

# On Being A Reader - What is a Reader?

## 1 The Role of a Reader

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 work in a variety of roles and situations across the Church, being 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.

As well as their formal roles Readers have many informal ways of ministering by their presence, witness and listening at their places of work, at home, among the neighbours and in their local communities. They are informed lay people living out their faith in their different walks of life.

## 2 The Duties of a Reader

Readers may:

- Preach
- Lead worship, except those services and parts of services specifically excluded by Canon
- Read the Old or New Testament readings, Epistle or Gospel at any service
- Lead intercessions
- Receive and present the offerings of the people
- Distribute the consecrated bread and wine to the people
- Take Communion to the sick and housebound
- Publish banns of marriage in the absence of a priest
- Undertake pastoral and educational work
- Assist any minister as the bishop may direct

With permission from the incumbent of the parish, Readers may:

- Accept occasional invitations to take part in services in a church of another denomination

With permission from the Bishop, Readers may:

- Officiate at Communion by Extension services
- Officiate at Funeral services (with the good will of the persons responsible)
- Accept regular invitations to take part in services in a church of another denomination, with the approval also of the PCC of the parish where the service is to take place.

Readers may NOT:

- Officiate at the sacrament of baptism, except in an emergency situation when it is lawful for any lay person to baptise
- Officiate at a marriage service
- Pronounce the Absolution or give a Blessing but should use an authorised alternative form of words.

As a matter of courtesy Readers should consult their incumbent before accepting engagements outside their own parish or district.

## 3 Licensing and Relicensing

All Readers in active ministry under the age of 70 must hold a bishop's licence, which:

- Authorises the Reader to minister in their own diocese
- Should indicate the area in which they may minister and the duties they are permitted to perform.
- Should be renewed periodically, normally every three or five years

All Readers in active ministry over the age of 70 must hold the bishop's Permission to Officiate, which:

- Authorises the Reader to minister in their own diocese
- Should indicate the area in which they may minister and the duties they are permitted to perform.
- Should be for a limited period, subject to renewal, normally annually

Readers who have retired from active ministry may be given the title Reader Emeritus.

During a clergy vacancy the Reader's ministry normally continues with supervision and support from the Rural Dean and churchwardens. Good practice suggests that a potential incumbent should be made aware of any existing Readers in the parish and declare acceptance of the principles and practice of Reader ministry, and when the vacancy has been filled, the new incumbent should re-nominate the Reader to the Bishop for the licence to be updated.

Readers invited to conduct a service or to preach outside their own diocese should ask permission from the Bishop of the diocese concerned, through the Warden of Readers of that diocese.

Local diocesan procedures should be followed for issues with licensing and re-licensing.

#### **4 Dress**

The normal dress of Readers for liturgical duties is cassock, surplice, hood of degree (where appropriate) and plain blue scarf. A cassock alb may be worn at the Holy Communion if this is the custom of the parish.

Reader lapel badges and ties may be purchased from the CRC Office.

#### **5 Ministry Agreements**

Readers should make a written agreement with their incumbent over the duties to be undertaken, taking into account:

- a. the Reader's particular gifts and ministry
- b. the Reader's role within the ministerial team
- c. arrangements for Continuing Ministerial Education
- d. attendance at Reader meetings
- a. work-life balance, between the Reader role and the requirements of family, work and leisure
- e. arrangements for meetings between Readers, clergy and other staff.
- f. the Reader's role in relation to the PCC - Readers are not automatically ex officio members of the PCC; but may be ex officio, co-opted or elected members according to individual parish policy
- g. arrangements for reimbursement of expenses incurred through performance of Reader duties

This agreement should be reviewed regularly by the Reader and incumbent together, normally once a year, and also at the time of the renewal of licence.

Readers are normally voluntary and unpaid ministers and do not accept fees for their services, but should be reimbursed for travelling (at a rate agreed by the diocese or Readers' Board) and other expenses incurred through the performance of their duties. Expenses incurred through serving outside their normal parish should be reimbursed fully by the parish using the services of the Reader.

