

Reader Selection in the Church of England

[3] The Selection of Readers in Dioceses; Identifying Best Practice in Content and Process

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Introduction

This Paper is about the *process* of selection. It is not primarily concerned with the criteria for selection – what we are looking for in potential Readers – although it is important that we should consider the techniques we might employ to identify in a candidate those qualities which we have defined as necessary in would-be Readers.¹ *How* we select Readers is clearly of vital importance, because if we do not “get it right”, the consequences can be serious. If we select unsuitable candidates, we will not only be condemning people to an inappropriate course of training, but we may well also be preventing them from developing very real gifts in some other area of ministry.

A key part of this process, therefore, must be to consider the question “what ministry?” Candidates have a tendency to opt for what they know; they need to be made aware of other possibilities. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that any process of discernment which precedes the Selection Conference should consider Reader ministry alongside other authorised public ministries, including ordination. That is why, in our efforts to raise the profile of Reader ministry, we must not be seen to be “in competition” with other forms of ministry.²

I have already noted³ the very high rate of acceptance at Selection Conferences reported by most dioceses in their responses to the Questionnaire. This does not indicate lax standards, but rather that the important work of discernment has already been done by the time the candidates come to be interviewed. In any effective system of Reader selection, the Selection Conference should come at the

¹ For a discussion of the Criteria for Selection, see Paper 2 in this series, *What is Reader Ministry and how can it be discerned? Criteria for Reader selection.*

² See Paper 4, *Encouraging and Promoting the Vocation of Readers.*

³ See Paper 1, *Mapping the Contours*, pp 4-5.

end of a long and careful process of sifting, designed, not only to eliminate those candidates who are woefully unsuitable, but also to discover the true direction in which God's calling might be leading people. Since Reader ministry is rooted in the parish and the local community, it is in the parish that this process should start.

Stage 1: the Parish

It should be remembered that, in a sense, candidates do not *apply* for Reader selection; they are *presented* by the parishes and their incumbents. The process of discernment must *begin* in the parishes. It is in the parishes that a person's gifts and vocation will first have become apparent. However, that process should not *end* in the parishes. In her response to the Questionnaire, one Warden⁴, noting a "very high rate of selection" warns: "This *might* mean that parishes are very discerning, or it might mean we haven't been discerning enough." Incumbents, influenced by an awareness of the needs of the parish, can easily make an unrealistic assessment of a person's gifts. It is easy to visualise a scenario in which a vicar who is under pressure decides that he or she would like someone to share the burden of preaching and leading services. Immediately someone comes to mind, a person who is already heavily involved in the work of the parish, showing enthusiasm and ability, perhaps as a Church Warden or PCC member, or as a Sunday School leader. The vicar then persuades that person that Reader ministry is right for them, without really appreciating that different gifts might be called for in a Reader. The vicar may rightly have perceived that God was calling this person, but not really have addressed the question of what exactly it was that God was calling them to.

And yet, incumbents are the right people to start the process, since they know the applicant reasonably well and, as part of their own ministry, ought to have experience in identifying and nurturing the gifts of parishioners. In order to avoid the pitfalls outlined above, here is a suggested approach based on the good practice demonstrated in many dioceses.

⁴ Karen Senior, Warden of Readers, Diocese of Rochester.

- A conversation takes place between applicant and incumbent, in which the incumbent should make sure that the applicant is aware of other possibilities, even if their mind appears quite made up. If it is considered appropriate, the question of ordination should be raised, but undue pressure should not be applied. If the applicant is quite convinced that God is calling them to service *as a lay person*, that conviction should be respected. It is quite acceptable for the first move to be made by the incumbent if necessary. Offering oneself for ministry in the Church is a dramatic step which many people might consider presumptuous. Sometimes we do require something of a “prod”.
- The incumbent should encourage the person to talk to active Readers, both within the parish, if there are any, and in the wider deanery. It might be possible for the potential applicant to “shadow” an active Reader.⁵
- The incumbent should encourage the person to attend a vocational event such as those discussed in Paper 4, to obtain and read the relevant literature and to pray about the matter.
- The incumbent should invite the person to “give a talk” during one of the principal services. This would be an effective means of testing their gifts as a communicator.⁶ The person should also be encouraged to read lessons and lead intercessions, if this is not happening already.⁷

⁵ In the Questionnaire, dioceses were asked whether this was taking place. Many reported that, while it was not actively encouraged, anecdotal evidence suggested that it was happening widely.

