



RENEWING  
Ministry

# Readers and Renewing Ministry



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Prepared by the  
Diocese of Derby Readers' Board

Diocese  
of Derby



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND

## Reader Ministry

Reader ministry has changed considerably since its revival in 1866, and continues to adapt to changing circumstances and needs in the Church.

As well as undertaking any of those ministries which are shared with other lay Christians, Readers hold the Bishop's licence to preach and to preside at non-sacramental worship. They work in partnership with their clergy, and require the incumbent's permission to exercise their ministry in a given place.

Two particular areas of ministry which are commonly exercised by Readers require permission additional to the licence. These are the taking of funerals and presidency at a service of *Public Worship with Communion by Extension*.

On these and other general matters of Reader ministry, including the national Canons and Bishops' Regulations, the 2004 handbook *Reader Ministry in Derby Diocese* is the best guide, and its content will not be reproduced here. Copies are available from the CDDM office at Church House (01332 388 670), and should be in all parishes. The remainder of this paper deals with the areas in which the Readers' Board foresees Reader Ministry developing in the new context of *Renewing Ministry*.

## Licensing

Readers minister up to the age of 70 (strictly speaking, until the Advent Sunday after the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday) under licence held from the Bishop and renewed triennially. After 70, many Readers remain active in ministry, holding the Bishop's written permission to officiate (PTO) for as long as they and their incumbents agree to be appropriate.

At present, Readers are licensed to a benefice. Where that benefice includes more than one parish, working practices vary. In some cases Readers work across all member churches; in others they focus their ministry on one. The Readers' Board is recommending that we move to license all Readers to MMAs rather than to parishes or benefices. Clearly this will mean no formal change in single-benefice MMAs, but we would encourage such MMAs still to look at any developments in the ministry of Readers which might appropriately take place at this time.

This comes with the recognition that working practices will vary at least as much in MMAs as at present in multi-parish benefices. In many cases individual Readers will continue to focus their ministry on an individual congregation or subset of the churches of the MMA. In others, Readers will develop a wider ministry over the whole of the MMA's congregations perhaps exercising a specialist ministry according to personal gifts and skills.

## Working Agreements and Ministry Review

This recognition of the different ministries which will be exercised by Readers in the MMA should be reflected in Working Agreements, reviewed and signed annually. The intention of the Working Agreement is to help to clarify the expectations, on both sides, of a Reader's ministerial work and commitment. There is no single expectation for what a Reader will do, recognising that some Readers are able to give full-time ministry, some are able only to offer ministry occasionally due to other commitments and many are in between. In addition, Readers' different gifts and skills lead to considerable divergence in practical ministry.

The Readers' Board recommends that the Working Agreement should be made between each Reader and the Area Vicar, recognising the intention of *Renewing Ministry* to encourage integration of ministry as far as possible in each situation.

This comes with the recognition that in some, especially large, MMAs, the best approach may be for the Working Agreement to be drawn up with the clergy of the Reader's 'home' church and countersigned by the Area Vicar. This will be a matter for local decision, and might be advisable where a Reader's ministry will be principally focussed on one church within the MMA.

The triennial Ministry Review will remain important, particularly in identifying areas for ministerial development. Whether this takes place between the Reader and Area Vicar or local incumbent, or for that matter as part of a whole-team process, will be a local decision.

## Readers and Leadership Teams

Readers operate as part of ministry teams, and *Renewing Ministry* will make it even more important that these teams work smoothly, with good communication. Readers, clergy and others in ministry should meet regularly (though not necessarily often!) to pray and share the process of seeking God's guidance for the ministry and mission delivered in the MMA. This is distinct from any diary meetings to plan preaching rotas etc.

## Finances

At present, Readers leading worship and preaching outside their own benefice are usually able to claim expenses through the Readers' Board. This will continue for services outside the MMA.

Within the MMA, we anticipate (and hope for) more exchange of ministries. This should not be at the



personal expense of the Readers (or clergy) involved, and so we continue to encourage the full reimbursement of expenses of office.

**Within the MMA, two options are possible.**

1. In the interim period as MMA finances move towards integration, expenses of travel between churches could be reimbursed by the receiving congregation
2. Where MMAs are working on a more integrated basis of ministry, an MMA account could be set up, with each partner church contributing proportionally, from which all ministerial expenses would be paid.

## Vocations and Training

Part of the ethos of *Renewing Ministry* is for each MMA to identify its own ministry needs as a whole. This leads on to an attempt, with God's help, to resource those needs. In turn, this requires a more proactive approach to encouraging vocations than has often been the case in the past.

If it is clear that the MMA needs more Reader ministry than can be provided through its current staffing, the first approach should be to look for potential Readers from within the congregations. Reader training is open to lay Christians who are communicant Anglicans between 20 and 65 at the point of beginning training.

As soon as possible, please contact the Warden of Readers, so that the discernment and application process can be guided through smoothly. Candidates with the backing of their PCCs are interviewed by a selection panel, and if recommended will go forward to a three-year training course. During the course, they may begin to exercise Reader ministry under supervision, and in line with their needs and commitments during training. At the end of training, Readers will normally be licensed to their 'sending' MMA, though in a few cases another MMA will be identified by agreement.

Where there is no possibility of developing local Reader ministry further, the Warden of Readers may be able to suggest a move of ministry for a Reader from a neighbouring MMA. In the short term, we anticipate that most Readers will, though, be fully occupied in the developments of their own MMAs, and so the number of Readers available for redeployment, already small, may fall further.

## Possibilities

*Renewing Ministry* opens up many possibilities for renewal of our collaboration in ministry. Readers will play a major role in the ministry of many MMAs, and their ministries will vary widely. We need to recognise that all Readers are volunteers, and for many, their time available for 'church-based' ministry is constrained by other heavy commitments.

The Readers' Board is cautious about the possibility of Readers serving officially as 'minister in charge' within MMAs. In particular, it is felt that the need to 'bring in' sacramental ministry from outside would make this

position hard to sustain with integrity. However, it must be recognised that in many cases the Reader will be the 'local minister' with continuous contact with one congregation. In these cases, we would argue for the provision of appropriate further training and resourcing.

The situation of Readers in the diocese will continue to be monitored, and the Readers' Board and CME officer will seek to provide appropriate education and training.

## Resources specific to Reader ministry

The Warden and Assistant Warden of Readers are available to consult and advise on any matters relating to Reader ministry.

**Warden of Readers**

The Rev'd Nick Watson  
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### Local resources, available from the CDDM office:

*Reader Ministry in the Diocese of Derby* (2004)  
General information and advice on Reader ministry.

*An assessment of the role, purpose and future of licensed lay ministry in the Church of England, with particular reference to Reader ministry in the Diocese of Derby* (2004) – MA dissertation by George Lewis (available only by email, and with Mr Lewis' kind permission)

### National Resources

*Copies are available on loan from the Warden of Readers*

*Reader Ministry and Training, 2000 and beyond* (2000, Ministry Division)  
Reflection and analysis on the (pre-Hind) state and future of Reader ministry and training

*Bridging the Gap – Reader Ministry Today* (2003)  
Essays introducing Reader ministry, accessible to those considering vocations

**Readers' National Website -**

[www.readers.cofe.anglican.org](http://www.readers.cofe.anglican.org)

a growing resource of information, documents and news on Reader ministry