



# Reader Training in the Diocese of Coventry

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In the Diocese of Coventry we understand Readers to be lay people in the Church of England from all walks of life who are

- called by God,
- theologically trained,
- and licensed by the Church to:
  - preach
  - teach
  - lead worship
  - and assist in pastoral
  - evangelistic and
  - liturgical work.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows we explore what Reader ministry today looks like, and how their calling, training and licensing are handled in the Diocese of Coventry.

## Coventry Diocesan Training Partnership

Coventry Cathedral and Diocesan Offices,  
1 Hilltop,  
Coventry CV1 5AB

**Principal:**

The Revd Canon Dr Richard Cooke  
[Richard.Cooke@CovCofE.org](mailto:Richard.Cooke@CovCofE.org)  
Tel: 07952 544820

**Discipleship and Mission Development Adviser:**

Katherine Walakira  
[Katherine.Walakira@CovCofE.org](mailto:Katherine.Walakira@CovCofE.org)  
Tel: 07507 721612

**Administrator:**

Sarah Palmer  
[Sarah.Palmer@CovCofE.org](mailto:Sarah.Palmer@CovCofE.org)  
Tel: 02476 521316

**BCDM Administrator:**

Rebecca Henney  
[Rebecca.Henney@CovCofE.org](mailto:Rebecca.Henney@CovCofE.org)  
Tel: 02476 521303

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.readers.cofe.anglican.org/>

# 1. Introduction – ‘lay people in the Church of England from all walks of life’

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Readers were introduced into the Church of England by Archbishop Matthew Parker in 1559, as a means of providing continuing ministry in parishes without incumbents. They were lay men authorised to offer pastoral and some liturgical ministry (they were not allowed to preach) in places where there might otherwise not be any ministry. They were committed to continuing ministry in that place. Though initially seen as a stop-gap, this form of Reader ministry continued for about two hundred years, predominantly in more remote rural areas, before it died out.

In 1866 the office of Reader was revived, with lay men licensed to be a bridge between the more highly educated and often higher class clergy, and ordinary working people. Like their predecessors, the primary task of these Readers was pastoral and educational work, and occasionally taking services of Morning or Evening Prayer. They were unpaid and operated at first not in parish churches but usually in slum areas, in ‘mission churches’ or halls, in pubs and houses. Later, Reader ministry was extended into rural areas, especially those without much clergy ministry, returning in many ways to the pattern of ministry of their 16<sup>th</sup> Century predecessors. Readers began to lead worship in parish churches and in some cases were paid to work full time. Under the pressures of the First World War a regular preaching ministry for Readers developed, while during the Second World War many found themselves temporarily in charge of parishes, once again echoing their forbears. Reader ministry was extended to women in 1969, anticipating the ordination of women as priests by 25 years.

As formally recognised lay ministers, Readers have been the catalysts of a quiet revolution that opened the way for the development and flourishing of lay ministry in general in the Church of England. Today it is common for a range of people to lead worship and to preach in church, to act as representatives of the local church in their community in a whole variety of ways and to see this as their ministry. In doing this we reflect something of the vitality and understanding of the early Church, where ministry was not the preserve of the few on behalf of the many, but shared by the whole people of God as the body of Christ (See, for example, Romans 12.6-8; 1 Cor. 12.4-11; Ephesians 4.1-16) and also of the Continental Reformation’s re-appropriation of that understanding in Luther and Calvin that is often called the ‘priesthood of all believers.’

Readers were also crucial catalysts in another aspect of the changing face of ministry in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Originally chosen precisely because they were not generally of the same social class as the clergy, they showed by their ministry that a good understanding of theology and the ability to preach it and, importantly, to relate it to everyday life, was possible for those who were not Oxbridge graduates. This in turn has been part of the breaking down of social and educational barriers to ordination in the Church of England which happened increasingly from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century onwards, and has helped to lead to a far more diverse priesthood.

But these changes, significant as they are, leave Reader ministry at something of a cross-roads. Ministry in the Church of England is no longer the preserve of clergy from a particular social and educational background, and the pool from which clergy are drawn is wider now than it was even twenty years ago. At the same time informal participation in all forms of ministry by lay people has expanded to a great extent. The effect of both these developments is that many people who would have considered Reader

ministry in the past now either explore ordination, or see no need for wider accreditation as they preach or lead worship in their own home parishes.

