



**Liverpool Diocesan Association of Readers
Reader Ministry in the Diocese**

**Guidance for Clergy, Readers,
and those who may be called to this ministry.**



1. Introduction

The purpose of this guidance document for Incumbents and Readers is to:

- assist in understanding together the role of Reader
- provide information on the selection and training of a Reader.
- act as a reminder that all have a diversity of gifts to offer as individuals as they serve Jesus, whilst working under the Bishop's authority (licence)
- help those involved in church ministry to foster good relationships within ministry teams and individual parishes
- offer guidance on the process of reconciliation where there is misunderstanding or a breakdown in relationships within the ministry team BEFORE it's too late!

2. What is a Reader?

The Office of Reader has existed nationally since 1866, and has long been a part of the Church's lay ministry. The lay ministry of a Reader is essential to the lifeblood of the Church of England. As the church structures continue to change both nationally and locally Reader ministry is changing also. Certainly, here in the diocese of Liverpool where there are some 300 Readers (as at November 2014) with another 30 in training Reader ministry forms an important part of the totality of ministry in the diocese.

Readers are communicant Christian people drawn from a wide variety of occupations and backgrounds. Working under the authority of Jesus Christ, as part of the Body of Christ, and holding a Bishop's licence Readers form a huge resource in helping the church proclaim the gospel, not just by word, but by their actions in living out the word through their secular experience in serving the needs of the community and individuals within it.

Readers are more than volunteers due to their unique position in holding the Bishop's licence in order to undertake their ministry. This means that it is an essential part of the role of Reader to continue to undertake ongoing professional development and training in order to support their ministry.

Readers are usually licensed to a parish or team but they can also be deployed with agreement to other churches as the need arises.

3. What do Readers do?

Whilst the ministry of Readers in the Church of England is governed by Canons E4, E5 and E6 there is much scope for flexibility of approach.

Readers are first and foremost Ministers of the Word and their first priority lies with preaching and teaching the Word of God. This is a high calling which requires training, preparation and personal commitment. It will find expression in Sunday and weekday preaching and perhaps also in small study groups and informal teaching contexts.

As a lay ministry the preaching and teaching ministry of a Reader is often informed and made distinctive in that Readers exercise their ministry within their "secular" calling. Indeed, Reader ministry is sometimes referred to as a 'bridge' ministry and Readers may in their preaching and teaching reflect upon the the ethical implications of work, family and community issues.

Second, Readers are leaders in the local church and this role and responsibility should be recognised and embraced. Readers are more than assistants to the incumbent; they occupy a key role as 'second chair leaders'. Such leadership will always be in a collaborative context and will always be informed by the missional needs of the church. As the Chair of the Central Readers Council, Bishop Robert Paterson notes, 'Readers are not a supplementary ministry, ready to step in when the Priest is absent, but have a distinct ministry of their own.'

Third, the preaching of the Word of God is set primarily in the context of worship and Readers hold the licence and the authority of the Bishop for leading worship as well as for preaching. All Readers must acquire both skills and sensitivity in leading liturgical worship as appropriate to their local context. Indeed for some Readers the leading of worship across a range of styles may prove to be their primary ministry.

Equally the authority of a Bishop's licence and the identifiable nature of Reader ministry can underwrite a defined pastoral ministry in the local church which again for some Readers may become their primary ministry. In particular it should be noted that many Readers can and do exercise an important and well received funeral and bereavement ministry. The exercise of this ministry is now a normative expectation for all Readers in training. Appropriate training and support for funeral ministry is provided as part of Reader post licensing training and Continuing Professional Development.

Readers are also deeply engaged in a range of pastoral and missional opportunities such as baptism preparation, schools work, hospital chaplaincy and youth work to name but few.

4. A 'step by step approach' to becoming a Reader

Step 1-Exploratory

The Incumbent and interested person meet to discuss a calling to the Reader Ministry; a long careful conversation followed by much prayer and discernment (which may include attendance at a 'Reader Taster - Life call' event). The interested person must be baptised, confirmed, a regular communicant in the Church of England, and satisfy the requirements of the Diocesan Safeguarding procedures.

Step 2-Consultation

The Incumbent or Priest in Charge should consult 'leading people' in the parish, e.g. Churchwardens to test reactions, and the PCC should give documented solid support to the person.

Step 3-Applying/Selection

The interested person (prospective candidate) should obtain application papers from the Reader Administrator at St James House (SJH). Once completed the forms are returned to SJH for consideration. If successful at this stage the candidate will be invited to a Reader selection event normally held in May of each year.

Step 4-Interview outcome

The candidate and Incumbent will be notified of the outcome of the interview. Those selected for training will be asked to register with the All Saints course and will be invited to a pre course meeting by the Director of Studies for Readers and Ordinands.

Step 5-Training, Licensing, Working Agreements and Ministerial Development Review (MDR)

The Diocese of Liverpool is committed to properly selecting, theologically training, equipping and supporting our Readers in their ministry. The training will develop the candidates' understanding of the Bible, its history and its relevance in today's changing world, as well as offering practical help for use in the Reader ministry. Support is available throughout the intense period of learning from the training team under the direction of the Director of Studies for Ordinands and Readers. The Reader training takes four years to complete.

Initial training is provided in partnership with the All Saints Centre for Mission and Ministry, with trainee Readers from the Diocese of Liverpool under the supervision of the Director of Studies for Readers and Ordinands. Details of the training course can be found on the All Saints website, linked to the Diocesan website.

