

PRIVATE MEMBER'S MOTION – READERS
WEDNESDAY 8 FEBRUARY 2006

A background note by Nigel Holmes

That this Synod aware that the work of the ten thousand Readers is crucial to the mission of the Church, requests the Archbishops' Council to assess the implications for this nationally-accredited office of the introduction in recent years of a great variety of patterns of voluntary local ministry, both lay and ordained.

My motion is about ministry matters and the starting point was the feeling of marginalisation apparent amongst the 10,000 Readers in our Church as a result of the proliferation of new categories of minister, both ordained and lay, which have adversely affected Reader morale. I found this expressed last year, particularly in relation to under use, at the diocesan wardens' meeting at the Central Readers' Council (CRC) AGM in April. In the discussion groups I chaired at the CRC Conference in July it ranged more widely and was further evident in my own Deanery Readers' meeting in October. At this last the speaker was the Carlisle Diocesan Continuing Ministerial Education (CME) Officer. I was struck there by the strong concerns from able, long-serving, pillars of the establishment, Readers respected both within and outside the Church – people not given to complaining without cause. When I asked the CME Officer if these views were similar to those she had heard throughout the Diocese, she confirmed that they were. *The Ministerial Review Survey* (Diocese of Lincoln 2005) was probably the most thorough ever conducted into Reader ministry. Only 57% led worship once a month or more frequently. At the General Synod in November, one of the few members who date from 1970 told me that not only had Readers never before been the subject of a motion but he could not recall them ever having been mentioned in a motion.

OPEN TO CHANGE

I have been a Reader for twenty years and for the past eight have chaired the Editorial Committee of the Central Readers' Council and have been a member, ex-officio, of the Executive Committee. I would stress that I am not seeking to prejudge the outcome of any study which follows this debate. Although the motion has been entitled *Readers*, it is not my intention that it should be a party political debate on behalf of the Reader movement. I am prepared to believe that perhaps it's time for it to be changed in significant ways. But if so that change should be properly considered and carefully managed. It raises questions. Should a significant number of Readers move to other expressions of ministry which are being created? But if the range of categories of ministry is too extensive, how can people clearly discern a calling? There is value in visible boundaries but where should they fall? There are, it seems to me, a lot of strands of thinking which should be brought together, both theological and practical, and with many implications not least for training. I would like to see these addressed, for the last broadly-based General Synod report on ministry was that by John Tiller *A Strategy for the Church's Ministry* (CIO 1983).

In that time the Church of England, like society, has changed at a rate faster than in any comparable period in its history. There has been a revolution in Church of England ministry in our generation. Until the 1980s ordained ministry was almost synonymous with traditional male models of stipendiary parochial service. Women became Readers in 1969. Now 57% of Readers-in-training are female. (*The Reader, February 2006*) Between 2000 and 2004 stipendiary women clergy increased by almost a quarter (23%). In 2004 women accounted for 16% of stipendiary parochial clergy yet 45% of licensed Readers and Non-stipendiary Ministers (NSMs) and more than 50% of Ordained Local Ministers (OLMs). In spite of the advent of ordained women of whom there are almost 1,500 in paid posts there are overall 18% fewer

stipendiary diocesan clergy, men and women, than 20 years ago. In 2004 there were half the number of ordinations of men to stipendiary ministry than there were just 14 years earlier. The number of women ordained to stipendiary ministry was only slightly up on 1990. Yet in the decade from 1994 the non-stipendiary increase was more than 2½ times from 89 to 234 which represents 50% of all ordinations. *Church Statistics 2003/4 (CHP 2005)*

READERS' ROOTS

A number of ministerial offices appear in the New Testament including apostle, bishop, elder and deacon as well as a number of functions that may be gifts or may be offices – prophet, teacher and administrator. Such roles have evolved down the centuries for reasons of pragmatism and in different ways in the various denominations. One could argue that the key New Testament passage which refers to a pragmatic development in ministry is Acts 6 - the appointment of Stephen and the seven. Here a new need is identified and the ministry of the seven is established to meet it. However it was not done in an unthought out, unofficial, ad hoc way. Rather there is an implied discussion first between the twelve, then ‘the twelve called the whole community of the disciples together’ to make the proposal. In other words this pragmatic development is properly and clearly announced and the ‘whole’ community is involved in it and the inauguration of their ministry takes place again with all the apostles acting together and before the whole church.

