministry. This may include, but is not limited to:

Spiritual Accompaniment: Ongoing regular support for personal spiritual life, with a curated list of those offering this ministry. Open to anyone in the diocese and recommended for all clergy and licensed lay ministers.

Email: ministry@chester.anglican.org

Pastoral Supervision: Ongoing relational support for the tasks and challenges of ministry. Regular confidential supervision from trained and supervised supervisors. Recommended for and available only to clergy.

Email: ps@chester.anglican.org

Counselling: Offered to anyone within the diocese through confidential self-referral to a team of qualified counsellors, as well as through the Inter-diocesan Counselling Service. A time limited resource rather than a long term arrangement.

Website: <https://interdiocesancounsellingservice.org.uk>

Email: counselling@chester.anglican.org

Mentoring: Support for a season for those stepping into new ministries or unfamiliar contexts, or who are facing a particular ministry-based problem to be worked through. Arranged by Bishops Adviser for Clergy Transitions with suitably experienced clergy. Recommended particularly for clergy in first post of responsibility.

Email: ministry@chester.anglican.org

Coaching: Short term, task-focussed support for clergy working with complex or challenging situations. Provided by trained and accountable volunteer coaches. Normally 3 sessions.

Email: ministry@chester.anglican.org

Mediation: Offered on a bespoke basis to parishes and other contexts experiencing conflict and relational difficulties. Provision for this service is currently limited but new resources are being explored.

Please don't struggle without support. If you need help or advice not covered by the above resources, please email ministry@chester.anglican.org and we'll do our best to signpost you in the right direction.

Financial Support

The [Clergy Support Trust](#) supports clergy households in times of hardship or need, seeing their mission as being to "promote and sustain the wellbeing of Anglican clergy and their dependants, so that those called to ordained Anglican ministry can flourish as they seek to serve their communities".

The [Churches Mutual Credit Union](#) offers savings and loans to clergy.

All licensed clergy may claim a CMD grant from the Diocese of up to £250 per year, subject to the funds being available. This can be used towards the cost of courses, retreats, etc. Full information is available on the [CMD pages of the diocesan website](#).

The Chester Clergy Families Charitable Trust, administered by Bishop's House, is able to make grants to clergy in times of hardship. Contact Bishop's House for more information.

Other support

[The Sheldon Hub](#) is a safe place for people in ministry to meet, share and support one another. They have a bank of great resources "across the whole range of doing healthy ministry together".

The Diocese of Chester has partnered with [Health Assured](#) to provide an Employee Assistance Programme for all clergy and Church House staff. The programme provides a free 24-hour confidential helpline, as well as proactive advice on matters such as family issues, legal information, medical information, financial information, stress and anxiety, bereavement and addiction issues.

[The Faith Workers' Branch of Unite](#) is open to all employees and office holders of faith organisations. They campaign on behalf of faith workers and run a large network of union reps who have been trained to support their members through difficult times.

When things get tricky

Misunderstandings and conflict within curacies can often be addressed successfully with early intervention, honest conversations, and a mutual commitment to working with difference. Sometimes curates and training incumbents need help to navigate this – this is not a sign of failure, and in most cases we can resolve problems successfully.

Curate or training incumbents who are struggling with an aspect of the curacy may wish to draw on the support of one of two independent IME 2 Chaplains. The Reverends Lesley Bentley and Andrew Tawn are both experienced priests who have worked in diocesan Ministry departments. They are available to listen independently to curates or training incumbents, or to work with a curate and incumbent together to resolve difficulties.

Lesley and Andrew work confidentially, and will not feed back to the bishop or Ministry Team staff unless they are asked to by the curate or training incumbent. Their role is primarily one of listening and advising independently of the IME 2 structures.

Curates and training incumbents are able to contact Lesley and Andrew directly:

Lesley Bentley

lesley_bentley@btopenworld.com

Andrew Tawn

Sometimes a member of the Ministry Team or Bishop's staff might refer a curate or incumbent to a chaplain, or suggest that the curate or incumbent makes contact themselves. Confidentiality will be maintained in the same way unless there is a different agreement at the point of referral.

When things don't get better

Very occasionally, it becomes clear that a curacy placement is not working, and that a move of a curate to a new context is necessary. When this happens it is usually for complex reasons where it would be inappropriate to attribute blame to one or other party. This can be a painful and anxious time for both curate and training incumbent, and we will seek to work closely with all parties to bring the curacy in one context to a good ending, and find a new context for the curate to continue their training.

There is no 'one size fits all' to this process, and it is always a last resort. However, if either curate or training incumbent feel that a curacy placement is not working, this will be taken seriously by the bishop and Ministry staff, and we will work together to find a solution for all concerned.

Extensions to Curacies

Extensions to curacy length, particularly for stipendiary curates, will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. The final decision for extending a title post rests with the Bishop or Suffragan Bishop, and if the curate or training incumbent deem an extension necessary then advice should be sought from the Director of Ministry in the first instance.

Sickness and other absence

If a training incumbent or curate takes a period of absence, then in addition to following the appropriate Diocesan Procedures, the Director of Ministry must be notified. In the event of the absence of a training incumbent, alternative supervision for the curate may be arranged.

Afterword: From the Ordinal

Deacons are called to work with the Bishop and the priests with whom they serve as heralds of Christ's kingdom. They are to proclaim the gospel in word and deed, as agents of God's purposes of love. They are to serve the community in which they are set, bringing to the Church the needs and hopes of all the people. They are to work with their fellow members in searching out the poor and weak, the sick and lonely and those who are oppressed and powerless, reaching into the forgotten corners of the world, that the love of God may be made visible.

Deacons share in the pastoral ministry of the Church and in leading God's people in worship. They preach the word and bring the needs of the world before the Church in intercession. They accompany those searching for faith and bring them to baptism. They assist in administering the sacraments; they distribute communion and minister to the sick and housebound.

Deacons are to seek nourishment from the Scriptures; they are to study them with God's people, that the whole Church may be equipped to live out the gospel in the world. They are to be faithful in prayer, expectant and watchful for the signs of God's presence, as he reveals his kingdom among us.

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Priests are called to be servants and shepherds among the people to whom they are sent. With their Bishop and fellow ministers, they are to proclaim the word of the Lord and to watch for the signs of God's new creation. They are to be messengers, watchmen and stewards of the Lord; they are to teach and to admonish, to feed and provide for his family, to search for his children in the wilderness of this world's temptations, and to guide them through its confusions, that they may be saved through Christ for ever. Formed by the word, they are to call their hearers to repentance and to declare in Christ's name the absolution and forgiveness of their sins.

With all God's people, they are to tell the story of God's love. They are to baptize new disciples in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and to walk with them in the way of Christ, nurturing them in the faith. They are to unfold the Scriptures, to preach the word in season and out of season, and to declare the mighty acts of God. They are to preside at the Lord's table and lead his people in worship, offering with them a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. They are to bless the people in God's name. They are to resist evil, support the weak, defend the poor, and intercede for all in need. They are to minister to the sick and prepare the dying for their death. Guided by the Spirit, they are to discern and foster the gifts of all God's people, that the whole Church may be built up in unity and faith.