MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE
CENTRAL READERS' COUNCIL
Held at Newcastle University on Sunday April 2nd 2006 at 9.00am

Present: The Bishop of Carlisle (in the chair), members of the council (or their
deputies), observers and staff listed at the end of the minutes.

Apologies: There were apologies for absence, listed at the end.

The meeting was held in the context of a residential weekend during which Sir Mark
Hedley, Bishop Paul Richardson and the Bishop of Bradford all addressed delegates. The
Bishop of Carlisle delivered his Chair's address separately from the business meeting.
The text of this will be available on the website and is also printed as an appendix to
these minutes. Anyone requiring a printed version should apply to the London office. It
is hoped that the text of the other addresses will appear on the website too.

1. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16th April 2005 were approved and
signed. There were no matters arising.

2. Co-options to the Executive Committee.

The Secretary reported that the Executive Committee has co-opted Andrew Young
(Rochester and Chair of the Younger Reader Conference Committee) and Chrysogon
Bamber (Salisbury) to join them. These co-options were approved.

3. Annual Report and Accounts

The draft Annual Report and Accounts had been circulated. Cliff Harris (Treasurer)
explained the various accounts and how they operated. He also apologised for a
computer error which had failed on one page to put figures in direct columns. On the
basis that this would be corrected in the version to be submitted to the Charity
Commission it was proposed by Nick Watson, second by Tony Rolfe and carried
without dissent that the accounts be accepted.

4. Independent Examiner of Accounts

Cliff Harris reported that Geoff Mihill, who has been independent examiner for the
past decade has indicated that he will now stand down. The meeting recorded its
thanks to Geoff for his long, meticulous service, and wished him a happy retirement.
A new independent examiner will be required to replace him, and Cliff asked for any
suggestions as to who might be suitable and available. The meeting agreed to
empower the Executive Committee to act appropriately in making an appointment.

5. Budget 2006/7

Cliff Harris explained that he felt that the Council needed to ensure that its income
level increased in the financial year 2006/7. The reason was that the capitation fee
charged to Dioceses is based on licensed Readers. No fee is collected in respect of
Readers over 70 with Permission to Officiate, and their numbers are increasing
whilst those with licenses decline. The position could be rectified by charging the
existing £1:50 per head to PTOs as well as licensed Readers, or by increasing the charge but leaving it to apply to licensed Readers alone.

There was some discussion of this issue, with the opposing views put by Jennie McPherson (Rochester) and Ven John Reed (Bath and Wells). The meeting eventually agreed that although the age of "retirement"/PTO will probably need to become more flexibly interpreted in future, the holding of a licence should continue as the basis of the capitation fee. In view of this decision, an increase in the capitation fee to £1:75 was approved.

6. Reports

The written reports having been accepted (see minute 3 above), the Chairman invited any supplementary comments:

Ann Richardson (Website Committee) stressed the need for dioceses to submit material to the Website editor, if the site is to be fully effective. The report was accepted unanimously - proposed by Carilyn Simkin (Hereford) and seconded by Nick Watson (Derby).

On behalf of the Editorial Committee, Nigel Homes commented that he was pleased to see that the magazine circulation remained in excess of 10,000. The issue dealing with the aftermath of the tsunami has been entered for an award. He paid tribute to the services on Sarah James and Gloria Helson to the committee, and welcomed its latest member, Ron Upton (St Albans). The report was accepted without dissent - proposed by Charles Flynn (Sodor and Man) and seconded by Tony Rolfe (Wakefield).

Ron Edinborough (Selwyn Committee) paid tribute to the work of Raymond Hawkesworth as chair until November 2005 and welcomed John Ashwin (Chichester), who has taken over the role. The printed report was accepted by the meeting - proposed by Ron Edinborough (Exeter) and seconded by Julia Francis (Hereford).

The National Moderator's report was received as printed - proposed by John Nightingale (Birmingham) and seconded by Julia Francis (Hereford).

Ann Richardson, a member of the Younger Readers' Conference Working Party, gave an informal report on the work of the committee. It appears that the conference in June is likely to be fully subscribed. However, she stressed that the ideal was to have representation from as many dioceses as possible, and she urged those that had not so far made nominations to do so.

