
A statement of the CRC's policy and beliefs about lay ministry

Since the re-creation of Reader Ministry in the Church of England in 1866, Readers have been an integral part of the Church and its ministry, drawing on their lay callings to inform and enhance their sharing of the Gospel in their workplaces, homes and congregations.

The Central Readers' Council (then the Central Readers' Board) was set up in 1922 to serve the diocesan Boards of Readers and ever since has had a central coordinating role, sharing good practice across the country. This continued with the Church in Wales after its disestablishment in 1920; its Readers remained part of the CRC.

The CRC continues to promote lay licensed ministry, to advocate for good standards of training and conditions of service and to encourage lay people to fulfil their calling as members of the body of Christ

1. CRC advocates that Reader/LLM ministry should be a nationally recognised lay ministry with common recruitment criteria and educational training standards. (Note 1)¹

CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

2. CRC encourages every Reader/LLM to keep their ministry refreshed with regular CMD and other learning/study. (Note 2)²
3. CRC feels that it is important that every Reader/LLM should have a Ministry Agreement which is reviewed on a regular basis. This should set out clearly the balance between expectations and commitment of the Reader and the needs of their parish. (Note 3)³
4. As a matter of good practice CRC recommends that each diocese should have a clear and published policy for its lay ministers setting out how disputes and issues of conduct are to be resolved. (Note 4)⁴
5. CRC recognises that many people at age 70 are not ready to retire from their ministry, but there should not be an institutional expectation that they will continue indefinitely. CRC believes that Bishops' Regulation 2000 (which

requires a Reader/LLM who reaches 70 to surrender their licence and move to PTO) needs amendment to recognise this. (Note 5)⁵

CHANGES IN WHAT READERS/LLMS MAY OR MAY NOT DO

6. Notwithstanding the provision in Bishops' Regulation 2000 which says that Readers may not be paid CRC believes that in certain circumstances it may be appropriate. (Note 6)⁶
7. CRC believes that it should be possible for Readers/LLMs who have been appropriately trained to be authorised by their bishops to conduct baptisms. (Note 7)⁷

SELECTION OF READERS/LLMS

8. CRC believes that it is important that the Church recognises that Readers/LLMs are lay people who are ministers, and they are not quasi-priests. It follows that in Reader/LLM selection dioceses should not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability or age. Two points follow from this: Canon C4 should not be applied to Readers as they are not clergy; as lay people Readers/LLMs should be able to enter into same-sex partnerships and marriages if they wish without their licences being removed (provided their parish accepts the relationship). (Note 8)⁸

¹ **Note 1** Common standards of recruitment and training should mean that Readers/LLMs are able to move from one diocese to another without retraining.

This gives confidence in the role and gives the Church a way of maintaining consistent quality standards. It also shows that the Church values and takes the role seriously.

However, CRC recognises the danger of such recognition perpetuating a hierarchical attitude that Reader/LLM ministry is 'superior' in some way to other lay ministries. One way of preventing this would be to ensure that all training for lay ministry in any form was designed in a modular way, to allow people to build up skills, and their own versatility, over time.

² **Note 2** Ministers who fail to keep up their learning tend to become stale and entrenched in their thinking. In this way they fail to 'feed' their congregations. Good learners make good teachers and this is an important part of Reader/LLM ministry. We are never finished articles where our ministry is concerned. Dioceses should be running accessible CMD programmes, or signposting their lay ministers to good resources for learning. However CRC recognises that there are constraints of time, and sometimes personal difficulties such as illness which may make this hard to do.

³ **Note 3** A Ministry Agreement which is properly used and reviewed can prevent problems festering, make sure that both minister and parish are comfortable with arrangements and make sure that the incumbent has a proper conversation with the lay minister. This means that the gifts of the minister are properly acknowledged and valued. It also embeds a sense and culture of accountability on both sides. This practice may need some monitoring and in some cases enforcement by the bishop and their staff. However, it also requires honesty and gentleness from both parties, and as a matter of good practice there should be guidance on how the process can be used, even to the point of guidelines for a structured conversation when the agreement is reviewed.

⁴ **Note 4** Although this may sound like an over-formalisation of a voluntary calling, it is good practice, and most well-run voluntary organisations will have a clear statement of policy about how their volunteers are to be managed and the standards expected, together with a clear method of resolving complaints and matters of conduct. The Church should do the same. Not to do so is contrary to natural justice, and Christian principles of justice and mercy. A published policy often prevents problems arising because it sets out expectations clearly, and ways in which difficulties, when they first arise, are to be tackled. It shows that the Church values and takes the calling of its lay members seriously.

CRC has been made aware of many cases where lay ministers have been bullied, or had their ministry summarily removed, without their being any avenue that they can explore to resolve differences. (It also knows of cases where Readers/LLMs have themselves been bullies of their priests.) Good policies can go a long way to preventing these painful events.

⁵ **Note 5** Many dioceses have departed from Bishops' Regulation already. Some have abolished PTOs for Readers/LLMs, some have moved the cut-off year to 75, some have extended the length of PTO for more than 12 months. There is no consistency and no clear consensus on what the title 'Emeritus' means either. Good practice over Ministry Agreements as set out at Para 3, should ensure that Readers do not go on past their 'sell-by date' and are enabled to retire at the appropriate point.

⁶ **Note 6** In some dioceses Readers/LLMs are already paid for funerals in addition to their travelling expenses. Although there is the potential for abuse of this (touting for business) it does help to relieve the burden on clergy and makes sure that the Reader/LLM who does not have an income of their own to rely on is not out of pocket. As clergy shortages become worse, it should be possible to pay lay ministers for certain tasks and Bishops Regulation should reflect this.

It should be noted that Readers were paid in certain circumstances in the past, and many received pensions at the end of their ministry.

⁷ **Note 7** At present any lay person may, in an emergency, baptise someone. This most often happens with very frail new-born babies, who might be baptised by a midwife. In lay-led congregations, mostly those regarded as ‘fresh expressions’ members of the congregation may seek baptism. At present, this means that a priest has to visit the congregation to perform the ceremony. CRC believes that there is good theology to support a baptism by a lay minister in these circumstances, and others, where the chief contact with the Church has been with a lay leader. This proposal is not new: it was recommended in Reader Upbeat (2009) and had been discussed and advocated some three decades before that.

It would be of great assistance in parishes which still baptise many babies.

⁸ **Note 8** CRC believes that it is fundamental to our calling that we are and remain lay people, and therefore laws and restrictions that apply to clergy should not be applied to Readers/LLMs. (In saying this, CRC does not offer an opinion on the present restrictions on the marriage of clergy.)

However, it is also important that we are ministers who are called by our communities into service in the Church, and therefore our lives and personal relationships should be conducted in such a way that we do not create a difficulty for our communities and we are accepted among them.

Canon C4 states (*“no person shall be admitted into holy orders who has remarried and, the other party to that marriage being alive, has a former spouse still living; or who is married to a person who has been previously married and whose former spouse is still living.”* An investigation into the basis for the divorce may show that the candidate was not the party at fault and therefore the canon may be over-ridden.) Some dioceses apply this to Readers/LLMs though it is not part of Bishops’ Regulation 2000.

On the question of same sex marriage see The House of Bishops Pastoral Guidance on Same Sex Marriage, Appendix, para 18: *“Those same sex couples who choose to marry should be welcomed into the life of the worshipping community and not be subjected to questioning about their lifestyle. Neither they nor any children they care for should be denied access to the sacraments.”*