

On Becoming a Reader – How do you become a Reader

1 The Office of Reader

The Office of Reader is one of the oldest ministries in the Church, but it in its present form in the Church of England dates was established in 1866. Since then, the growth in Reader Ministry has been one of the great success stories in the Church of England and there are now over 10,000 Readers, some in every diocese. It is the only lay ministry in the Church of England which is voluntary, nationally accredited, episcopally licensed and governed by Canon.

Readers exercise what is sometimes called "a teaching and preaching ministry within a pastoral context". They are authorised by the Church of England to preach and teach, to conduct or assist in conducting worship, and to assist in the pastoral, evangelistic and liturgical work of the Church in the parish or area where they are licensed.

Readers are lay men and women, from a wide diversity of occupations and backgrounds, who recognize a call to serve God and his world through the Church of England. They are sometimes described as 'lay theologians'; their close contact with everyday situations helping them to interpret the Gospel, and to proclaim Christ's teaching both in the Church and in the world. In collaborative teams with clergy and other church members they work in a variety of situations; in parishes, schools, prisons, hospitals, hospices, factories and shops, among seafarers and in the Armed Forces, with children and young people, the elderly, housebound and bereaved, and with those preparing for baptism, confirmation and marriage. Roles and scope for Reader ministry vary across the dioceses.

In church, Readers can be distinguished from their ordained colleagues by the distinctive blue Readers' scarf.

2 Vocation and Nomination

The call to become a Reader may be felt by an individual or may come from outside; from their incumbent, a fellow worshipper, or from someone who does not even attend church but recognises certain qualities. There is no single profile for a Reader; they can be men or women, almost any age and come from all walks of life.

If you think God is calling you to Reader ministry you should consider questions such as:

- Is God calling you to serve him more fully in ministry?
- Is the teaching and preaching ministry of the Reader the particular ministry to which you are called?
- Have you the necessary gifts (with training) to carry out this ministry?
- What is the pattern of your present discipleship? your daily offering of prayer and Bible study? your worship and witness within the parish? your witness as a Christian at work?
- Have you talked over the possibility of Reader ministry with your spouse and family? Are they ready to support you?
- If you are selected for training, are there commitments in the parish and elsewhere which you would have to give up?
- Is there a ministry for you in your parish or deanery? Is your Incumbent willing to ask the PCC to agree to your nomination as a candidate?
- On completion of your training and on admission and licensing, are you willing to work elsewhere than your home parish?

The next step is to talk it over with your incumbent.

All candidates for Reader ministry will need the support of their local parish church, must be, or become, confirmed and regular communicant members of the Church of England, and will be asked to provide two additional referees, at least one of whom has knowledge of them outside the church community. They have to be willing to train with others and to explore and communicate their faith.

3 Selection

3.1 Process

Each diocese operates its own selection process, designed to test the vocation of applicants for Reader ministry, and to assess their potential for serving and developing as a Reader, and their ability to cope with and benefit from training.

The Warden of Readers for the diocese, acting on behalf of the Bishop, is responsible for appointing appropriate selectors and ensuring that selection is carried out effectively on behalf of the wider Church. The selection guidelines recommend that:

- the candidate should be interviewed by at least three different people separately, at the same place on the same occasion
- the selectors take into careful account the information and recommendation from the priest, PCC and referees
- the candidate is informed of the decision of the selectors as soon as possible after the selection meeting.

Selected candidates are recommended for acceptance onto the diocesan training course for Reader ministry. Subsequent admission and licensing as a Reader will be dependent upon successful completion of the training programme.

3.2 Guidelines for Selection for Reader Ministry - Criteria

Licensed Readers may only continue serving until they are 70, after which they receive a special Permission to Officiate or retire. No guidelines have been given to dioceses for the maximum age at which candidates may be accepted for training for Reader ministry, leaving this decision to the discretion of the individual dioceses.

The Church of England Ministry Division has laid down the following selection guidelines, and dioceses are encouraged to incorporate them into their own selection procedures.

Ministry in the Church of England

Candidates must be baptised and confirmed and regular communicants of the Church of England who are familiar with its traditions and practices. They must complete the necessary disclosure statement in connection with the House of Bishops' Policy on Child Protection before undergoing the diocesan selection procedure.

Vocation

Candidates should be able to speak of their own sense of vocation to ministry and mission, referring both to personal conviction and to the extent to which others have confirmed it. Their sense of vocation should be obedient, realistic and informed.

Faith

Candidates should show an understanding of the Christian faith and a desire to deepen that understanding. They should demonstrate personal commitment to Christ and a capacity to communicate the Gospel.

Spirituality and worship

Candidates should show evidence of commitment to a spiritual discipline which involves individual and corporate prayer and worship. Their spiritual practice should be such as to sustain and energise them in their daily lives.

Personality and character

Candidates should be sufficiently mature and stable to show that they can sustain the demanding role of a minister and to face change and pressure in a flexible and balanced way. They should be seen to be people of integrity.

Relationships

Candidates should demonstrate self-awareness and self-acceptance as a basis for developing open and healthy personal and pastoral relationships as ministers.

Potential for training

Candidates should be capable of undertaking satisfactorily a course of study and ministerial preparation with an open and enquiring mind.

Leadership and collaboration

Candidates should show the potential to offer wise leadership in the Church community and to some extent beyond it. They should also show ability and willingness to co-operate with other ministers and to work as team members as well as leaders.

3.3 Further Information on Selection

Further details are available from local dioceses, particularly on local arrangements for the selection process, and also in the book *Selection for Reader Ministry* ABM Policy Paper No.7.

4 Training

A national system of moderation ensures that all the dioceses provide a thorough theological training for their Readers, recognised by a Church of England Readers Certificate awarded to all who complete their training. This means that if a Reader moves to another diocese his or her admission is recognised and there should be no undue difficulty in being re-licensed in the new diocese

Within the national system each diocese or group of dioceses offers its own training course which generally lasts for about three years. Although arrangements vary across dioceses and individual situations are taken into account, candidates should expect to commit at least 7 hours study time per week, in addition to tutorials, and occasional evening and weekend meetings. Some diocesan courses also include study weekends.

Alongside the academic training, a Reader candidate receives training in practical and pastoral skills. Guidelines suggest that the course should include a placement in another parish to broaden the prospective Reader's experience; this would normally involve a commitment of one evening a week, plus Sundays for the duration of the placement.

Dioceses are encouraged to take the individual circumstances of each candidate into account and in particular to take account of relevant accredited prior [experience and] learning (AP(E)L).

5 Admission and Licensing

On satisfactory completion of their training Readers are admitted and licensed by the bishop of the diocese, often at a Readers' Annual Service. At this service candidates make their declaration of faith, take their oath of obedience to the Bishop, receive authority for their ministry and are presented with a copy of the New Testament.

6 The Next Step

Licensing is not the end, but the beginning, of becoming a Reader. To preach the word of God, Readers must keep up their private reading and undertake on-going tuition. There is an expectation that Readers, like all other ministers, will undergo Continuing Ministerial Education and each diocese has its own scheme for providing this ongoing training. In addition the Central Readers Council puts on periodic national conferences and regional training events, and publishes *The Reader* magazine.