⁶ *Reader Upbeat*, Recommendation 11. Question 4 in the Questionnaire asked dioceses whether this was happening. Many Wardens commented that, while there was no diocesan policy as such, it was happening in many parishes. Some incumbents have reservations about allowing an unlicensed person to preach. In many cases these are the same incumbents who have reservations about allowing *any* lay person to preach, and, therefore, they are not likely to be sympathetic to Reader ministry. For the rest, there should be no worries about the legality of asking such people to “give a talk”. Canon B18.2, which states that the sermon should normally be delivered by a “minister, deaconess, reader or lay worker duly authorized in accordance with Canon Law”, adds “At the invitation of the minister having the cure of souls another person may preach with the permission of the bishop of the diocese given either in relation to the particular occasion or in accordance with diocesan directions.” See further *Reader Upbeat* 4.6.7.

⁷ It might be necessary to give some basic instruction in public speaking, use of a microphone etc.

Stage 2: the Diocese

For reasons discussed above, it is essential that, while applicants must always have the support of their parishes, dioceses should have in place an effective and objective system of discernment. It cannot be left entirely to incumbents and PCCs. Fundamental to any system of discerning a person's vocation must be the existence of a team of people, both lay and ordained, who are experienced in identifying and nurturing gifts in God's people.

In many dioceses, such a team has official status as a Vocations Team, under the leadership of a Senior Vocations Adviser or Officer. In some cases this person doubles as the Diocesan Director of Ordinands, in which case it is essential that the Warden of Readers, or other similar senior figure within the diocesan Reader structures, is a member of the Team in order to avoid any bias towards ordained ministry. In any case, it ought to be obvious that the Warden of Readers and the DDO should have a good working relationship.

In other dioceses, the discernment process is organised "in house" by the Warden and Readers' Board. Usually, the people who work with the applicants are those officers, both lay and ordained, who are variously titled Area or Deanery Wardens, Deanery Chaplains or something similar. These are the people who have pastoral oversight for the Readers in a particular Deanery and organise the meetings of the Deanery Readers' Chapter. Since they have a good local knowledge, they are ideal people to assess the situation in which a potential Reader may be working, and their pastoral and general interpersonal skills should enable them to form an accurate judgement of an applicant.

The obvious disadvantage of the "in house" approach is that it does not necessarily look at the whole range of options. If a candidate has discussed the matter thoroughly with the incumbent, tested their gifts in the ways recommended, attended the appropriate vocations events, read the appropriate literature *and is now convinced that Reader ministry is what God is calling them to*, this might not be a problem. But a system looking at all options is better able to help those who are still not quite sure in which direction their calling lies.

Dioceses must decide which system works best for them. But whatever approach is adopted, there must be a team of sympathetic, skilled and knowledgeable people who will be able to explore their calling with applicants. By this stage, it is unlikely that the “really inappropriate people” will present themselves, since they should have been eliminated during the discussions at parish level.

In terms of *process*, I recommend that

- Once the incumbent is satisfied that a person has a genuine calling to some form of authorised ministry, he or she contacts the appropriate diocesan officer to arrange for the candidate to meet a member or members of the discernment team. It is preferable to have two members of the discernment team (perhaps one lay and one ordained), since this minimises the possibility of the process being influenced by irrational bias.
- If, as a result of this meeting, it is considered appropriate, the candidate is encouraged to make a formal application for Reader selection. (The process of application will have been made clear in the literature, and the candidate may well have obtained the application forms already.)
- At the same time, a report is submitted to the Warden and to the incumbent, summarising the result of this conversation.
- In some dioceses the Warden or some other appropriate officer (ideally the deanery warden/chaplain) visits the candidate in his or her own home. This has much to commend it, since it is often possible to gauge the degree to which the candidate has the support of his or her spouse. It might also be possible to identify potential problems in terms of facilities for study and make the appropriate arrangements to improve the situation.
- If Reader ministry is not considered appropriate, the Warden, or other appropriate officer, should discuss the situation with the incumbent, with a view to agreeing a strategy. The candidate should be referred to someone who can help them explore other possibilities.
- No one should be allowed to appear at a Reader Selection Conference who has not gone through this, or a similar, process.

