

Reader Ministry in the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf

Reader Ministry finds expression in almost every part of the Anglican Communion, but is understood differently from Province to Province, and Diocese to Diocese. Some Provinces and Dioceses think of Reader ministry in very practical terms, as an assisting role to the clergy. Some think it is primarily liturgical, and concerned with leading non-Eucharistic worship. Some take the title Reader literally and use it as a title for everyone in the congregation who reads the lessons in services. Some see a strong pastoral role, and include officiating at funerals as part of the job description. Indeed, some describe the role in a way that makes it almost indistinguishable from that of an ordained Deacon. Others major on the preaching role.

It is perhaps worth saying at the outset that every baptized member of the church is called to ministry. A descriptive paragraph used by the Methodist Church in Singapore, at Ordinations presents a context for thinking about that.

“We are not ordaining you to ministry; that happened at your baptism.

We are not ordaining you to be a caring person; you are already called to that.

We are not ordaining you to serve the Church in committees, activities, or organisations; that is already implied in your membership.

We are not ordaining you to become involved in social issues, ecology, race, politics, revolution, for that is laid upon every Christian.

We are ordaining you to something smaller and less spectacular: to read and interpret those sacred stories of our community, so that they speak a word to people today; to remember and practise those rituals and rites of meaning that in their poetry address man at the level where change operates; to foster in community through word and sacrament that encounter with truth which will set men and women free to minister as the body of Christ.

We are ordaining you to the ministry of the word and sacraments and pastoral care.

God grant you grace not to betray but uphold it, not to deny but affirm it, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Any call to Reader ministry will therefore be discerned in the context of how God is calling people to serve him, bearing in mind their specific talents, rather than whether.

In this diocese, Reader ministry is considered first and foremost to be an enabling part of the teaching and learning process in churches. This may be primarily focused on preaching, though not necessarily so. It will mean thinking deeply about the Gospel and how to communicate it. It will involve an acceptance that in any teaching activity there has to be some degree of self-disclosure. That is, like all Christian ministry it cannot be objective. Ministers are not consultants. They emerge from the community of the faithful and journey alongside them. It follows from that, that personal character, integrity, maturity and self-awareness should be as important in discerning who should hold a public ministry, as more easily testable competencies. But those skills are also important. Potential Readers should think realistically about their ability to both learn and teach, and their commitment to, and suitability for, a training programme scarcely less rigorous than that for ordination.

Preaching is not a stand-alone activity. It is most effective when seen as part of a wider pastoral experience, and the diocese encourages Parishes / Chaplaincies to think about imaginative ways to achieve that balance. We have Readers who hold specific Chaplaincy roles to Seafarers or Students or to a particular Institution such as a hospice. Also, teaching is not restricted to preaching. Readers may, for example, coordinate Confirmation courses, run a study group, organize a retreat or pilgrimage, or facilitate an Alpha course. Reader ministry is essentially local. It is conducted by those

who know the context, and have the support of the local congregation in their ministry. A first step in any discernment process should be a conversation with the Chaplain/Parish priest, to see how a Reader Ministry would work within the wider ministry team in that place, and to make sure that it would be appropriate and welcomed.

The Church of England Ministry Division has laid down the following selection guidelines, and the diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf recognizes them as sufficiently comprehensive to be adopted as a guide for those considering a call to this Ministry in this diocese.

Ministry in the Diocese

Candidates must be baptised and confirmed and be regular communicants in their local church. They should be familiar with Anglican Church culture and practice. They must be able to comply with the Diocesan Policy on the Protection of Vulnerable People. They should be sympathetically aware of the multi-faith and particular ecumenical context of the diocese.

Vocation

Candidates should be able to speak of their own sense of vocation to ministry and mission, referring both to personal conviction and to the extent to which others have confirmed it. Their sense of vocation should be obedient, realistic and informed.

Faith

Candidates should show an understanding of the Christian faith and a desire to deepen that understanding. They should demonstrate personal commitment to Christ and a capacity to communicate the Gospel.

Spirituality and worship

Candidates should show evidence of commitment to a spiritual discipline which involves individual and corporate prayer and worship. Their spiritual practice should be such as to sustain and energise them in their daily lives.

Personality and character

Candidates should be sufficiently mature and stable to show that they can sustain the demanding role of a minister and to face change and pressure in a flexible and balanced way. They should be seen to be people of integrity.

Relationships

Candidates should demonstrate self-awareness and self-acceptance as a basis for developing open and healthy personal and pastoral relationships as ministers.

Potential for training

Candidates should be capable of undertaking satisfactorily a course of study and ministerial preparation with an open and enquiring mind.

Leadership and collaboration

Candidates should show the potential to offer wise leadership in the Church community and to some extent beyond it. They should also show ability and willingness to co-operate with other ministers and to work as team members as well as leaders.

It is the Diocese's aspiration to have a selection procedure for Readers that mirrors the one we have in place for Ordained Ministry. This involves a residential period of one or two days in which candidates are interviewed by at least four people, and are asked to demonstrate certain skills such as leading worship or chairing a meeting. If the decision of the Conference is to recommend that a candidate should proceed to training; that training will mostly be delivered locally. It is an aspiration that Readers should attend a diocesan residential school for a week long period at some point in their training, but this has yet to take effect. Local training will involve participation in a Church Learning Group, alongside others who may be on a vocational journey of their own. Learning from and with each other is a key component of the course and the Diocese does not normally recommend any form of remote, individual distance learning. A typical list of modules to be covered would include the following

Beginning the New Testament

Doing Theology

Call and Vocation

Beginning the Old Testament

Mission and Service

An Introduction to Anglican Worship

The Diocese is committed to encouraging a culture of life-long learning, and so expects that Readers will take every opportunity to continue their study in a programme of continuing professional development. Within the Diocesan Exploring Faith scheme, there is opportunity to proceed to Diploma or Degree level.

No-one is admitted to any Ministry simply on the basis of completing a course. It is for the Bishop to decide whether and when that admission takes place, and he does so on the basis of evidence of intellectual and theological capacity and curiosity; competence in the necessary skills, and formation.

The Diocese supports those in training both financially and practically and by the provision of tutors and mentors who will act as supports and encouragers, as well as being critical friends.