7. General Synod Debate on Reader Issues.

The Chair explained the background to the recent synod debate, which had passed a resolution requesting an examination by the Archbishops' Council of Reader Ministry. The Archbishops' Council has chosen the Bishops' Committee for Ministry as the vehicle through which the debate will be held, and there will be a working party to discuss the matter, chaired by the Bishop of Carlisle as Chair of CRC. Appointments to membership of this working party will be announced shortly.
Rona Duncan (Southwark) wanted to know whether dioceses and Readers could be represented. The Chairman said that although he could not pre-judge the views of the Bishops' Committee for Ministry once the working party has reported, he could assure Ms Duncan that CRC would be fully represented on the working party itself.

8. **Points discussed by Section Meetings.**

Julia Francis (Hereford) reported that the meeting of Representatives had asked for greater clarity in future over the question of to whom Readers should be licensed. This was no real problem where there is a traditional incumbent in post, but can become an issue in Team or Group Ministries, or during interregna. It was hoped that the future working party might address this issue. The Representatives had also stressed the importance for ministry agreements, and called for them to be introduced in dioceses where they do not already exist.

The Wardens expressed concern about the frequent lack of Reader involvement in the selection of new clergy. Jennie MacPherson (Rochester) supported by Pat Nappin (Chelmsford) pointed out that this can present difficulties when the Reader is not involved, and then the new incumbent displays little interest in using or supporting lay ministry. The Wardens urged that at the very least it should be the norm for all members of any ministry team to meet potential new incumbents. Responding to the report from the Wardens, Annette Masters (Monmouth) expressed the hope that the increasing emphasis on collaborative ministry might diminish these kinds of problems in the future.

Each of the sections meetings was addressed briefly by a member of the website committee and by Cliff Harris (CRC Treasurer). The Secretaries' meeting expressed concern to Cliff that the accounts office at Church House does not seem to keep records sufficiently accurately or up-to-date to obviate unnecessary problems. Cliff acknowledged that problems associated with temporary staff have occurred. However, such matters are outside CRC control, and he also asked for a sympathetic response from diocese to queries that might seem repetitive or unnecessary. Michael Cooper (Peterborough) was particularly unhappy with this response, and insisted that inefficiency at Church House was unacceptable.

9. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next Annual General Meeting will be held in London on Saturday March 31st 2007.

**ATTENDANCE LIST BY DIOCESES : CRC ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2006**

- **Bath & Wells**  | John Reed  | Hilary Daniel
- **Birmingham** | John Nightingale  | Philip Bellingham
- **Blackburn**  | Rev D Walkden | Yvonne Tomlinson  | Dr M Ives
Bradford        Paul Booth        Susan Naughton        Despina Hadjioannou
Bristol        Mr R Allen        Wulstan Perks
Canterbury     Hilary Richter
Carlisle       Nigel Holmes        Peter Vivash
Chelmsford     Pat Nappin        Adrian Smith
Chester        Tina Upton        Rev J Knowles
Chichester
Coventry       Rupert Allen        Mrs C Haines        Miss S Trafford
Derby          Nick Watson        Christina Williamson        Sue Caunt
Durham         Catherine Lawes        Linda Burton        Dr M Beck        Mr D Talbot
Ely            Stephen Tooke        Morgan Bunday        Elaine Levitt
Europe         Rosemary Selle        Peter Welsh
Exeter         Mr M Bridgwater        Sandra Parker        Ron Edinborough
Gloucester     Sarah James        John Mitchell
Guildford      Geoff Mihill        Gertrud Sollars
Hereford       Julia Francis        Carilyn Simkin        J Williams        B Jenkins
Leicester      Simon Harvey        Steve Carter
Lichfield      John Maddison
Lincoln        Alex Whitehead        John Marshall
Liverpool      Nicholas Daunt        Adrian Manson        Sir Mark Hedley
London
Manchester     Mrs J Giles
Newcastle      Ron Black        Rt Rev Paul Richardson        Ian Farrimond        Sue Hart
               Andy Lie
Norwich        Anne Bone        Peter Pease        Mrs W Sargent
Oxford         Joanna Coney        Alan Wakely
Peterborough  Michael Cooper        Hilary Walker        Phillip Nixon
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**IN ATTENDANCE (in addition to officers listed above)**