After two years of training with All Saints, and subject to satisfactory college reports being received, the candidate is licensed as a Reader. This licence is issued on the understanding that post licensing training will be undertaken as part of the Working Agreement and Ministerial Development Review process (MDR) and in due course evidence of such training will be required. (More information on this can be obtained from SJH) Attendance at Summer Study evenings and the Bishop's Day Conference for Readers is to be encouraged in order to meet the Bishop's conditions for relicensing.

5. Readers aged 70+ (Permission to Officiate/Reader Emeritus)

If on reaching 70 the Reader wishes to continue in active ministry, and with the approval of the Incumbent and PCC, the Reader can apply for the Bishop's Permission to Officiate (forms available from SJH). This permission covers a three year period from the date of the permission.

Readers who have surrendered their licence or Permission to Officiate can be granted the title of Reader Emeritus which allows the individual to maintain their links with the Diocesan Reader network.

6. Reader Chaplains and Reader Chapter meetings

Each Deanery has a Reader Chaplain, appointed by the Bishop to take care of the pastoral needs of Readers in the Deanery. This includes promoting the continuing training, education and fellowship of Readers, and to this end it is the Chaplain's responsibility to arrange regular meetings of the Reader Chapter. The Reader Chaplain may be a Priest or a Reader.

Readers are reminded that they accept with their licence an obligation to be part of their Deanery Chapter.

When a Deanery Reader Chaplain wishes to retire he or she should liaise with the Area Dean to identify a suitable replacement, whose name may then be recommended to the Bishop.

7. Interregnums/long term clergy absences/new clergy appointments

During interregnums and long term clergy absences when clergy are not available expectations of local Reader ministry resources should be carefully considered by the Area Dean. It is clearly understood that the Reader does not take the place of the incumbent, and therefore expectations should be proportionate, realistic and agreed with the Reader(s) and the PCC.

It is also very important that clergy coming to a parish with Reader(s) in place are deemed to have signed up to supporting the Reader ministry and will be contacted by the Deanery Chaplain/Warden to talk them through the opportunities and implications that this valuable local resource presents.

8. Mental health and the welfare of all Licensed Ministers (including Readers)

In December 2014 a Diocesan 'Task and Finish Group' was established under the direction of the Core Group with the remit of producing a report on this issue for consideration. Further information on this issue will be published in 2015 and will be incorporated into this document.

9. Guidance and advice on how to avoid or resolve problems in ministry team relationships

It is true to say that from time to time problems occur in relationships despite the call to 'love one another.'! The important point to make is the need to be aware of problems as they develop.

There are 3 stages to recognising conflict (Thomas Kilman)

Stage 1 Warning stage - Petty arguments, body language, comments made by others

Stage 2 Growing Stage – people become hostile, perhaps arguments ensue, or divisions in ministry teams start appearing

Stage 3 'Fighting' stage – serious disputes erupt, verbal aggression, health issues occur, family stress, absence from church activities. Congregations can be seriously affected at this stage

Some causes of conflict:

Fear, personalities, expectations, misunderstanding, stress, communication barriers, emotions, values.

Ways of addressing or seeking reconciliation to the problem:

Avoidance – Although it might be useful initially to allow time for minor problems to dissipate without over-playing them, it is important that the parties communicate before major problems develop. Sensitivity and discernment are required to determine when this should be.

Collaboration - Work together to find a mutually beneficial solution. This requires trust, respect, communication and PRAYER!

Compromise - Find a middle ground where each party can be partially or wholly satisfied.

Accommodation – Surrender one's own needs/wishes to accommodate the other.

If the problem cannot be resolved it may be necessary to involve the Area Dean and the Deanery Chaplain of Readers, who can provide 'neutral ground'. If all attempts at local reconciliation fail, a Diocesan mediation/conciliation service can be provided, e.g. through the offices of the Warden of Readers and/or the Bishop of Warrington.

No public announcements should be made and all discussions must remain confidential until discussion has taken place with appropriate Diocesan representatives.

10. Finance

Readers are on the whole voluntary ministers and therefore do not receive a fee for undertaking a service of worship. However, in agreement with their PCC, Readers may reclaim the cost of legitimate sermon resources and study books.

There is no legal requirement for a PCC to pay towards the maintenance of a Reader's robes, however all PCCs are requested to look favourably on any such request.

In regard to the statutory DBF fee that is due for each funeral or burial, the law allows a DBF to give a proportion of its fee to the Reader who took the service. Within the Liverpool diocese the proportion claimable, at time of publication, was 50%. It is an individual decision for each Reader whether to take a proportion of the DBF's fee or not. If a Reader chooses to take part of the DBF fee, then they must be made aware that this money is taxable income and must be declared to HMRC for tax purposes.

(Such a declaration could be through a PCC's own PAYE Scheme, or through the Reader's own HMRC Self Assessment form.) Obviously, where a Reader chooses not to take any of the DBF fee, then no tax declaration is required.

Readers are also allowed to claim reasonable travel expenses, at the agreed diocesan rate, in regard to funerals and burials. Such expenses are taken from the PCC's statutory fee and do not incur a tax liability.

Footnote

This document published June 2015 replaces 'Reader Ministry in the Diocese - Guidelines for Incumbents, Readers and those who may be called' document published in February 2002.