

**Fit for mission, purpose and change.** That's the title of our service today. All Readers contribute to that fitness. And because you're Readers, you will do so by reading.

*'1 Tim 4:13 - 'Until I arrive, give attention to reading...'*

This is a great day for the licensing and authorising of ministers in the Church, lay theologians, preachers of the Word of God, leaders in local parishes, fresh expressions, schools and chaplaincies, transformers in society, inaugurator a of the Kingdom of God - and the Church calls you 'Readers'. The name seems a bit, well, undergunned.

Of course in previous generations reading was a rare skill, and the order of lector, reader, was one of the so-called minor orders for those who were headed for priesthood. But today reading is something that most of us can do. Literacy in the UK is high, around 99%, though of course not universal. And so training for years to be a \*reader\* seems an odd thing to do. The report 'Reader Upbeat' recommends a change of name, to the more wordy 'licensed lay minister' or even 'licensed lay minister (Reader)'; a few dioceses have put that policy into practice already.

But whether or not we stay with the name, there's a wealth of wisdom in the idea. You will be admitted as a reader. And so reading will be your calling.

In the NRSV, a normally trustworthy translation, the text reads "give attention to the public reading of scripture", and of course that's a core meaning, and one of the biblical roots of the office of lector, reader, in the tradition. Scripture needs to be read in public. Our Anglican tradition rests on scripture as the authoritative foundation, scripture interpreted and refracted through tradition and reason, but scripture publicly owned and read and heard by the church through its ministers. The various problems and issues that face us as a church, and a world communion of churches, will be resolved not least by our reading the Bible together and hearing together the whole counsel of God as the Bible expresses it. So give attention to reading.

But there are two other ways that I want you, and all our Readers to read.

Firstly read in silence. You will know that in antiquity hardly anyone did. St Augustine in his Confessions says this about his mentor St Ambrose: 'When Ambrose read, his eyes scanned the page and his heart sought out the meaning, but his voice was silent and his tongue was still.' Nowadays we all read silently, but all ministers of the Gospel, and you as Readers among them, are called to scan the page with our eyes and to search out the meaning with our heart. The richness of our interior life is formed in silence. That silence has to shape us before we read aloud, speak aloud, live aloud. You may know the story of the Indian woman evangelist who was asked by her village, 'why do read this book all the time? Why not others?' and who replied, 'I like other books. I read them gladly. But this' and she lifted the Bible - 'this is the book that reads me'. Today's gospel ends with words that I have had, literally, stamped onto the pectoral cross I wear today, in Greek και καρποφορουσιν εν υπομενη, "and they will bring forth fruit with patience - patience in endurance, patience in interior discipline. Be formed by the word. Give attention to reading, and to being read.

And finally, read for us all - read the signs of the times. The Bishop of Sodor and Man leads on Reader matters for the House of Bishops. He has described the core of your Reader ministry as the ministry of a lay theologian. A theologian because you have been formed by the word refracted through tradition and reason. And a lay theologian because you're not in holy orders - indeed, as bishop Robert says, you are 'out of order'. With your daily experience of the world beyond the church, you are called to read the signs of the times in the light of our faith and to bring that reading back to the family of God. To read the culture and to read the changes and movements and puzzles of our society. To stand at the crossroads so that the Church can be fit for mission.

Fit for mission, purpose and change. That's the title of our service today. All Readers contribute to that fitness. Our Diocese is on mission; to introduce more people to Jesus Christ and to transform our communities after the pattern of God's Kingdom. To do that well we need to read - to read the Bible and to expound it; to read silently and to allow our hearts to be formed into the likeness of the Lord Jesus; to read the signs of the times and to contribute the insights of lay theologians to the family. We need you, our Readers, to help us with that. So give attention to reading. New Readers, seasoned Readers, all Readers; give attention to reading, and may God bless you as you bless us in your ministry.