When we look at Reader Ministry across the history of the Church of England we can see two main models:

- The original model was one where Readers continued pastoral and liturgical ministry in places where it might otherwise have died out; we might call this the model of 'continuing ministry'.
- The revived model was one where Readers occupied space on the margins of society and church, interacting with lay people without the barriers that ordination sometimes sets up; we might call this the model of 'extending ministry'.

In fact Reader ministry in its revived form fairly quickly recolonised the role which Readers had often had in its original version. These two models of Reader ministry seem both to be in operation today.

Reader ministry in both its continuing and pioneering forms was intended originally to meet the mission challenges which the Church of England faced. Today the Church of England faces a mission challenge to move from the traditional pattern of primarily teaching the faith to children (through Sunday Schools and other means) and expecting that pattern to provide sufficient background knowledge for life to a new pattern of recognising that communicating and teaching the faith to adults in our churches is vital. We live in a society which is experiencing what we might call a crisis of theological literacy, and a third model of Reader ministry may be part of the response to this challenge.

- This third model is one of ministry focused on Readers being catalysts alongside their peers, as knowledgeable and reflective resources within congregations and the wider world. This is something of a 'bridge-ministry' in a society which is increasingly unaware of the basics of faith. The role is one of being inspiring facilitators of faith, so perhaps we call this the 'facilitating' model of Reader ministry.

This ministry is designed to facilitate lay ministry and mission more generally, cascading the understanding and experience of Readers across congregations. Typically, therefore, future Readers may exercise much less of their ministry 'up-front' in robes, leading worship and preaching in parish churches, though most are likely to continue to do some of this; instead they will be more likely to act as skilled and wise guides in small-groups, as one-to-one mentors, as enablers of reflection and learning, and as nurturers of faith through vehicles like the Bishop's Certificate in Discipleship and Mission.

The three models of Reader ministry are not exclusive of each other. They may all be exercised by one individual at the same time, or sequentially, or with a focus primarily on only one. Recognising these models informs the way in which Reader training is provided; using general means of increasing an individual trainee Reader's knowledge and understanding through participation in the BCDM, together with some specific, Reader-focused training as candidates prepare for Admission.

In a society which understands less of Christian faith, Readers are likely to become less like the people they work with or relate to. Becoming a Reader will therefore be more of a step into being a 'public Christian' than it has been before. Future Reader ministry will be also most likely less focused on Sunday worship and more on everyday ministry, and in some respects Readers may be seen as akin to members of a religious 'third order' or 'new monastic' community: committed to a rule of life and dedicated to

Christian service in a particular way as a distinctive gift within the body of Christ, focussing not on their individual ministry but the growth of the whole people of God. As the Service for the Admission and Licensing of Readers puts it:

As authorized lay ministers, [Readers] are to encourage the ministries of God's people, as the Spirit distributes gifts among us all. They are called to help the whole Church to participate in God's mission to the world.

The challenge to Readers, whichever model of Reader ministry is primary for them, is to enable the Church as a whole to participate in God's mission.

## 2. 'Called by God'

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Any ministry begins with a sense of being called into it by God. But how this calling comes varies with the individual: some may hear a very strong 'inner voice', but for others their calling may come through other people: 'I wonder if you've ever sensed God calling you to be a Reader?' asked a vicar one day; 'I've wondered if I might be called, but never felt God saying it', came the reply; 'What do you think he's doing now?' said the vicar.

If you have a sense of being called to be a Reader, the first thing to do is to pray about it, and then talk to your vicar. But any personal call, or any call endorsed by a local church, needs to be tested more widely. So if your vicar is happy to recommend you to the Diocesan Training Partnership, which oversees selection, there is a Diocesan Discernment Process. This consists of several one-to-one meetings between you and an experienced Discernment Adviser. If they feel there is sufficient evidence of calling to Reader ministry, they will recommend you to a Diocesan Panel, which will decide whether to recommend you to prepare for admission as a Reader or not. This whole process will usually take between 4 and 6 months.

A sense of being called is not enough, on its own, and the Discernment Adviser will look with you at a number of areas that back up the sense of call, including your capacity to accept the framework of the Church of England. The Adviser will be working with the national criteria for selection for Reader ministry, which are that Candidates for Reader Ministry should...

- desire to learn from Scripture, tradition and the development of Christian thought.
- have a personal commitment to Christ.
- desire to grow closer to God through worship, prayer, Bible reading, study and reflection.
- be developing their ability to relate prayer and worship to the world of home, work and society.
- have personal integrity, are self-aware and emotionally stable.
- be trustworthy, honest, approachable and a faithful member of the body of Christ.
- see collaboration as a hallmark of their membership of the body of Christ.
- have a sense of call to lay ministry motivated by a desire to serve.
- be baptised and episcopally confirmed regular communicants in the Church of England.
- be willing to commit to learning and formation.