There remains the question about the extent to which the Warden should be involved in this stage of the process. While some Wardens meet all potential candidates before the Selection Conference, others prefer to stand aside until the Conference itself, over which they preside without being a member of an interviewing panel. This, they argue, gives them a degree of objectivity when it comes to making the final recommendations to the Bishop based on the advice of the panel members. This would appear to be a strong argument, although practical realities might force the Warden to become involved at an earlier stage.⁸

Other Means of Discernment

- **The Foundation Course:** courses in Christian basics often provide a stimulus for people to offer themselves for some form of authorised ministry.⁹ Time spent following such a course should encourage people to think long and hard about the way God might be leading them. We urge those responsible for designing courses to include the idea of vocation and ministry, not so much as a specific topic or module, but rather as something which is embedded in all aspects of the course.
- **Other Lay Ministries:** in their responses to the Questionnaire, some Wardens noted that a significant number of recruits to Reader ministry come from other forms of authorised lay ministry, such as Pastoral Assistants. Having discovered that they have gifts in these areas, they may wish to develop them further through training for Reader ministry. This does not mean that the original process of discernment was “wrong”, but, rather, that God is now asking them to move on, in the same way that many Readers go on to sense a calling to the priesthood. Such progressions are a natural part of how we grow as people and as Christians. Readers, like OLMs, can also emerge from Shared or Local Ministry Teams.

⁸ In some dioceses, the Warden has no responsibility for selection at all; he or she is only responsible for *licensed* Readers (or those with Permission to Officiate).

⁹ See Paper 4, *Encouraging and Promoting the Vocation of Readers*.

- **Spiritual Direction:** some people explore a calling to ministry with a spiritual director. What really matters is the ability to talk freely and honestly with someone who is a good listener and who is well-informed about the different options.

It should be emphasised that, however a person senses that they have a particular vocation, they must go through the proper channels in terms of selection. In the case of would-be Readers, this means seeking and gaining the support of the incumbent and PCC, and discussions with one of the diocesan vocational advisers before making a formal application for selection.

- Finally, it should be remembered that we are selecting men and women for *training* as Readers, not for *licensing*. In other words, there is no guarantee that a person, once selected, will become a licensed Reader. The process of discernment should be allowed to continue during training. Inevitably, some people will discover as the course progresses that public ministry in any form is not for them. Sadly, others will drop out because of changes in their personal circumstances. But some will come to realise that God may be calling them in some other direction. There ought to be enough flexibility built into courses to enable people to respond to this fresh understanding of their vocation. In some dioceses, it is the practice for people training *for all forms of authorised ministry* to follow a common course in the first year and to train alongside each other. The final decision is not taken until the end of that year. Numbers of people changing are small, but, at least, the possibility is there. This appears to be eminently sensible.

Stage 3: The Selection Conference

Attendance at a Selection Conference can be an extremely stressful experience for many people. We have a duty to do all we can to reduce that stress to a minimum, emphasising that the Conference is not like an “interview” for secular employment, with its inevitable competitive element, but is rather an attempt to explore further an already strongly felt and strongly recognised sense of vocation. This does not mean

simply that we should do our best to make the event a “pleasant” experience. We should go further: whether they are selected or not, looking back, candidates should come to view this event as a significant stage in their spiritual journey, an occasion when God was speaking to them about the direction their lives should take. This may seem an idealised view, but it is possible to achieve such an effect with a little consideration for features such as setting, time and atmosphere. Above all, every effort should be made to ensure that the business of the event is conducted in a spirit of prayerful reflection. For that reason, careful thought should be given to the design of worship used.

That said, we should remember that the principal aim of the event is to select the right people for training for Reader ministry. If the process of discernment has already been handled well, there should be few if any instances of really inappropriate candidates presenting, but we still need to design the Conference in such a way that no mistakes are made with those whom we do select.