When Readers conduct a funeral, they may not retain the fee. Fees collected should be passed to the incumbent or PCC treasurer, or in a vacancy to the Diocesan Board of Finance. Readers may however receive reimbursement from the undertaker or incumbent for loss of earnings and expenses incurred through conducting the service and providing the related pastoral care for the bereaved family.

## **6 Ministry Review**

Readers should keep a record of their ministry; services led, sermons preached, training attended and other ministry exercised. When requested this should be reported to the Warden or an appointed delegate. The report should be discussed with the incumbent who should be asked to countersign it and add appropriate comments.

Periodically Readers should undergo a formal in-depth review of their ministry; dioceses vary in their requirements, but it is recommended that such a review take place every three or five years paying attention to areas of fulfilment and satisfaction, noting opportunities for expansion of ministry or re-deployment, and needs for refreshment or retraining. Subject to issues of confidentiality, a brief summary should be placed in the Reader's records.

## **7 Continuing Ministerial Education**

Licensing is not the end of becoming a Reader. To preach the word of God, Readers must keep up their private reading and undertake on-going tuition. Readers should be encouraged both by their incumbent and by the Warden of Readers to develop their ministry and understanding of the faith as the years go by. A commitment to continuing training is an essential part of a Reader's life and ministry.

In addition, the Central Readers' Council publish *The Reader* magazine and organize national conferences and courses.

## **8 Deployment**

In appropriate circumstances Readers may be seconded or redeployed to new areas of ministry.

## **9 Transfer within the Diocese**

When Readers move to another parish or place within the same diocese they should inform the Warden or designated officer, and after a sufficient period, the incumbent should contact the Warden to ask that the Reader's licence be transferred.

## **10 Transfer to Another Diocese**

Although Reader training and the certificate of admission is recognised throughout the Church of England, there is no automatic transfer of a Reader's licence when a person moves to another diocese. Licensing by the bishop of the new diocese takes place in the normal way.

It is the responsibility of the Reader leaving the diocese to notify their Warden of Readers of their departure and new address, so that advice and help may be provided. (It is helpful to give the name of the new diocese if known, as different parts of some counties may be in different dioceses.)

After settling into regular worship, the Reader should approach the incumbent there and discuss whether there would be an appropriate role as Reader.

Readers' Regulations vary slightly from diocese to diocese. The Warden or Reader Secretary of the new diocese will be able to provide information about the length of time a Reader needs to worship in a benefice before the incumbent and P.C.C. may nominate the person for licensing, or whether the Reader might be given temporary permission to officiate by the bishop, or whether it is appropriate to be licensed to a deanery. They will also be able to provide information about local and diocesan Readers gatherings, and may be able to assist if the Reader has difficulty finding a parish where their ministry would be welcomed.

Where an admitted Reader seeks to be licensed in another diocese references are usually taken up with the diocese where the person was previously licensed and proof of admission (usually the person's admission certificate) may be required.

## **11 Bishops' Regulations for Reader Ministry, and Canon Law**

Bishops' Regulations for Reader Ministry are intended to provide an agreed framework. The regulations clarify the basis of Reader duties and the practice of their ministry, and provide a common understanding to be applied in all dioceses. However, except where they relate to Canon Law, they are guidelines for Reader ministry and practice varies across dioceses.

The ministry of Readers in the Church of England is governed by Canons E4, E5 and E6 – the full text of which is available to download free or to purchase in printed form at [www.cofe.anglican.org/about/churchlawlegis/canons](http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/churchlawlegis/canons).

## **12 Further Information**

In addition to Bishops' Regulations for Reader Ministry and Canons E4, E5 and E6 further information on particular aspects of Reader Ministry is available in:

ABM Policy Paper No 7 *Selection for Reader Ministry*

ABM Ministry Paper No 19 *Servants and Shepherds*

ABM Ministry Paper No 20 *The Deployment of Readers*