This may seem a formidable list! But mostly it requires candidates to show either certain qualities of character (integrity, honesty, for example), or the desire to grow or develop (in prayer, for example). It doesn't expect candidates for Reader ministry to be the finished article.

More information on exploring God's Call is available on the Diocesan Website: the main page is

- Called to Ministry? <http://www.dioceseofcoventry.org/vocation>.

From this page you can access

- Types of Ministry <http://www.dioceseofcoventry.org/vocation/ministrytypes>, and specifically on Readers follow the link on the right of the page to <http://www.readers.cofe.anglican.org/index.php>.

The Discernment Process is more fully explained in

- God's Call Leaflet <http://www.dioceseofcoventry.org/vocation/vocationsprocess>.

There are also regular

- Vocations courses <http://www.dioceseofcoventry.org/vocation/vocationscourses>.

It's important to say that calling comes first in Reader, as in any Christian, ministry. Without a sense of being called by God to serve in this way there is no ministry. But if it is there and endorsed more widely, then the role of training is to equip you for that ministry.

### 3. 'Theologically trained'

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Training for Readers in the Diocese of Coventry consists of two major elements: the Bishop's Certificate in Discipleship and Mission (BCDM), which typically takes two to three years to complete to the 'Plunge' level, and the Preparing for Admission as a Reader Programme (PfA), which takes 6-months and runs concurrently with the completion of the BCDM 'Plunge' level.

The aim is to make Reader training as flexible as possible, recognising that candidates are likely to be at a variety of stages of development. Many candidates sense their call to Reader ministry after having completed some BCDM modules; some after they have completed the final 'Plunge year. The selection process runs in parallel with training, but must normally be completed by the February before admission, in order to allow sufficient time for candidates to participate in the 'Preparing for Admission' programme. Those who have completed the BCDM to the 'Plunge' level and are later selected for Reader ministry are also able to join the relevant PfA group.

Some candidates may have existing prior learning that can replace elements of the BCDM provision, through other institutions or dioceses. This should be made clear through the discernment process. All candidates are required to participate in the PfA programme.

We seek to make what is offered accessible to people with all levels of academic ability. You'll need to try hard, and give enough time to training, but if you do then our aim is to equip you to fulfil the ministry to which God has called you.

## BCDM

Coventry Diocese has developed The Bishop's Certificate in Discipleship and Mission within the overall Diocesan strategy based on the *Natural Church Development* approach, which seeks to strengthen and equip local churches in 8 essential qualities of church life (see <http://www.dioceseofcoventry.org/HealthyChurches>).

The BCDM's aims are:

- To equip and empower people to engage with their faith in their everyday life and give people the theological grounding they need to do this;
- To see people passionate and excited about the Bible, the daily walk of faith, able to think theologically in ordinary life and able to communicate their faith confidently and effectively with others;
- To produce high quality modules on every area of faith in everyday life, the Bible and ministry, building on the areas of the 8EQs;
- To create a body of lay leaders out of BCDM who empower others through small groups or other means, building confidence and biblical knowledge and recognising their call to join in with the Mission of God as agents in the world; marketplaces, workplaces and homes, as well as those who have increasing leadership roles in the Church itself.

(See <http://www.dioceseofcoventry.org/BCDM>.)

At the heart of the BCDM lies the idea of the 'Mission of God', sometimes known as the *missio Dei* - God's action to make, grow, redeem and renew the world - in which all Christian disciples are called to participate. This Mission is expressed by the Anglican Communion as 'Five Marks of Mission':

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom;
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers;
- To respond to human need by loving service;
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation;
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

These five marks help us to locate where God is at work, to see what God is doing and to join in.

Christian discipleship might be likened to a great sandy seaside bay, which we interact with in three ways:

- First, it's a pool which you can paddle in, or go for a swim, exploring the shallows and some of the depths, as well as the rock pools and little coves that fringe it.
- Second, once you've explored, you might want to be more disciplined and develop your strength and stamina for a longer swim, or to become a life-saver. So there are buoys which mark out a pathway across the bay, from one side to the other to help you to train for the challenge ahead.
- Third, so far you've really only been on the surface, but below it there are exciting and mysterious depths to explore, and by plunging down you become even more extend your strength and stamina even more. You'll need a snorkel and flippers for this part!

