



The Bi-vocational Priesthood The Episcopal Diocese of Texas

About ten years ago, the Church was faced with a growing need for clergy leadership in smaller congregations and in churches with unique challenges and circumstances. Studies indicate that most congregations with an average Sunday attendance of 30-75 find it difficult to fund the services of a full-time priest. Congregations with an average Sunday attendance of fewer than 30 are accustomed to utilizing supply and part-time Priests-in-Charge. For some very small congregations even this can be a financial stretch.

Begun in 2004, the Bi-vocational Priesthood Program has given the Diocese of Texas the ability to provide for the clergy leadership needs of its smallest churches. Bi-vocational Priests are called to the priesthood and have independent means of income, including retirement or other professions. The results of the Bi-vocational Priesthood Program have been encouraging. The placement of Bi-vocational Priests has resulted in new vitality and growth for many congregations that would otherwise not have been able to sustain a dedicated clergy person.

The Iona School for Ministry developed a three-year local program of preparation that provides comprehensive training for Bi-vocational Priests and deacons. The program includes extensive academics and field placement assignments for practicum. The Commission on Ministry's role is to affirm a call to ordained ministry and recommend persons with gifts and fitness for this ministry. Characteristics include:

- An affirmed call to Holy Orders as a priest
- Healthy in mind, body, and spirit
- Ability to articulate a relationship with Jesus Christ
- Proven leadership skills and aptitudes
- A record of effectiveness in their personal and professional lives
- Demonstrated leadership in their parish/mission
- Capacity to financially support themselves
- An understanding and agreement that there is no financial support from the church they serve or from the Diocese of Texas
- Ability and willingness to commit to a three-year formation program at the Iona School for Ministry
- Willing and able to drive up to 70 miles, one way to assigned church.

Initial Requirements for Individuals Pursuing Admission to the Program

- Letter of support from sponsoring priest/Head of Congregation
- Active engagement with a discernment committee
- Completion of application process including psychological and medical exams and background screening
- Interview with the Commission on Ministry
- Acceptance by the Executive for Ministry as a postulant

Requirements for Ordination

- Satisfactory completion of academic and field work assignments as required by the Iona School for Ministry
- Satisfactory evaluations from the Iona School for Ministry, the Commission on Ministry, the Examining Chaplains, and the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Texas

Those who complete the rigorous three years of preparation at the Iona School for Ministry in the Bi-vocational Priesthood track are ordained into the full order of priests of the Episcopal Church. There is no differentiation in the ordination of a person prepared at the Iona School for Ministry and any seminary of the Episcopal Church. Each has the full privileges and responsibility of the priesthood. However, the Iona School graduates understand that they will not be fiscally compensated for their work as priests in the Diocese of Texas.

Responsibility of the Church Receiving an Iona Student

Students at the Iona School for Ministry who are beginning their 2nd year in the Bi-Vocational Priesthood track are placed in small congregations. Each situation is unique. It is the decision of the Bishop of Texas to determine the exact status of the incoming 2nd year Iona student who will serve a particular congregation. Some students will enter as Interns serving under the mentorship of an in- place priest who is either Rector or Priest-in-Charge. Other students will enter into a congregation as Pastoral Leader and Head of Congregation with an off-site mentor priest chosen through the Office of the Bishop. In this latter situation supply clergy continue to serve these congregations on an occasional basis to celebrate the Eucharist. Supply clergy in these cases are designated “Sacramentalists.”

Prior to the placement of a Iona student or graduate in a church, the Vestry or Bishop’s Committee must sign Letters of Agreement that include an agreement to pay mileage and church related business costs for the assigned student. There is also an agreement as to the number of hours the student will work for the church. All of these matters are thoroughly reviewed with the Canon to the Ordinary who represents the Bishop.

In addition, any congregation that is a parish of the Diocese of Texas must agree to revert to mission status in order to receive an Iona student or Bi-vocational priest.

Usually, Iona graduates remain for many years with their assigned congregations and become the Vicar (Head of Congregation) after ordination to the priesthood.

The Diocese of Texas has ordained over 50 Iona trained Bi-vocational priest who have served or are currently serving in the following congregations and ministries:

All Saints', Cameron
All Saints', Crockett
All Saints', Hitchcock
Christ Church, Matagorda
Christ Church, Mexia
Christ Church, San Augustine
Epiphany, Calvert
Holy Innocents', Madisonville
Sam Houston State University - Campus Ministry, Huntsville
SoCo Community, Austin
St. Augustine of Hippo, Galveston
St. Bartholomew's, Hempstead
St. Francis', Prairie View
St. James', Taylor
St. John's, Carthage
St. John's, Center
St. John's, Columbus
St. John's, Marlin
St. John's, Palacios
St. John's, Sealy
St. John's, Silsbee
St. John's, Tyler
St. Joseph's, Salado
St. Luke the Evangelist, Houston
St. Luke, Lindale
St. Luke's, Livingston
St. Martin's, Copperas Cove
St. Matthew's, Henderson
St. Paul's, Freeport
St. Paul's, Kilgore
St. Paul's, Orange
St. Paul's, Woodville
St. Peter's, Lago Vista
St. Philip's, Hearne
St. Thomas', Rockdale
Stephen F. Austin - Campus Ministry, Nacogdoches
Trinity, Anahuac
Trinity, Jasper