Readers might have had their origins in the Jewish synagogues, becoming lectors of the early church, being reinvented in the sixteenth century by Archbishop Matthew Parker in the face of a severe shortage of clergy and again in the nineteenth century. Readers were recreated 140 years ago this year, very much in response to the pressing need for ministry in the rapidly growing industrial cities. At that time Readers in significant numbers were paid. A distinction was made between Diocesan Readers (well educated professional people) who, like officers, were ‘commissioned’ and Parochial Readers who were more limited and were ‘licensed’. By the end of 1905 national regulations were agreed at which time Readers could read Morning and Evening Prayer and preach, but not from the pulpit ! The distinction between Diocesan and Parochial Readers persisted until 1969. Ten years later Readers were allowed to conduct funeral services, though the proposal at that time to allow them to baptise was never implemented. From 2001 they were permitted to administer Extended Communion.

The Archbishop of York, Cosmo Gordon Lang, said in 1928, “What local preachers have done for Wesleyanism, the Diocesan Readers ought to be able to do for the Church of England.” Yet in 2005 whilst the 9,000 Methodist Local Preachers in England, Scotland and Wales led and preached at about two services out of three, Readers are much less involved in that way. The two categories are broadly comparable in number yet different in function. *In the Spirit of the Covenant* (CHP/Methodist 2005) discussed Methodist lay presidency which under the episcopal authority of Conference is, in certain circumstances, open to Local Preachers. I hope the ecumenical aspect will enrich this debate and future work arising from it.

BISHOPS' MOVES

Ministry matters are very much in the hands of the House of Bishops. At present they are planning to create both an ordained and a lay ‘pioneer’ ministry prompted by *A Mission-shaped Church* (CHP 2004). One might reasonably have expected some discussion with the Central Readers’ Council or the Church Army, particularly in relation to Lay Pioneer Ministers. The brief report of the House of Bishops’ meeting last October intimated that details of these new

categories would be agreed at their January 2006 meeting and according to the Fresh Expressions website “The pioneer ministers of the future will be drawn from both lay and ordained ministers”.

The introduction of Ordained Local Ministry (OLM) has given rise to much soul searching. It is only to be found in a minority of dioceses. In some it has been promoted and implemented by one bishop only to be revoked by a successor a few years later. It seems that the pattern of ministry can so often reflect more the character of the diocesan bishop than that of the diocese. In the General Synod in recent years such ministerial categories have been considered in isolation and some years after their introduction. Examples were the reports on OLM *Stranger in the Wings* (CHP 1998) and that on the Distinctive Diaconate *For Such a Time as This* (CHP 2001). The General Synod refused to commend the latter and members regretted its lack of consideration of the comparable ministries of Readers and Church Army Officers.

SIGNIFICANT STATISTICS

To my mind the key figure is that Readers-in-training have fallen by 18% within the past four years. *Church Statistics 2003/4* (CHP 2005) Over the last four years the overall number in training for ordination has increased by 5%. Between 2000 and 2004 stipendiary clergy numbers fell by 6% and a similar rate of loss is projected to 2009. Between 2000 and 2004 NSMs increased by 5%, OLMs by 75% but the number of Readers fell by 3% over the same period. As the categories vary markedly in size, the ordained increase was NSM + 83, OLM + 234 set against a Reader decline of 268. It seems quite reasonable to suppose that a good number of the newly ordained were previously Readers. Indeed Tiller foresaw this. “Those men and women who are at present encouraged to train for Reader ministry....might be candidates for the local priesthood; others would be included as lay pastors in the eldership. It has been pointed out that where there is a suitable Reader already trained to preach the Word and proven to be an acceptable pastor, there is a strong case for calling such a person to a local sacramental ministry as well.” The Tiller Report also said “Readers would not continue to be a separate quasi-order nationally but would be merged into the local ministry”. Then, in 1982, there were 1,714 Readers in training (*A Strategy for the Church's Ministry*, paragraph 229); in 2004 there were 1,081. At the time of Tiller the Central Readers' Conference, in its own submission, was open to change. They saw the need “to ask not how the Reader will fit into this development and/or future pattern, but what pattern of ministry the Church needs to develop and is there a place for the Reader within it?” *Strategy for Ministry* (CRC 1982)

A CLEAR CALL ?