(a) The Selectors or Assessors

Over the years Wardens tend to establish a pool of people who can be called upon to act as selectors in a Selection Conference. The number required for any Conference will obviously depend on the number of candidates and whether it is considered necessary to have different interviews taking place simultaneously. It is vital to have more selectors in the pool than will be required on a particular occasion, since some will inevitably be unavailable on that date. At any Conference there should be a good balance between ordained and lay selectors. Some of the lay people should be Readers themselves, but preferably not all. It is important to get the “view from the pews”. Of the Readers, some should have been trained fairly recently, so that they will have a good understanding of how the training course works. But, of course, there is also a role for people with years of experience.

It has been suggested that, in order to ensure comparability across the Church as a whole, selectors should include representatives from other dioceses, perhaps from within Regional Training Partnerships. There is a fundamental tension in Reader

ministry between the local and the national. Ideally Readers should emerge from local worshipping communities and their ministry should be geared to the local situation. Nevertheless, because Readers are deployable across parish and diocesan boundaries, some sort consistency is required. Using selectors from other dioceses might help to achieve that aim.

Selectors are often chosen because of their skills and experience in secular employment. If this is the case, they will not require training in how to conduct an interview as such, but it is still important that all selectors are made aware of the criteria for selection and the particular issues which might arise during the interview. A short briefing session before the candidates arrive is probably sufficient in most cases, but it is worth considering holding a more in-depth training session from time to time. This will give selectors an opportunity to consider the whole subject of selection in a less pressured setting and to help formulate future policy. Where possible, selectors should be given photocopies of the documentation beforehand. These, of course, will be destroyed afterwards.

(b) Documentation required before the Selection Conference

All documentation should be available on-line as well as in printed form.

- **Application Form:** It has been suggested that there should be a standard application form for use by all dioceses. I see little point in this: dioceses have all produced their own forms which are perfectly adequate, and there seems to be no need to change them. What should be included in an application form is generally agreed (see Appendix 1), although there are some points which require further discussion.

A question about marital status raises the issue of candidates in Civil Partnerships. The 1991 statement by the House of Bishops, *Issues in Human Sexuality*, remains the basis for discussion of this matter, but in 2005 the House of Bishops made a statement relating specifically to Civil

Partnerships.¹⁰ However, this applies to the ordained ministry. As far as Readers are concerned, the real point at issue is whether a distinction is made between *personal* and *public* ministry, in which case it might apply to them, or between *lay* and *ordained*, in which case it probably will not. Diocesan bishops differ widely in matters of interpretation, and Wardens are advised to discuss this issue with their own bishop.

Some people object to a question about *ethnicity*, although the information which such questions yield is useful in monitoring equal opportunities within the Church. The question should be left as optional.

A question about membership of certain political parties is now a *clear requirement* and should be included in all application forms. In 2009, in response to the report of a working group set up to implement a General Synod motion on promoting racial equality, the House of Bishops agreed to set out the Church's teaching on racial equality and proscribe by list any party "whose constitution, policies, objectives or public statements were incompatible with it".¹¹ Those wishing to be ordained, as well as those wishing to be Readers or other licensed lay workers, should be asked about membership and support of such proscribed organisations. The suggested wording of a question to be inserted into application forms can be found in Appendix 2.

- **Submission from Incumbent:** The candidate's incumbent should be asked to write a formal submission setting out why he or she believes that the candidate is being called to Reader ministry. It is strongly recommended that this should be in a structured format on a printed form (see Appendix 3). In view of what has been said about the need to consider all possibilities during the discernment process, it is important to ask incumbents whether they have explored other areas of ministry with the candidate. Many dioceses include in their submissions from incumbents a description of the envisaged role of the

¹⁰ *Civil Partnerships: a Pastoral Statement from the House of Bishops, 2005.*

¹¹ HB(09)M2, paragraph 4.

candidate within the parish. It would certainly be helpful if selectors knew what exactly the candidate would be expected to do after licensing.