The Lord Bishop of Carlisle(Chair), The Ven Christopher Lowson (Director, Ministry Division), Janice Milbank and Patsy Grey (Administrative support)
APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

John Ashwin Chichester
Ven Clifford Offer Norwich
Elizabeth Salmon London
Dennis Lloyd Portsmouth
Andrew Woodsford Southwell
Bishop David Hamid Europe
Ann Hemsworth Ripon and Leeds
John Gulland Sodor and Man
Roderick Clarke Coventry
Alec George St Edmundsbury & Ipswich/National Moderator

APPENDIX

Some Issues Concerning Reader Morale in the Church of England (Chairman's address: Central Readers Council AGM April 2nd 2006)

The Synod Debate

As most of you know, the February session of the General Synod included a debate on Reader Ministry, the first for as long as anyone could remember. We are particularly grateful to Nigel Holmes for his Private Members Motion. It heightened the profile of Readers and I think that was needed.

The presenting issue which triggered the debate was the state of Reader morale throughout the country. The motion was amended slightly and as passed it read:

That this Synod, aware that the work of the ten thousand Readers is crucial to the mission of the Church, request the Archbishops' Council to consider how this nationally-accredited office should be developed, and Readers more fully and effectively deployed, in the light of the welcome recent introduction of a great variety of patterns of voluntary local ministry, both lay and ordained.

As expected, the Archbishops' Council referred the matter to the Bishops' Committee for Ministry. That Committee met recently. It is in the process of forming a working party to address the task, a working party which we hope will include both Readers and members of the Central Readers Council. As the motion suggests, the focus of the working party will be on the development and deployment of the huge army of Readers across the country and how Reader ministry is affected by recent developments in ministry, both lay and ordained.

Factors Affecting Readers

But let me return to Reader morale. It is helpful to summarise some of the factors which are affecting Readers.

1. The Growth of Other Ministries
When I was ordained in 1967, the ministerial task force was, by and large, stipendiary priests and Readers. So the ministry in parishes was planned around these two categories of ministry. As a curate in the Diocese of Rochester I was allowed to train 9 Readers in Tonbridge Parish. They became a vital resource for serving the four churches in the parish. Perhaps, equally important, however, Reader training was an important step in the spiritual development of all these people.

Reader training was far less rigorous in those days. There was no national moderation. Those in my Reader training class had to do 16 essays, four each in the areas of Bible, doctrine, liturgy and church history.

In those days, if you wanted to offer to share in the Church's ministry, apart from full-time stipendiary ordained ministry, the only other avenue open to you was Reader ministry. So, many people just took that road. What we have now is in stark contrast. First, we have seen the emergence of a great many non-stipendiary or self-supporting priests. Secondly there has been vigorous growth in lay ministries: pastoral assistants, evangelists, leaders of worship and commissioned ministers, to name but a few.

The Willesden Area of London Diocese now has around 90 commissioned ministers. 'Commissioned minister' is the generic term for these lay ministers who have a commission from the bishop which is purely local to the parish. They are called whatever best describes their work; they may be parish assistants, lay ministers or evangelists, for example. Some may have permission to lead worship or preach and, in a few cases, to take funerals. Most of them start, like an apprentice, by doing the work, under supervision. Their training takes place as their gifting becomes clear. It is a different model. By and large, these lay ministers are not taking a place which was previously the ground of Readers. Their ministry is new and it simply did not exist before. We have a growing number of these commissioned ministers in the Diocese of Carlisle.

In most dioceses the emerging lay ministers start with a course of training. As we might expect these are of varying length and thoroughness. The adult education section of the Board of Education is concerned about the consistency in the quality of these training courses across the country. But in the House of Bishops, as far as I can tell, there is no mood at present for trying to impose uniform standards on what is spontaneously bubbling up in the dioceses. That might come later on.