An increasing number of us involved in Reader ministry at a national level have become concerned at the contracting role left for Readers as more and more categories of ministry, lay and ordained, are introduced. Many Readers are wondering whether their call is elsewhere. Not only Readers but also Church Army officers are being ordained in larger numbers. What is the effect on the standard of Readers who remain ? All too often in the past Reader ministry has been regarded as a sop for those not selected for ordination. How distinctive is a sense of calling ? To what extent are the categories of ministry determined by pragmatism ? Could the House of Bishops' definition of the work of a Reader as ‘a preaching and teaching ministry in a pastoral context’ be too tightly drawn. And anyway, is there a sufficient opening for a preaching and teaching ministry at a time when public worship is dominated by eucharistic services ?

In a changing church with fewer and older stipendiary clergy where do the needs lie ? Is the Reader becoming redundant when the need is for people to preside at Holy Communion ? Might many of those who were called to a preaching and teaching ministry 20 years ago serve the

church more effectively as NSMs ? Practice is moving on apace without consideration of the broader provision of ministry in the church and is causing real concern to Readers who feel that their gifts, knowledge and experience are underused. In dioceses where new categories of commissioned lay ministry are being fostered other uncertainties arise.

AN AFTERTHOUGHT

The majority of ordinands now follow local courses rather than join theological colleges, so the pattern for the majority is much more similar to that for Readers. About half the dioceses train Readers and ordinands together. (*The Reader, February 2006*) From the late 1980s there has been a much greater degree of central control over the standards of Reader ministry with the establishment of a system of national moderation of diocesan training schemes, the registration of all candidates in training and the award of the Church of England Readers' Certificate. Yet as increasing effort has gone into academic training the opportunities for using that in a preaching and teaching ministry have, overall, diminished. There are also national guidelines for Reader selection based on the criteria for ordained ministry, yet whilst the Church makes affirmative noises about lay ministries the culture within often seems to imply the opposite. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, in his presidential address to the General Synod in November 2005, called for a vision for vocations to ministry. "If this Synod is going to give the support it should to the continuance of the *Mission-shaped Church* agenda, let it be willing to use its imagination about ordained ministry." He did not mention Readers.

COST CONSIDERATIONS

The cost of a working group and its report will be mentioned in the debate. I would suggest that the price will be small in relation to the ministerial resource which the present Readers represent and all the more so were they better regarded and more effectively deployed. To my mind it would be a false economy to do nothing and allow the present malaise to become endemic. I hope that the General Synod will grasp this opportunity to influence ministry matters by commissioning work both of a theological and a practical nature.

Nigel Holmes
January 2006

Background paper on the Private Members Motion on Reader Ministry

1. The Canons

1.1 Canons E4, 5 and 6 regulate the Ministry of Readers

1.2 Canon E4 states that ‘a lay person, whether man or woman,... may be admitted by the bishop of the diocese to the office of reader in the Church and licensed by him to perform the duties which may lawfully be performed.’

1.3 It goes on to say that it shall be lawful for a Reader:

(a) ‘to visit the sick, to read and pray with them, to teach in Sunday School and elsewhere, and generally to undertake such pastoral and educational work and to give such assistance to any minister as the bishop may direct;

(b) during the time of divine service to read Morning and Evening Prayer (save for the Absolution), to publish banns of marriage at Morning and Evening Prayer (on occasions on which a layman is permitted by the statute law so to do, and in accordance with the requirements of that law), to read the word of God, to preach, to catechize the children, and to receive and present the offerings of the people;

(c) to distribute the holy sacrament of the Lord’s Supper to the people.

The bishop may also authorize a reader to bury the dead or read the burial service before, at or after a cremation but only, in each case, with the goodwill of the persons responsible and at the invitation of the minister of a parish or an extra-parochial place.’

1.4 Canon E5 speaks about the nomination and admission of Readers and paragraph 3 is of some note:

‘No person shall be admitted to the office of reader in the Church except it be found on examination, held by the bishop or by competent persons appointed by the bishops for this purpose, that he possesses a sufficient knowledge of Holy Scripture and of the doctrine and worship of the Church of England as set forth in the Book of Common

Prayer, that he is able to read the services of the Church plainly, distinctly, audibly, and reverently, and that he is capable both of teaching and preaching.’