- **Formal Assent of Church Wardens and PCC.** This is not just additional paperwork; it is essential that the candidate has the full support of the PCC during training (this may well include financial help in the form of book grants etc) and once licensed. A copy of a formal motion to that effect, signed by the PCC Secretary and the Wardens, should be included in the pre-selection documentation. Many dioceses send a standard format of the motion, which simply has to be signed and returned. If the candidate is a member of the PCC, he or she should not be present during discussion of the motion.
- **Two References.** Full contact details should be given (including telephone numbers and email addresses) of two referees. One of these should be from within the church community (not necessarily from the candidate's present parish) and one from outside. The present incumbent should not be named as a referee. As with the incumbent's submission, dioceses may wish to structure references by using a printed pro-forma with specific questions about the candidate. Before quoting someone as a referee, candidates must ensure that this person will not only be willing, but also *available* to provide a reference. Much time can be wasted if (as happens) a referee is discovered to have gone on a world cruise!
- **CRB disclosure.**
- **Passport Photograph.** Two copies. Photographs attached to the documentation help selectors to identify the candidates. If the candidate is selected for training, they will, no doubt, be required for the candidate's file.
- **Written Personal Statement.** Many dioceses ask candidates to write a personal statement with a title such as "My Journey of Faith", "My Faith Story", "Why I believe God is calling me to be a Reader", or something similar

(see Assessment Tools below). If a written submission is required, an indication of length should be given, ideally no more than two A4 sides.

(c) Assessment Tools

- **Interview.** All dioceses which returned the Questionnaire reported using an interview or interviews as an assessment tool. Clearly, selectors will wish to meet candidates face-to-face and to engage with them concerning their vocation. However, there are questions which must be resolved relating to the number and length of the interviews, the number of interviewers and the number of candidates seen at one time.

If there is only one interview for each candidate, the organisation of the day will probably be made easier. However, since the one interview will have to cover all the selection criteria, it will need to be longer - at least forty minutes and more likely an hour. Many dioceses have opted to have a number of shorter interviews (about 20 minutes), each of which is concerned with a different cluster of criteria and each of which is conducted by different selectors. The selection criteria, however they are formulated, will tend to fall naturally into three such clusters: (1) issues relating to the candidate's spiritual life (vocation, faith, spirituality and worship), (2) personality or character (including relationships, leadership potential and the ability to work with others) and (3) potential for training (including academic background as well as a willingness to be challenged by new ideas). Whether or not the candidate has been baptised and confirmed, and is a regular communicant (Criterion H "Involvement in the Church of England" in the new Criteria) can be dealt with beforehand in the paperwork, and his or her understanding of the Church of England and its ecclesiology can be probed in the interview relating to faith and spirituality. This would also be the best place for any presentation by candidates on their personal journey of faith, if this is not asked for in written form (see below). Obviously, having three twenty minute interviews for each candidate instead of a single hour-long session does call

for skilful programming, but it has two major advantages. Firstly it ensures that none of the criteria is overlooked or treated in a superficial way; secondly it allows selectors to confer between sessions, so that, if some matter of concern is touched upon in one interview, it can be further explored by other selectors in a later session.

It is not good practice for candidates to be interviewed by a single selector. Personal reactions to candidates will differ, so it is important that a balanced and agreed assessment is reached, avoiding the influence of any undue irrational antipathies. Furthermore, it is very difficult for one person to ask questions, listen to the replies and make notes at the same time. Ideally one selector should be asking questions while another makes notes. Having too many interviewers, however, will risk making the occasion seem like a job interview. I would recommend, therefore, that there should be two interviewers, who take turns to ask the questions and make notes (who asks which questions should be decided by the interviewers beforehand). The interviewers should be given a printed schedule on which to make their notes. This should be based on specific questions relating to each of the criteria. It is hoped that the way in which the new criteria are formulated will make the framing of such questions easier. The questions need not necessarily all be asked in the form they appear on the schedule, since the answers may well emerge naturally. Indeed, selectors should do their best to make the session more like a conversation than an interrogation. It goes without saying that selectors should not sit behind an imposing desk and that candidates should sit in comfortable chairs!