Reader ministry also has developed: in most dioceses: Readers are now permitted to take funerals. More recently they may now be given permission to take Public Services of Holy Communion by Extension. This is quite widely taken up in the Diocese of Carlisle.

So this is the background indicated in Nigel Holmes' motion. The ministerial context in which Readers operate has changed dramatically.

2. The Decline of Morning and Evening Prayer Services

One of the longest serving Readers in our diocese told me that some years back, on most Sundays, he would be out in one of the many village churches in Penrith Deanery, taking a Martins or Evensong service. Now this almost never happens and his preaching is confined to once or twice a month in Penrith itself. But he is fortunate to have even that. Many Readers don't. So it is not surprising that they feel marginalised both by the growing army of NSM priests and by the predominance of Eucharistic services.
3. The Predominance of Eucharistic Services

All over the country there has been a sharp decline in evening services and a change in
the pattern of morning services to include more frequent celebration of the eucharist.
Often it is every Sunday morning. While there is no reason why Readers should not be
given opportunity, at a eucharist, to read the gospel or to lead intercessions, to share in
parts of the liturgy and to preach the word, it seems as if this often does not happen. In
some cases it may be because the Reader is perceived to lack the appropriate gifts. But I
suspect that more commonly it is because, as rota's are prepared, services are allocated to
just one person, and a priest is required for the eucharist. It is a great pity that the
leading of the services is not shared more with Readers.

4. The Sense of Unrealised potential

By contrast with the clergy, attention has not been given, in most dioceses, to the
individual development of Readers. CME has been available, but the take-up is
disappointing. But the issue is more to do with why guided individual development is not
offered to Readers in the way that it is to clergy. Even review of Reader ministry is
patchy. Some Readers are very frustrated that what they see as their potential is not
taken up and they are not told why; nor are they offered guidance as to how their skills
might be developed. They are left to their own devices and to take up any CME course
which takes their fancy. There is little pastoral support for them in the vision they might
have for their own ministry.

In the case of some who have been Readers for some years, the lack of attention to CME
and the lack of individual development often show, for example, in a style which is dated
and in weaknesses which probably could have been addressed years earlier, but weren't.
The journey of finding and developing their most distinctive gifts in ministry simply
hasn't happened.

5. The Effect of an Interregnum

Around the time of an interregnum can be a difficult time for a Reader. Readers are often
called upon to do more in such a time. While they are pleased to be valued, they can be
overworked in that time with too much expected of them. Then when the vacancy ends
they are quietly dropped and what was apparently valued is no longer valued, or so it
appears. Of course, this doesn't happen everywhere.

Quite often a prospective priest is not asked about his or her attitude to existing Readers;
and the Reader is not given a chance to express an opinion about possible candidates. I
am not, for a minute, suggesting that the priest's attitude to Readers is the most
important factor in their selection. But there are too many unhappy stories about what
happens to Readers when the incumbent changes. This suggests that many clergy still do
not know how to work collaboratively and to use the resources God has provided in the
church to which they are appointed. Particular pain is caused when a well accepted
woman Reader is no longer allowed to minister by a new incumbent, simply because of
her gender.

6. The Numbers of Retired clergy
In our diocese, the number of retired clergy is very large. Although, it is interesting to see how unevenly the Holy Spirit distributes them! It seems to be the custom that, when the incumbent is not available, or there are services at overlapping times in a multi-parish benefice, use will be made of a retired priest to take a service rather than a Reader who is local to the parish. The retired priest usually has no pastoral link to the parish, yet the Reader is a member of the local Body of Christ. The Reader is passed over because he or she is not a priest. If the reason is because it is a eucharist, then, in my judgement (and not everyone will agree with me), the use of the local person is to be preferred, using Communion by Extension, at least on some occasions. Alternatively the Reader could share the service with the retired priest, but with the Reader preaching. This develops the gifting and ministry in the local situation. We are not into staffing services. We are into growing God's people and their ministry.

7. The Issue of Status

It is our doctrine that within the Body of Christ we are all equal and we offer our ministry according to our gifts. Sadly, we are human, and with Readers, just as much as with clergy, status and the recognition of status become an issue. The Church encourages this with our robed processions, everyone carefully positioned according to their rank or status. Desire for status really is a problem. People in one group resent the incursion of those of another group, and ways in which other ministers might seem to be ranked ahead of them.