1.5 Canon E6 is of the licensing of readers

1.6 Canons E7 and 8 are about the ministry of lay workers

1.7 Canon E7 speaks of the office of evangelist and goes on to say:

3. ‘A lay worker may in the place where he or she is licensed to serve, and under the direction of the minister, lead the people in public worship, exercise pastoral care, evangelize, instruct the people in the Christian faith and prepare them for the reception of the sacraments.

4. A lay worker may:

(a) in accordance with Canon B 11 be authorized and invited to say or sing Morning or Evening Prayer (save for the Absolution);

(b) distribute the holy sacrament of the Lord’s Supper to the people and read the Epistle and the Gospel

5. The bishop may also authorize a lay worker to perform any of the following duties at the invitation of the minister of a parish or an extra-parochial place:

(a) to preach at divine service;

- (b) to church women;
- (c) with the goodwill of the person responsible, to bury the dead or read the burial service before, at or after a cremation;
- (d) to publish banns of marriage at Morning and Evening Prayer.

1.8 Canon E8 is of the admittance and licensing of lay workers.

2. Background of Reader Ministry

2.1 The office of Reader was revived in the Church of England in 1866. Although the Central Readers Council is a charitable trust in its own right, nevertheless the Ministry of Readers is represented on the Ministry Division Committees and its Chairman is a member of the Bishops' Committee for Ministry. Although the Executive Officers are part-time and honorary, the Ministry Division provides office space and secretarial support. Reader statistics are to be found in the *Statistics of Licensed Ministers*.

2.2 At present there are 10,582 active Readers

2.3 There is widespread anecdotal evidence around the country that Readers are not always used to the best advantage. Their potential may be unrecognised. Their role is sometimes undervalued. Some are underused. Some are not consulted about their ministries. Some receive no supervision or encouragement. Many receive minimal support through CME (continuing ministerial education).

2.4 The Chairman of the Central Readers' Council (the Bishop of Carlisle) has said:

“Reader Ministry has several distinctive features which give it strength. Reader training is extensive and has a primary focus on equipment for preaching, teaching and leading worship. Readers bring to their ministry not only a firm theological understanding but also experience in the wider community and in the world of work. They have potential as ‘lay theologians’. The office of Readers offers coherence for these trained lay preachers across the Church of England and parts of the Anglican Communion. Their ministry is transferable across all parishes in a diocese and across the Anglican Communion. None of these points applies in the same way to those who are authorised through the development of diocesan lay ministry schemes.”

2.5 “Because they are trained for leadership of public worship, those Readers with appropriate gifts are well suited to public roles as Lay Chaplains in hospitals and prisons, in stores, shopping malls, airports, city centres and cadet forces. Increasingly such openings are being taken up by Readers with the support of their dioceses, and, where appropriate, with further training. Those with pastoral gifts are used increasingly to take funerals, and, in a few places, to have effective pastoral charge of a church congregation and neighbourhood.”

2.6 Candidates for training are reducing in number and it appears that Readers are ageing – see attached table of statistics

3. The recently growing variety of other forms of voluntary local ministry include:

- those that are fully representative ministries with *national* accreditation both ordained and lay
- representative lay ministries with *diocesan* acknowledgment
- other lay ministries including *local* recognition of a personal ministry.

Among these are:-

- 3.1 Ordained :
 - (i) Non-Stipendiary Ministers
 - (ii) Ordained Local Ministers

- 3.2 Lay:
 - (i) Pastoral Assistants
 - (ii) Lay Evangelists
 - (iii) Youth Ministry – though these are frequently paid
 - (iv) Worship/Music ministers etc.