BCDM works the same way:

- **The Pool - Exploring discipleship and Mission modules** cover a huge range of things and are great ways of just dipping your toe into what's on offer. You can just do one or two a year if you like, and you don't have to submit assignments unless you want to (and you can submit them up to 2 years after attending a module if you change your mind). Some of these modules are available online.
- **The Pathway - Developing Discipleship and Mission modules** focus on key themes that prepare you for a more systematic approach to discipleship and mission, offering an overview of discipleship and mission suitable for those who might be seeking accredited ministry, though not exclusive to them.
- **The Plunge - Going Deeper in Discipleship and Mission modules** will take you to a more advanced level, looking in depth at issues and biblical texts.

| <b>Pool</b><br><i>(4 modules required for Readers)</i>  | <b>Pathway</b><br><i>(6 modules required for Readers)</i>  | <b>Plunge</b><br><i>(modules required for Readers)</i>   | <b>Preparing for Admission as a Reader</b>   |
|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Exploring discipleship and mission through...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being a Christian in a Digital Age</li> <li>• Creation Care</li> <li>• Exploring Themes in the Bible</li> <li>• Forgotten Books of the Old Testament</li> <li>• Global Christianity</li> <li>• God’s Mission and the New Testament</li> <li>• Introducing Christian Ethics</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• The Book of Revelation</li> <li>• The Bible in Five Acts</li> <li>• Understanding Loss</li> <li>• Understanding the Bible - Renewing Your Life</li> <li>• <i>Leading Inspiring Worship</i></li> <li>• <i>Preaching that nourishes</i></li> <li>• <i>Holistic Small Groups</i></li> <li>• <i>Effective Structures</i></li> <li>• <i>Loving Relationships</i></li> <li>• <i>Gift-based ministry</i></li> <li>• <i>Needs-based evangelism</i></li> <li>• <i>Leadership that empowers</i></li> </ul> | <b>Developing discipleship and mission through...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission-Shaped God</li> <li>• God’s Mission and the Old Testament</li> <li>• Jesus and the Gospels</li> <li>• Paul’s Life, Mission and Letters</li> <li>• Spirituality</li> <li>• We Believe – the Creeds as an introduction to faith and prayer</li> </ul> | <b>Going Deeper in discipleship and mission with...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission in the Church of England</li> <li>• John’s Gospel</li> <li>• Prayer</li> <li>• The Prophet Ezekiel</li> <li>• The Letter to the Romans</li> <li>• The Kingdom of God</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worship, Spirit, Place</li> <li>• Liturgy and Worship</li> <li>• Being the Church</li> <li>• Preaching</li> <li>• Leading in a Community</li> </ul> |
| <i>Some modules to be available online</i>  |  |  |  |
| <i>10 modules attended, 5 assignments for certificate</i>   |  | <i>5 assignments for certificate</i>   | <i>5 assignments for Reader certificate</i>  |

## Preparing for Admission as a Reader

Reader candidates are also required to participate in the 6-month 'Preparing for Admission' programme from February-July in the year during which they will be admitted as Readers. This is usually while completing the BCDM 'Plunge' year, though it can be accessed by candidates after they have completed that year.

The PfA programme focuses on elements of training specific to Reader ministry and consists of five one-day modules and a placement.

The modules are:

- Worship, Spirit, Place
- Liturgy and Worship
- Being the Church
- Preaching
- Leading in a Community

They include reflection on the personal demands of public ministry as a Reader and encourage the completion of a 'rule of life' by each candidate. These modules are not assessed.

The Placement is in a parish usually near to the participant's home and involves four weeks attachment around Easter, including Sundays and a minimum of one other activity per week. Participants are required to lead a minimum of one service to preach at least once. A report on the placement is required from the candidate and the supervisor.

In addition to this programme, during this period candidates are expected to complete a draft ministry agreement with their incumbent, clarifying expectations for the future.

## Mentors

At the point of selection, Reader candidates are linked with an experienced Reader who will accompany them during their training. Typically they will meet once or twice a term, in a non-reporting relationship, in order to provide pastoral and developmental help to the Reader candidate.

## Training Committee

The Training Committee's role is to check that candidates for admission as Readers have satisfactorily completed their training, and meets in July before the Admission Service. Candidates need to submit details of modules and assignments completed, their Placement report, Incumbent's recommendation, and a PCC resolution supporting their admission. The Training Committee also considers exemptions from elements of Reader training because of appropriate prior learning.