We all need to deal with this in ourselves. We all have moments of being passed over, of not being asked to do what we would like to have been asked to do and of seeing someone else in the position which we would have liked. Insensitive decisions are bound to be made from time to time about someone's recognition. But we must guard ourselves against defensiveness and remember that our highest calling is not to robe up and be recognised in what we do; it is to know Christ and be found in him.

So here then are seven significant present-day factors which will be among those considered by the working party arising out of the Synod debate. But it is important to stress that the feel of Reader morale varies greatly from diocese to diocese. What I have done is to outline factors which are quite widely felt across the Church of England.

The Distinctiveness of Reader Ministry

Now let me turn to what Reader ministry is. I continue to argue, as I did at the residential AGM two years ago, that Reader ministry is highly distinctive and has a great deal to offer. Other ministries really do not need to be seen as a threat.

1. An exacting theological training.

Readers do a thorough and exacting theological training. It is far, far more than the 16 essays done by my class at the end of the 60ies. This equips the Reader for their primary role, which is to preach and teach the Word of God. Put that alongside their daily experience in the community and in the world of work and they can bring to their preaching insights about daily working life, seen through the eyes of Christian Faith.

I always hope that Readers will preach much more out of their own experience than they tend to do. I want to hear them telling the stories of their daily work, or of their former
work, or even life on the golf course(!) - but setting their experience in the context of the scriptures and the Kingdom of God. With their training and with their grounding in daily working life, Readers can speak authentically to people in our congregations about faith at work, which is a subject the clergy rarely address, perhaps because they don't feel competent to do so. We can call Readers 'lay theologians', if we want to; although I would say that all Christians who think about their Faith and apply the teaching to their lives - are lay theologians.

2. A training for public ministry

As well as being theologically trained, Readers are also trained for public ministry. Originally a Reader was someone who read the service. They are trained to lead worship well, to understand the liturgy and to lead prayers sensitively. So they are at ease standing before a congregation and leading. Many of them take funerals very well.

From the platform of training for public leading, a growing number of Readers are now taking on other publicly authorised roles. Among recent members of the Central Readers Council there have been several Reader Chaplains: one to the deaf (Julia Francis), one to a hospital (Philip McDonnagh), one at the huge Gateshead Metro Centre (Ron Black). In Liverpool Diocese there are two stipendiary Readers with responsibility for churches. We have also had stipendiary Readers in Carlisle, engaged in full time pastoral ministry. Public ministry fits well with Readers and their training.

3. Admission to the Order of Readers

The Order of Readers, to which every Reader is admitted, offers coherence across the Church of England and parts of the Anglican Communion. In keeping with Canon Law, Readers receive licences from the Bishop of the Diocese. Similar licensing is available to Church Army workers and to the small number of trained and accredited Lay Workers. Licensed Readers may serve across all the parishes of a diocese. They are transferable across dioceses and usually to other parts of the Anglican Communion.

These 3 points show the advantage of Readers. None of these points applies in the same way to those who are authorised through the various diocesan lay ministry schemes.

What Can be Done to Address the Situation of Poor Reader Morale?

What is generally already given in any context of Reader ministry is the number of public services and the type of those services - eucharistic or non-eucharistic. There may be debate about these points. I certainly favour services in every viable congregation every Sunday. I believe that the people of God in any locality should worship every Sunday. I also believe that, generally, the service should be at the same time each Sunday. The number of services should not be decided by the availability of the priest. That is to use an old model in a new situation. Others can learn to lead the services. There may also be a case, in a population that is less churched and less taught than it used to be, for more non-eucharistic services, readily accessible to those on the fringe of the Church. There are signs of a slight trend in this direction. But these are questions which should be decided on quite other criteria than addressing the under-use of Readers.

