

The Central Readers' Council AGM Saturday 5th April 2014

Strategic Discussion – A Sorted Summary

Context: the big picture

- * Some dioceses question the role and value of the Central Readers Council (CRC).
- * Underlying questions about why nationally accredited lay ministry is independently funded.
- * Dioceses vary in their schemes and patterns of ministry for both lay and ordained ministry.
- * Some dioceses have said they do not want Readers in their traditional form.

One question which follows from this is - what is the relationship between CRC (the Reader body) and the Ministry Council (which shapes the national strategy for ministry)?¹

The **Discussion** focused on the 4 areas below; the question 'Where do we go from here?' was mostly addressed in the Question & Answer session on Sunday (section 5).

1. <u>Diversity</u> in training and in the exercise of lay public ministry (diocesan strategies)

How the other half do it:

- *Chichester:* Readers support their clergy and are valued in their role which is mostly leading and preaching. There is a need to affirm the traditional roles of Readers as well as looking for new ones, and we should wait for a national decision before changing policy.
- *Canterbury:* One way forward is to involve Readers in the training for other authorised lay ministries. In this way, the course for Occasional Worship Leaders can provide recruits for new Readers.
- *Chelmsford* has widened the diversity of training and, as a result, more people have come forward for training.
- *Bangor* has been forming 'mission areas'. Readers lead and preach and then add other activities for which they get additional training (e.g. being in charge of a parish).

Supporting growing diversity in lay ministry:

- There is a theological case to be made for developing more lay ministries (*Norwich, and also W. Temple in a quote from 1945*).

¹ *Consequential issue in that CRC includes England and Wales: there would need to be a formal separation from Wales if lay ministry were fully embedded in the C of E Ministry Council and, perhaps, a Four Nations Lay Ministry Network set up.*

- The laity are getting smarter and better educated, and the role of the laity is getting more important – incumbents are no longer autonomous. We need an integrated national strategy for the development and training of all lay ministries (*St Albans*).

2. The consequences of diversity for initial training.

If readers should be lay theologians, they need training to level 5 (diploma level). Within the structure of Common Awards, we need to get a series of nationally accredited benchmarks, so that ministries can be interchangeable between dioceses.

Facts

- The time taken for training and the time of admission and licensing varies between dioceses; a 3-year course is common
- Some dioceses spread the 3-year course over 4 years to make it more manageable; others admit after 2 years of a 3-year course.
- There was a claim that some Readers train for only 6 weeks (this seems to be inaccurate).
- There is at least 1 diocese where the only lay training available is an academic route (even for Pastoral Assistants etc) (*Rochester*)
- There is much lay ministry that happens without being either licensed or authorised. We need to think about equipping people who are ministering in this way already.

For 'standardised' training for lay ministries

- Readers exist in Canon Law, unlike other lay ministries. This has implications for what they do and also for their training. This is enabling as well as restrictive.
- Standardisation of training is important as Readers can transfer between dioceses.
- Common Awards should be followed and then can be built on (*Lincoln*).
- One practical answer to the disparity of training among Readers would be that funding for Reader training is centralised, which would also provide national assurance of training standards (*Norwich*).

In favour of flexibility

- We need a diversity of training for a diversity of ministries.
- Training could be based on a generic core and be built on, so that specialisation for a particular ministry happens further down the line (*as in Coventry*)
- Admission as a Reader is not like ordination (which is an ordered commitment to a lifelong call); does a once-for-all 'admission' confuse lay with ordered ministry; should we focus on licensing and allowing lay ministries to develop and change? (+RP)

- Within the range of lay ministries, we may need to distinguish between 'professional' and voluntary lay ministries, e.g. Readers and Children's Workers
- Depending on local situations, we may need to uncouple the role of lay theologian from the role of worship leader, with implications for training; i.e. some churches need worship leaders, but they don't need a theologian who is trained to level 5. (+MB)
- Ongoing training is vital, whether initial training was 6 months or 3 years (*Sheffield*).
- There is evidence (esp. in Fresh Expressions of church) of gifts of e.g. evangelism that are very different to the traditional 'academic scholar's' way of working
- We need to take into consideration the pressures on younger candidates with families and increased demands within the work place as they undertake the study required leading up to admission as Readers (i.e. consider adaptable length of time / diversity of modules)

Practical issues

- There are serious issues around the tension between a (necessarily high) standard of training and the lifestyles that many candidates live by.
- At the moment, many candidates train after they have retired from paid employment. With the retirement age rising, this will not be practical much longer. We need to recruit young people now; and their training has to be manageable (*Coventry*).

3. What is a Reader within the range of public lay ministries?

- Readers are Lay Theologians: 'Lay' - out of order, not in holy orders; theologian - trained in God-talk. These two elements combine to lead to a ministry where the Word is important, i.e. worship, catechesis, apologetics etc.
- 1866 envisaged Readers to be a body that reconnected church and society.

