

## **The Discernment and Selection Process for Reader Candidates.**

When someone considers becoming a Reader, he or she will have thought carefully and prayed deeply, even about taking that initial step. The Church of England has a discernment process because Readers, like clergy and others, are exercising a public ministry on behalf of the Church. Each candidate's sense of calling needs to be set alongside the task of discernment, carried out on behalf of the Church by people known as Reader Discernment Advisers. The Diocese has designated Reader Discernment Advisers who consider evidence from candidates' written applications meeting the candidates at Discernment Days where they weigh that evidence against national criteria.

Every individual is different, so the work and ministry carried out by individual Readers differs between place and context. Therefore, whilst there are some elements that might be said to be at the core of a vocation to Reader ministry, each candidate expresses those aspects of call differently. Selection is not a matter of 'passing' or 'failing': it is a process of discerning as best we can – recognising the diversity of individuals and ministries – whether God is calling this person to Reader ministry at this time.

### **How does the discernment process operate?**

Vocational discernment usually begins with a conversation with an incumbent, once a potential candidate feels that they have a calling to Reader ministry that they would like to explore. Whilst there will be individual variability, candidates might speak with others in the parish, family, colleagues, other Readers and/or the Deanery sub-warden of Readers. As these conversations proceed, and provided the incumbent supports the person concerned, they should ask the Enquiry and Selection Administrator for an application pack (contact details can be found on the Who's Who page of the Reader website). The pack contains an application form for a Reader Discernment Day, a Reader's Handbook (a general information document which will be useful during the application process and beyond for reference), and a form to make an application for enhanced DBS clearance, (Disclosure & Barring Service). There will be a personalised covering message to introduce the pack contents and share key dates relating to what the candidate should do to complete the form.

It is strongly recommended that candidates with little or no theological education should attend the York School of Ministry (YSOM) Discernment Year to support their application process. There is a course fee and details are available from the Diocesan office.

### **Making an Application.**

When the candidate feels ready to complete an application form they should do so and return it to the Enquiry and Selection Administrator. It is advised that when completing a form, a candidate should meet with their sub-warden for support in this process, and there may be others the candidate wants to consult as well. Apart from factual information, substantive questions on the form cover the following:

- The candidate's personal faith story and their understanding of the Good News
- Previous and current theological or pastoral training

- Leadership and team-working
- Church and mission activities
- Sense of calling, skills and gifting

The application form also has a section requesting details of 3 referees (one of which must be the incumbent) with the option of adding a fourth referee, who would be an academic tutor from the YSOM discernment year. There is a question asking about PCC support for the application, which means that they must have discussed the potential applicant, and minuted the outcome. In addition to being asked for a reference, the incumbent is asked for a draft proposed role for the candidate and a parish description to be returned with their reference. (They will be provided with model examples for guidance from the Handbook sent to the candidate when they first enquire about making an application.) The incumbent is also asked to provide a copy of the PCC minute, referred to above.

Once the application form is completed the candidate returns it to the Enquiry and Selection Administrator. It is important that the application is received at least 8 weeks before the Discernment Day. Receipt is acknowledged, the candidate reminded of the date of the next Discernment Day and sent some practical information about the running and expectations of the Day - 'top tips'. Discernment Days are held in the Spring, on a Saturday, at Diocesan Offices.

**The Discernment Day includes:**

- A group exercise, including a presentation and leading a discussion
- A written exercise on a pastoral issue
- Two interviews with Reader Discernment Advisers who will have seen the documentation the candidate has submitted plus references, the parish description and draft proposed role. (requested ahead of the Day)

At the end of the Day, the candidate will be given some initial feedback. Following the Day the candidate will receive the written report compiled by the Reader Discernment Advisers Panel. The outcome may be a recommendation from the Advisers to the Suffragan Bishop that the person should go on to train, a recommendation to pursue a different calling; or advice on further areas for development of discipleship. There is an opportunity to discuss the report with the Secretary to the Panel if there is anything requiring further explanation. The report also goes to the Bishop and he or she will follow up with a letter to the candidate to say whether they are happy to accept the Panel's recommendations. The candidate can appeal a decision through the Warden of Readers.

**Reader ministry and manner of life.**

We are all fallible and imperfect human beings. No-one is claiming to be perfect. But there are some areas where it would be inconsistent for the Church to authorise a person for public ministry if that person lives his or her life in a way that deliberately takes a different direction from the teaching of the Church. Whilst there is an obvious danger in the Church appearing to be obsessed by sexual matters, this is an area where that principle does apply.

In this respect, Reader ministry has the same standing as ordained ministry, and the expectations are very much the same.

The Warden of Readers is unable to present to the Archbishop for licensing as a Reader any person who is in a full sexual relationship outside marriage. Applications for Reader ministry are received on the basis of honesty and good conscience in this regard. Candidates in a Civil Partnership or who are co-habiting may be asked to meet with the Archbishop's designated officer – an experienced retired priest – to discuss their circumstances.

**Candidates who are divorced and remarried, or who are married to a person who was previously divorced.**

Many candidates for Reader ministry have been divorced, and some have remarried. Divorce and remarriage are not in themselves a bar to ministry. The Church does nevertheless have a duty to ensure that there is no clear evidence that a candidate has behaved in a way, or that there are unresolved issues, that make it inappropriate for that person to enter public ministry.

A special procedure applies in either of the following cases:

- When a Reader candidate has remarried following divorce, and the candidate's first spouse is still alive
- When a Reader has married a person who was previously divorced, and that person's first spouse is still alive

There is a question in the application form that asks about marital history, and if this is answered positively then the application is referred to the Warden of Readers and the applicant will be contacted with information about next steps.

This overview covers the main points but the Enquiry and Selections Administrator is available to answer any queries arising, or will find the appropriate person to answer.

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