## Safeguarding

No-one can be admitted as a Reader without having completed a DBS check – this is normally done after Easter before admission.

All Reader candidates must also have participated in Safeguarding Training Modules up to C3 before admission. There is normally a specific training session for Reader candidates in early September before Admission, run by the Diocesan Safeguarding Team.

Further details are available at <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/safeguarding#na>, and from Carol Clarke, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, [Carol.Clarke@CovCofE.org](mailto:Carol.Clarke@CovCofE.org).

## 4. Licensed by the Church to preach, teach, lead worship and assist in pastoral, evangelistic and liturgical work

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The Church of England uses a system of licensing for all those who have a regular ministry in preaching or public worship, whether ordained or lay. Although the development of lay ministry in the last century or so is very welcome, echoing insights of the New Testament and the Reformation (see the Introduction, above), when someone exercises a ministry on a frequent basis it is good for that ministry to be recognised. It's been wisely noted that there is often a progression from having a gift, which develops into a ministry and then is recognised as an office. The system of licensing ministers gives a form to the recognition of office in the Church. It also emphasises that ministry needs to be overseen, and the origin of the word episcopal, used of bishops, is *episkope* - supervision or oversight. To be licensed, then, is to submit to being part of an accountability structure, recognising that we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

Licences are also to particular places, set within dioceses or parishes, and as such are always local. This means that, if a licensed minister moves permanently, they will need to be freshly licensed in that new place.

Before a Reader is admitted and licensed, they have to make the Declaration of Assent: this declares that:

The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation. Led by the Holy Spirit, it has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, *The Book of Common Prayer* and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. In the declaration you are about to make, will you affirm your loyalty to this inheritance of faith as your inspiration and guidance under God in bringing the grace and truth of Christ to this generation and making Him known to those in your care?<sup>2</sup>

This declaration sets out clearly the Church of England's self-understanding, and asks candidates to affirm their loyalty to this 'inheritance of faith.' This includes giving 'due obedience' both to the Bishop and to the minister of the parish in which they serve. This structure of accountability is important, and one of the gifts of the Church of England. With the recognition of authority by being licensed is to given the extraordinary privilege of freedom to minister safely and securely in Jesus' name on behalf of his Church.

Reader ministry is a public ministry, and the licence which new Readers receive from the Bishop at the Admission Service is a formal acknowledgment that there are now expectations on them as publicly recognised ministers of the Church. The Bishop goes on to ask these questions in the service:

- Do you believe that God is calling you to this ministry?
- Will you be faithful in leading the people of God in worship, and in preaching the word to them?

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<sup>2</sup> For 'The Admission and Licensing of Readers', see <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/admissionreaders.pdf>

- Will you be diligent in prayer, in reading Holy Scripture, and in all studies that will deepen your faith and fit you to bear witness to the truth of the gospel?
- Will you endeavour to fashion your life according to the way of Christ?
- Will you promote unity, peace and love in the Church and in the world, and especially among those whom you serve?
- Will you work closely with your colleagues in ministry and encourage the gifts of others?

To the first question, the candidates answer 'I do so believe.' To all the others they reply: 'By the grace of God, I will.' It is the grace of God that comes first here, before our own will, and the most important aspect is the desire to let the grace of God work through us, to transform our natural gifts for the glory of his Kingdom.

There are tasks attached to ministry as a Reader, which include preaching, teaching, leading worship and assisting in pastoral, evangelistic and liturgical work. This is a fairly comprehensive list, but it is still not exhaustive. How Reader ministry may develop in the future has been explored in the Introduction, above, and it may well be that new situations call for new interpretations of what teaching and leading worship may look like in the years to come.

Yet, above all, and in all that they do, as lay ministers Readers have a responsibility described in the Admission service like this:

As authorized lay ministers, they are to encourage the ministries of God's people, as the Spirit distributes gifts among us all. They are called to help the whole Church to participate in God's mission to the world.

Readers are commissioned especially to be encouragers of the ministry of others, and enablers of God's mission in the world. There are many ways in which this can be done.

When new Readers have been admitted to office, the Bishop prays for them like this:

May the Lord give you wisdom, courage, strength and love to do his will,  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
rest upon you, and on your work done in his name,  
now and always. Amen.

May it be our prayer for all Readers, that wisdom, courage, strength and love to do God's will may be the hallmark of their ministries, wherever and however that ministry is exercised.

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