Most dioceses interview one candidate at a time, although several prefer what might be called a "group interview". In Liverpool for a number of years we interviewed candidates in pairs, with two selectors. This was generally successful in creating a relaxed, conversational atmosphere and it allowed selectors to observe how the candidates interacted with each other. One disadvantage was that it was difficult for candidates to raise sensitive or

confidential issues, so it was necessary to allow time and space during the day for them to speak privately to the selectors if they so wished.¹²

- **Written Work.** Any written work used should be produced before the actual Selection Conference. Giving candidates a written task during the Conference itself uses valuable time which could be better spent, and may appear to candidates uncomfortably like an examination. Many dioceses ask candidates to submit with their application forms some sort of written “faith story”, explaining how they have reached this particular point in their spiritual journey. As well as shedding much light on the candidate’s personality, this can be an effective way of enabling selectors to gauge the extent to which candidates feel at ease discussing issues of personal spirituality. It also gives some idea of their level of literacy.¹³ Such a piece could be written in the form of a letter to a friend. If the candidate has already followed a foundation course or something similar, examples of assessed work could also be submitted. Another possibility, again submitted before the Conference, would be a written response to a particular situation in the life of the Church, preferably one involving pastoral issues. Since many of the candidates will not yet have developed the requisite skills in biblical study (that is, after all, one of the most important things they will learn if accepted for training), it seems unreasonable to ask them to write in any depth about a passage from the Bible.
- **Oral Presentation.** Since the would-be Reader’s basic role in teaching and preaching will require effective oral communication skills, it is sensible to ask candidates to give a short oral presentation (certainly no more than 5 minutes) on a chosen topic. It is a good idea to avoid topics related specifically to Church, but rather allow candidates to talk about a subject about which they feel confident; for example, a favourite book or film, or a hobby or interest. The subject matter is not the issue; rather it is the

¹² This method is no longer used in Liverpool Diocese.

¹³ Thus enabling selectors to spot candidates who might require some sort of learning support if accepted for training.

candidate's ability to communicate effectively (Criterion E) which is the principal concern of the selectors. Some dioceses require an oral "faith story" instead of the written one described above. Clearly this will require more time. It could form part of one of the interviews. Whatever type of oral activity is used, candidates should be given prior warning of what is required, although it is best if they are encouraged to speak without reference to detailed notes. Some dioceses ask candidates to read a passage of scripture out loud. While this might be a useful tool, it should be recognised that it involves rather different skills from those demonstrated in the oral presentation.

- **Group Exercise.** For almost all Readers, working as a member of a team is an important part of their ministry. Many dioceses seek to assess candidates' ability to work with others by asking them at some point in the Selection Conference to take part in an observed group exercise. In this way it is possible to identify such positive characteristics as sensitivity to others, ability to grasp underlying issues and to provide direction, as well as more negative ones such as aggressive point scoring and a tendency to put other people down. However, it is important not to reject candidates simply because they do not make much contribution to the discussion; after all, the "strong silent" character may well have an enormous contribution to make to the ministry of the Church. Any group exercise should have clearly defined ground rules and strictly enforced time limits. The nature of the "task" given to the group will reflect the particular concerns of the individual diocese. An example¹⁴ is included in Appendix 4. This is from a large, mainly rural diocese, and the task is appropriate to that kind of setting. The task should not require detailed technical knowledge (e.g. of Canon Law!), but rather an understanding of some of the issues facing the Church today and how these might be resolved. The Observation Schedule is also included. The observer ticks the appropriate box as each candidate demonstrates particular

¹⁴ From the Diocese of Exeter, used with permission.

characteristics. The “group interview” (see above) will also give some insight into the way candidates interact with others.

- **Worship.** In at least one diocese¹⁵ it is the practice to ask different groups of candidates to devise a short act of worship to be used at various points during the Conference. Clearly the candidates would need to be warned of this beforehand, so that they could bring with them the appropriate worship resources.

It is recognised that, for some of these assessment tools to be effective, a “critical mass” in terms of candidate numbers is required. In dioceses where numbers are very small, a group exercise, for example, would be very difficult, if not impossible, to organise. In some cases, numbers might be so small that the very idea of a “Selection Conference” would be inappropriate. When only one or two candidates are presenting each year, it is probably better to conduct individual interviews as and when required.