More relevant to Reader morale are the following:
1. The Discernment and Development of Gifts for Ministry

As I have already said, and in contrast with the clergy, not enough work has been done in dioceses to enable Readers to reflect on their gifts, hear what others discern about them, and pursue training and development in the areas where their gifting lies. We hope to tackle this shortly in the Diocese of Carlisle by conducting interviews with all our Readers and separately with their incumbents; then we hope to draw up a ministry and development plan for each Reader. We have more Readers than clergy, although many of them are senior citizens.

Authorised ministry must always follow gifting. A satisfied minister is one who sees their gifts flourishing and bearing fruit in the exercise of ministry. Where a Reader (or any minister) operates not out of their gifting, the result is dissatisfaction - dissatisfaction on the part of those who are receiving the ministry, and this, in turn, leads to less use of the minister and disappointment.

Let the Readers who are gifted preachers preach and let them make the links with daily working life or community life. On the other hand where the gifting is still undeveloped let the incumbent help them with regular supervision.

2. The Training of Clergy to Use People According to Gifting

I find it hard to understand why this is still a problem for many clergy. Part of the role of being a pastor and shepherd to a congregation is the role of discerning in what way each person can share in the ministry of Christ. We want as much ministry of Christ as possible. That must be axiomatic.

So, let those Readers who preach well preach regularly at the eucharist as well as at non-eucharistic services. Let them take some of the load of yet another sermon. Let them also be available as itinerant preachers, visiting a variety of churches, bringing their teaching insights to nourish faith. I wish that deaneries would do an inventory of available gifts: for preaching it should include the gifted Methodist local preachers who could well preach more in Anglican churches.

Let Readers who are gifted as evangelists also have an itinerant ministry, taking opportunities to bring people to faith. Let those who are pastorally gifted be encouraged to take funerals, leaving more space for the priest to pray and discern God's will and maybe to make new links outside the congregation. Most of our priests are too busy. Readers can know the community better than the priest. They can spend more time with the family both before and after the funeral. They also speak as someone alongside the one who has died, a fellow pilgrim, a lay person engaged in the same struggle and joy of faith.

Or when there are several places of worship let the pastorally gifted Reader be the pastor or 'shepherd' to one of the congregations, there every week, a reflection of Christ the Good Shepherd, who knows his sheep and the sheep hear his voice. As I said two years ago, of the five-fold ministry described in Ephesians 4 as necessary for the growth of the Church, it is the pastors who must be local, the same person every week for the people to relate to.
To me it is just obvious that you use well all the resources you have got. Why do the clergy hang on to so much for themselves? It can't just be because of the expectations of the congregation. Where lay people do something well, their ministry is usually very acceptable to the congregation.

3. Imaginative Use of People Trained for Public Ministry

More and more doors are opening for the presence of the Church's representatives in the form of chaplaincy - or whatever we choose to call it. If bishops or local clergy try pushing doors, many will open for chaplains, for example, in stores, shopping malls, hospitals, care homes, civic centres, airports, prisons, schools, cadet forces, Scouts and other uniformed organisations, and to the police. The opportunities are amazing! Jesus said: 'the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few; pray that the Lord of the harvest will send more workers into the harvest.' Why then are we not using to the full our trained and articulate resource people, according to their gifting and availability? A great many people in today's networks of life recognise the need for spiritual help and guidance, along with an independent point of reference in the work place to which employees can turn for help.

4. A Better Mutual Understanding of Ministries

If we desire as much ministry as possible, done well in Christ's name, Readers ought not to be found resisting the growing numbers of lay ministers in every diocese. What is important and helpful, however, is an arena where the different categories of minister can meet and share their experience. This can enable a mutual interest and delight in each other's ministries. In the Willesden Area of London Diocese, where I used to serve, several residential weekend conferences have been regularly held for all lay ministers with the bishop's licence or commission. On the first occasion, in 1997, the large number of Readers (over 60 people) were a little anxious about the 8 commissioned ministers present, some of whom were doing some preaching. Two years later, but with a similar number of Readers, 12 hospital lay chaplains and 21 commissioned ministers, the anxiety seemed to have disappeared. All those present seemed genuinely interested in hearing about the ministry of others, in whatever category.

It is this sort of exercise which can grow mutual trust, respect and delight of one another's ministries.

That leads me finally to comment on the interface between the ministries of Readers and the diversity of other ministries.