Focusing on LAY

- To be a Reader is to be a lay person in a lay world (+RP describes a lay theologian as 'a person who can bring God into the conversation').
- Being lay is key, making the connections between the worlds of church and work etc. If we minister only in church, we are selling ourselves short (*Guildford*).
- *Against this*: we are behind the times if we see Reader ministry in these terms. Today, many priests have spent significant time in secular employment before they became ordained; they are well able to make these connections (*Europe*).
- "We are called to be lay and we can give leadership for other aspects of lay ministry. We are not a storage bank for when we run out of clergy." Said in protest at a situation where Readers were 'elevated' to NSM in response to clergy shortages (*Monmouth*).

Focusing on THEOLOGIANS

- *Historically*, Readers went into their ministry expecting to lead, preach and work pastorally.
- The ability to 'apply' theology in the secular situation comes with experience; it does not have to be all there are the start of ministry.
- Do we need to uncouple the worship leader from the lay theologian [see also above]? Do both need to train to the same level? What some parishes need is not the traditional Reader but just well informed Christians or evangelists or pastors (e.g. very rural parishes who need worship leaders, but not somebody who is trained to level 5). (+MB).
- There is a tension between the Reader role and others who do something very similar without the same training.

4. Integration of lay public ministry (of which Reader ministry is the largest part) -

- Can it be integrated more firmly into the structures of the Church of England?
- Can lay ministry be totally integrated into Ministry Council, so that in fact Ministry Division does the thinking instead of CRC?

Supporting the need for change

- The Church of England is engaging in a major review of the way in which resources for ministry education are distributed.
- There is an acknowledged need for national understanding of episcopally licensed roles and some form of central education.
- In terms of ministry resources, at the moment it is the clergy who 'have the cookie jar'; we need to look at the allocation of resources for training & find more sophisticated access to training.
- The generational profile and the relation to culture among clergy and also Readers are becoming acute problems.

Against focusing on institutional change

- National policy cannot be set by CRC, as all 44 diocesan bishops need to agree on how to go forward. All CRC can do is show examples of best practice.
- Are we in a situation of too much change to think of long term strategy? What we should do is identify examples of best practice and promote these. We can set norms and guidelines and invite others to follow (*Lincoln*).
- The Church has one ministry; rather than look at formal processes, we need to work more flexibly and less institutionally (*JH, and further comments below*).

- It is difficult to formulate a strategy in an institution as diverse and dispersed as the Church is at the moment (and it is also under stress).
- The area of the Church that is growing most rapidly is Fresh Expressions of church – which is least institutionalised and often led by untrained people.
- Many young people are suspicious of institutions and reluctant to get involved in institutional processes; we need to be savvy to the way people relate to institutions.
- The Archbishop of Canterbury's priorities are (1) the revival of prayer and the religious life, (2) reconciliation and (3) evangelism. He has said nothing about tidying up the institutional structures of the church.
- Mission is more important than structures.

5 More comments about the way forward

Supporting the Status Quo

- There is conflict within the Reader body between where the leadership of CRC would like to take the ministry of Readers, and where it is now. This leaves Readers to wonder what the future holds for them, causing uncertainty and distress (*Chichester*).
- CRC could propose protocols, guidelines, route maps, best practice, et cetera of how each diocese could put in place agreed best practice for the discernment, training, nurture and support for Readers; this would help to equip Readers to respond to the challenges of sharing in God's mission (*Chichester*).
- *+MB (Jarrow)* queried whether everybody present agreed that Readers and the CRC need to be much more integrated into Ministry Division.
- The Church of England is not likely to regulate Occasional Worship Leaders and Occasional Preachers; this will not get general support. It is not about badges; it is about what resources the Church of England needs in order to be the church God wants it to be. We must not be bureaucratic about people doing things – people discover their passion (and calling) linked to what the local church needs (*+MB*).

Affirming the need for change –

- *+RP* – Lay ministry *has* to develop. We need to widen the areas in which lay people are involved, and we need to widen the areas of training. The Church should be responsible for these. Change might involve CRC being subsumed in Ministry Council which would be responsible for a wider group of lay and ordained ministers.
- The principle to go back to Ministry Council : Readers would welcome other lay ministries into a new fold, provided adequate credit is given to training and respect shown for existing Readers.
- JH undertook –

- to ensure that in the review of funding for ministerial education the provision of resources for lay ministry was included in the discussion
- to work at a fresh understanding of how lay ministries need to be licensed, recognised, authorised or simply encouraged and to find a way for this to be considered and resolved by the House of Bishops and, insofar as it is a legal/financial matter, the Archbishops Council.
- There was a suggestion that Ministry Council might establish a working party to produce a paper for the House of Bishops, Archbishops' Council and, possibly in the future, the General Synod.

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