(d) The Decision

Before they depart, candidates must be given a clear indication of what happens after the Selection Conference. This will include a reasonably precise timetable of events. Given the vagaries of the postal service, it is not possible to specify an exact date when they will receive notification of the decision, but they should be told that, if they have not heard by a specific date, they are to get in touch with the office.

Once the candidates have departed, the selectors will want to meet in order to discuss each candidate in turn. Such sessions are usually presided over by the Warden. It is preferable for the Warden not to have been involved in the actual interviews, so that discussions can be chaired with greater impartiality (see page 5). It is important that sufficient time is allowed for this session. Selectors should be warned not to expect a quick getaway! The decision concerning formal

¹⁵ St Albans.

recommendations to the Bishop is usually taken by the Warden. The final decision, of course, belongs to the Bishop; in most dioceses it is either the Diocesan Bishop or one of the Suffragans who writes the formal letter to candidates, informing them whether or not they have been accepted for training. Candidates should always be made aware that Readers hold the Bishop's licence and are under episcopal discipline.

(e) Procedure for Rejected Candidates

For reasons already discussed, the complete rejection of a candidate should be a very rare occurrence. Much more likely is the provisional or deferred acceptance of a candidate on condition that some specified condition is fulfilled. It may be that the candidate is accepted for training the following year after following a foundation course, or obtaining some specified experience. Obviously, this will need to be carefully explained to the candidate, and care must be taken not to give the impression that this is an outright rejection. It is also important to discuss the situation with the incumbent.

In those few cases where it is decided that a candidate is not suitable for training as a Reader, it is important not to abandon the process of discernment which has been initiated. Clearly, to have got this far, the candidate must have some sort of authentic vocation, but it does not lie in the direction of Reader ministry. Cases like this should be referred back to the vocations team for further discussion with the candidate. The reasons for the selectors' decision should be explained to the candidate. Again, the situation should be discussed with the incumbent. A high level of pastoral sensitivity is required in cases such as these.

(f) Residential Selection Conferences

A few dioceses already organise residential Selection Conferences, typically over a 24 hour period from Friday evening to Saturday evening, and others are considering adopting this pattern. The advantages are obvious:

- It is a way of signalling the very serious nature of the calling to ministry. It should be noted that residential Selection Conferences for ordinands are the norm.
- In geographically larger dioceses, there is less worry about candidates getting to the venue on time.
- The atmosphere is much more relaxed, enabling candidates and selectors to interact with each other, and to explore vocation in a more meaningful way.
- The greater time available allows the selectors to get to know the candidates more deeply than would be the case in a 30-40 minute interview.
- It is possible to build into the programme plenty of spare time, enabling candidates and selectors to find space in which to reflect on their own or together. This is especially so if the venue is in pleasant surroundings.
- If the venue is a retreat centre, the availability of a chapel will make it easier to root the process in prayer. If a religious house is chosen, candidates and selectors can join in the liturgical routine of the community.

There are, of course, disadvantages:

- Additional cost.
- Problems with child care and other family commitments for some candidates.
- Greater time commitment for all concerned.

As far as cost is concerned, it might be appropriate to ask parishes to make some contribution to the accommodation costs of candidates. Quite clearly, the costs of the selectors must be borne by the diocese. As for those candidates who experience problems being away from home, it is worth remembering that, at some point during their training, successful candidates will probably be required to attend a residential training weekend.

Despite these problems, I do feel that the residential Conference has much to commend it. I would strongly urge dioceses to consider such a pattern, possibly while still retaining the traditional one-day Conference for those unable to attend the residential.

Appendix 1: Content of a Typical Application Form

Personal Information: (1) Names; address; phone (daytime, home and mobile); email. (2) Date of Birth. (3) Marital Status. (4) Occupation.

Church Information: (1) Parish; incumbent. (2) Date of Baptism; Date of Confirmation.

Ethnicity (optional).

Membership of Political Parties.

Medical condition or disability if relevant (optional).

Education and Training:

Educational and professional qualifications, listed starting with most recent, giving place where studied and date awarded.

Career History:

Employment and other activity (e.g. carer) starting with most recent; approximate dates and space for additional comments.