1. Readers and Ordained Ministries.

Some would say, "should we not just ordain these Readers. Isn't their work the work of a deacon or even the work of a priest". Should we add them to the growing number of non-stipendiary ministers?

A steady stream of Readers, do move on to become deacons and priests. (3 out of the Tonbridge 9 I mentioned at the beginning). Sometimes, almost as soon as a Reader starts their public ministry, you think, "that Reader is a gifted leader and natural witness to the Apostolic Faith, maybe God is calling them to ordination."
But do we really want to clericalise the leading of all church services? I would say that we have been over-clericalised for centuries. What message does it give to lay people if only priests and deacons take focal roles in the services? I certainly don't want that. We need public lay ministry. When Readers lead prayers and preach it gives a different message to the people. It says, "this faith is for you, too." Reader ministry is a natural sign to lay people of what their ministry can be.

It is true that Reader ministry can be seen as diaconal. But we still have great confusion in the Church of England about what a permanent diaconate looks like. In my judgment this will never be resolved until we conceive of a diaconate which is radically different from the work of an ordained priest. It will need a separate training and public profile. There are such models in Germany and Scandinavia and they work well. But as long as the public cannot differentiate between different categories of 'Reverend', and as long as most deacons are in transit to the priesthood, there is, in my view, no hope of a distinctive permanent diaconate.

2. Readers and Other Lay Ministries

I have referred to the 'raising of the bar' in the quality of study expected for Reader training. This has led to the space where more modest training aims are in view to be filled by these various diocesan ministry courses. These have flourished and, as we would hope, out of these courses have come a good number who subsequently do further training as Readers or Priests. We certainly wouldn't want to discourage the impulse for service and ministry which has arisen from these courses. In some cases a foundation year is shared by all who are growing into ministerial roles; in other words, potential Readers, pastoral assistants and evangelists all start together.

As I have already said, Reader ministry is distinctive because Readers are highly trained theologically and for public ministry. Their ministry is transferable. They have the Bishop's licence and they belong to a national order. I believe that Readers have no reason to object to the ministry of those who learn to preach or lead worship more as an apprenticeship, under supervision from their incumbent. Yes, such people certainly have far less training in the first instance, but they grow in their ministries and training then is particularly focussed upon where their gifting is emerging, which hasn't always been the case with those who have trained as Readers.

In my judgement these tensions will arise far less if the Readers themselves are fulfilled in what they are doing. And this will happen if they are not seeking status but, with the full support of others, are using and developing their gifting.

3. Readers and 'fresh expressions' of Church

Two years ago, at Nottingham, it was exciting to see at this same conference, the eagerness amongst those present to see Readers play a part in the wave of 'fresh expressions' of Church. I think we would all agree with that. Reader training, like clergy training needs to put a vision in front of people for a different style of Church, a church which people will find relevant, contemporary, accessible and in reasonably in their own life shape. St. Paul said that he became all things to all people that he might by all means win some for the Kingdom. Following the recently agreed criteria for those called to
Pioneer Ordained Ministries, I hope that similar criteria will be developed for Readers who are similarly gifted and called.

But that might all lead to a change of name for Readers into something that is publicly more easily understood. Oxford and Bristol have led the way, with Licensed Lay Ministers. Perhaps Diocesan Lay Ministers should be considered in contrast to Parish Lay Ministers or commissioned ministers. We shall see.

Lastly, and not strictly about Reader morale:

4. Readers and RTF's

It seems appropriate for me, at this AGM, to report that in the different regions there is steady development of Regional Training Partnerships (RTF's). The intention is that Reader Training, along with lay adult education will be part of the structural provision of RTF's. Hopefully it will then be better integrated with clergy training and CME provision.

Since RTF's are ecumenical, this dimension features in the planning. One of the outcomes of the post-Hind work is a report setting out the shape of provision for the training of lay ministers, and, in particular, Readers and Local Preachers. Our own National Moderator of Reader Training, Alec George, has had a prominent role in this working party.

So, in conclusion, Reader morale is the issue of the day. I have tried to address it as I see it. I shall greatly value your come-back and engagement with the issue.