4. A Review

In any consideration of a Review the following issues may need to be borne in mind:

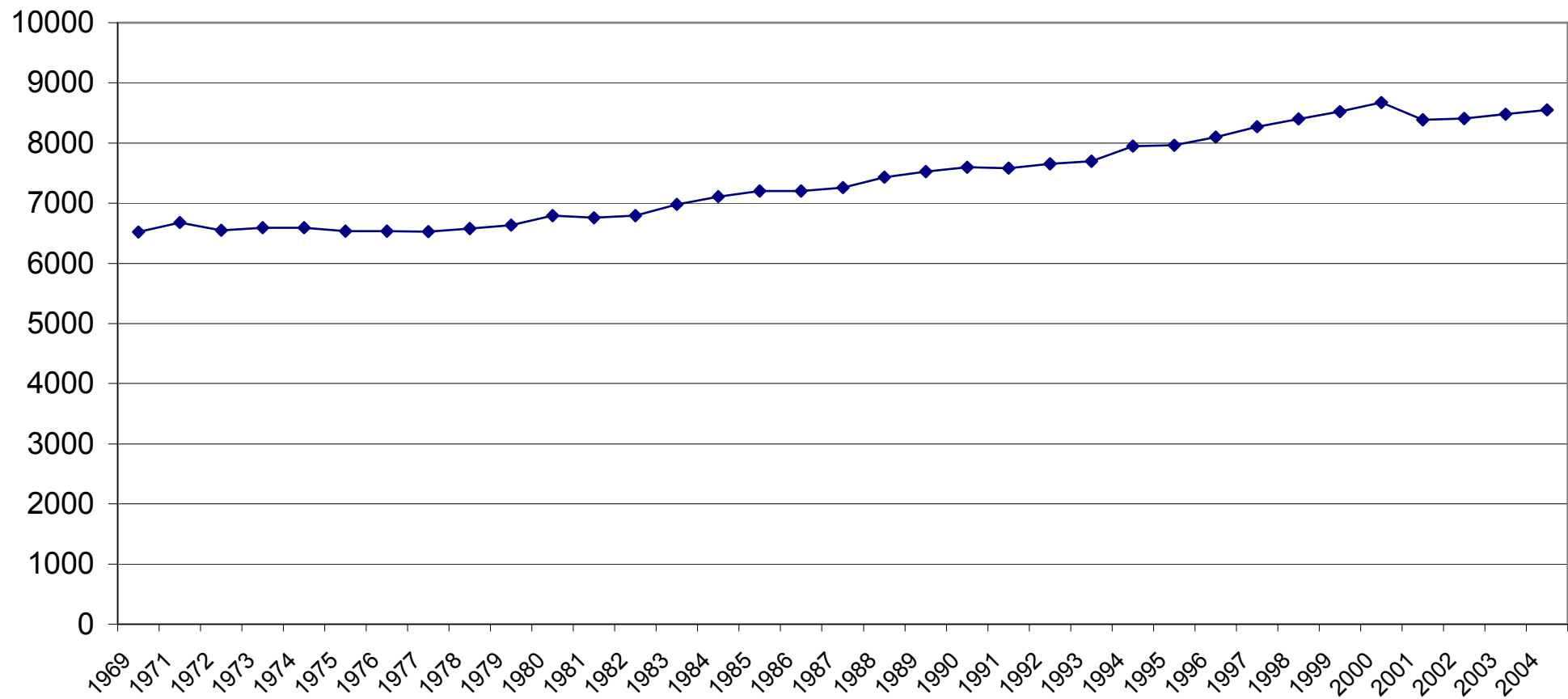
- 4.1 With respect to the terms of reference these might include:
 - (a) Nomenclature for this ministry since some Dioceses have stopped using the term 'Reader' and replaced it with Licensed Lay Ministry (eg Oxford)
 - (b) The role of this Ministry which varies considerably among different Dioceses.
 - (c) However the Review would become a very major piece of work (involving extensive consideration of Canons) if it sucked in reconsideration of the diaconate, Accredited Lay Workers, Church Army Officers, Ordained Local Ministry, Pastoral Assistants and other forms of ministry. Would it be possible to have a strictly limited review?

- 4.2 Linked to the above issue would be the matters of duration, membership, and cost

- 4.3 There would need to be close liaison with the Board of Education group working on Lay Ministry Development and Authorisation (serviced by Joanna Cox, National Adviser in Lay Discipleship and Shared Ministry) and re lay evangelists with Rev Paul Bayes, National Mission and Evangelism Adviser.

Ven Dr Gordon Kuhrt
Director of Ministry
11/01/06

Number of Licenced Readers 1969-2004



Readers in training 1988 - 2004

