

Summary of an address given to the CRC AGM on 1 April 2017 by Julian Hubbard, Director of Ministry at the Archbishops' Council

This is an important time for the Reader community and for the ministry of Readers. As the Church of England seeks through its programme of Renewal and Reform to focus on the need for growth and a proactive approach to the sharing of faith, in many ways the moment has come for Readers to step up. Renewal and Reform has at its centre the work of evangelism and developing disciples, and the need for lay people and lay ministers to take their proper role in these and all other aspects of the church's life. It is a moment when the best of what Readers can offer is needed and when the promise of the Reader's role as a lay theological resource can be fulfilled.

Two reports have been produced to support work in this area. "Setting God's People Free" sets out a double challenge to change the way we do things. First, priority should be given to enabling all members of the church to express faith in their everyday life. Second, a change of attitude is needed to make a reality out of our aspiration for ministry to be shared, particularly between ordained and lay members.

"Serving Together", the report of the Lay Ministries Working Group, builds on these two challenges with particular reference to lay ministries. It argues for a greater emphasis on lay ministries being based around a mission task, rather than around the idea of holding an office. It also seeks to make these ministries more shared and collegial. It calls for more and better thinking about lay ministries in their own lights and not as a reflection of ordained ministry. It seeks practical improvements in the way lay ministries are authorised, supported in learning and training and included in the thinking and planning of dioceses and the national church.

The range of lay ministries has widened over the past few decades and recently new forms have emerged such as pioneers, worship leaders and funeral ministers. It is a good moment for Readers as the longest established form of lay ministry to reappraise the place they hold in this increasingly diverse setting.

While there are no proposals for formal changes to the role of Readers, developments in other forms of ministry are happening apace. The CRC has therefore been asked to take a fresh look for itself at what contribution Readers can make to the mission of God through the Church of England in the coming years: and also to consider its own role in supporting Readers and the dioceses. It may well be that encouraging a culture of learning becomes the defining feature of the CRC and, in line with the Serving Together report, the emphasis shifts from the office to the task, and from an inward focus to outreach and mission.

Work on the Serving Together report will continue over the coming year through a process of celebrating, sharing and learning around lay ministries. Look out for further information about this and for ways of getting engaged in the process in your diocese and nationally.