Church involvement:

Activities/church organisations currently involved in; others in past.

Referees:

Names and address (phone number and email if possible as well) of two referees **excluding incumbent**. One from wider community and one from church (not necessarily present parish).

Appendix 2: Suggested Question on Membership of Proscribed Political Parties

Are you a member or active supporter of the British National Party or any organisation whose policies, objectives and public statements are incompatible with the Church of England's commitment to promoting racial equality?

Appendix 3: Topics to be included in the Incumbent's Submission

How long the candidate known by the incumbent.

Candidate's faith; ability to express it.

Relationships; ability to relate to others; pastoral concern; ability to work with others.

Ability to cope with training.

Support from family.

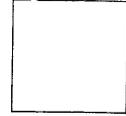
Present responsibilities in the parish. **N.B. Incumbents should be required to release candidates from parochial responsibilities during training. They should give written undertaking that they will do this.**

Other areas of possible ministry explored with the candidate?

Any reservations about the candidate's potential as a Reader?

Appendix 4: a Typical Group Exercise Assignment

Diocese of Exeter



READER TRAINING SELECTION DAY

GROUP EXERCISE

Hopeful is a small hamlet situated in the most isolated part of rural Moorshire. The hamlet consists of thirty homes, mostly ancient farm cottages belonging to the 'Big House' over the valley, one working farm and a small general store with a side room that serves as the local 'Bar'. By far the grandest building in the hamlet is the large Victorian Parish Church, built originally as a 'Chapel of Ease' for the 'Big House'. The parish is part of a united benefice with three other parishes, the UB has a total of six church buildings; the united benefice has been served for the last forty years by Fr. Ardworker SSC. Fr. Ardworker had been a widower for the last ten years; three weeks ago he suffered a fatal heart attack and has now been laid to rest in the churchyard at Hopeful.

The bishop and archdeacon have attended a combined meeting of all the PCC's in the benefice and explained that there is little chance of appointing an ordained minister to the benefice in the foreseeable future. The bishop has asked each of the individual PCC's to consider their position and to produce a plan to ensure that the spiritual needs of their local community are met in the most realistic and practical ways possible. Your initial plan should be completed within one month.

You are the PCC at Hopeful, meeting the next day, you are about to begin your first consideration of the bishop's request. This is a special meeting with no other planned business on the agenda. Lord Myway, from the 'Big House' and a direct descendant of the church's benefactor, is an active member of the church. At the end of the meeting you should make available a brief summary of your progress.

You will need to consider:

- what are the theological issues involved ?
- what are the pastoral issues involved ?
- who will be affected by the recommendations, and what will these effects be?
- what will be the practical and pastoral implications of your recommendations?
- what are the implications for the mission of the Church?

Instructions for Group Exercise

1. Be yourself. This is not a role-play. Be ready to listen, discuss and challenge.
2. You have 10 minutes to think about the situation.
3. The observer will indicate when the 10 minutes are up and you are then each asked to make an initial response lasting not more than 2 minutes in the order indicated by the number at the top of this sheet.
4. After each member of the group has made their initial response, general discussion follows.
5. Every member of the group has the same information as given above these instructions.
6. After the 10 minutes thinking time you have 45 minutes. The observer will tell you when you have 20 minutes left. Also when you have 10 minutes left which you will need to prepare your summary. A final warning will be given when 2 minutes are left.
7. It is for you as a group to decide how to proceed and to agree any details not stated.

GROUP EXERCISE:OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

	Group Order Number					
	Seated					
Offers facts, information, makes suggestions.						
Asks questions.						
Keeps group on task.						
Summarises, clarifies, provides direction.						
Appreciates others' contributions / strengths.						
Acknowledges differences and tries to resolve.						
Listens.						
Honest with own feelings and experience / uses 'I'.						
Sensitive to others / shows empathy.						
Looks after others / calms down.						
Makes jokes.						
Avoids / denies / colludes.						
Does not contribute / silent / off-task.						
Concerned ONLY with task.						
Contributions irrelevant / tangential / distracting.						
Dominates.						
Puts people down.						
Aggressive / point scoring.						
Shows initiative.						
Articulate.						
To the point.						
Theological connections.						