

A guide to good practice for authorised and commissioned Lay Ministers



THE DIOCESE OF
SHEFFIELD



Diocese of Sheffield Readers Association

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Useful contacts

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Area Deans

See: <https://sheffdio.org/area-deans>

Useful documents

Readers, Focal Ministers and Children's, Youth and Family Workers are advised to consult the guides written specifically for their ministries. These are available on the diocesan website.

- [Reader Ministry - sheffdio.org/reader-ministry](https://sheffdio.org/reader-ministry)
- [Focal Ministry - sheffdio.org/focal-ministry](https://sheffdio.org/focal-ministry)
- [Children, Youth and Family - sheffdio.org/children-and-youth](https://sheffdio.org/children-and-youth)

Contents

Useful contacts.....	2
Useful documents.....	2
General principles.....	4
Licensed Lay Ministries	5
Authorised Lay Ministers.....	6
Commissioned Lay Ministers	6
Discerning and Selecting Lay Ministers.....	7
Expectations of the conduct of Lay Ministers.....	8
Dealing with complaints and concerns about a Lay Minister	8
Dealing with complaints about an Oversight Minister	9
Guidelines about the completion of the Ministry Agreement	10

General principles

1. Lay Ministries in the Diocese of Sheffield are loosely categorised as Licensed, Authorised and Commissioned. These are not fixed boundaries and do not imply a hierarchy of ministry (which is the privilege and calling of all the baptised, lay and ordained).
2. All ministry is a gift volunteered in response to the calling of God and in the service of God and the church. It is not to be treated lightly and should be nurtured and encouraged to flourish.
3. All ministers are expected, as part of their responsibility for their calling and discipleship actively to engage in lifelong learning, so that they can feed and nurture their own lives of faith and those to whom they preach and minister. Grants of up to £250 are available from the diocese for licensed, authorised and commissioned lay ministers.
4. Lifelong training may be provided centrally through the Diocese and includes the Bishop's annual lecture in the Cathedral and other events open to both ordained and lay ministers. It is also expected that ongoing training and learning will be provided at deanery and parish/mission area levels with levels of training to be appropriate for the extent and responsibilities of the ministry being offered.
5. All ministers working with children and vulnerable adults are required to have up-to-date DBS clearance and must have completed appropriate safeguarding training, as specified and required by the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer within the previous three years. It is the responsibility of the Parish Safeguarding Officer and the individual minister to ensure that these requirements are met.
6. All ministers are encouraged to have a Spiritual Accompanier to assist them in their life of faith and to see him or her on a regular basis. A list of approved accompaniers is held by the Diocese. For further information please contact the Bishop's Adviser in Spirituality.
7. Lay Ministers and Oversight Ministers¹ should endeavour to work together as a team in a collegiate fashion to further the ministry of their church(es). Lay ministers are accountable to the Oversight Minister and regular supervisions and annual reviews, with an Oversight Minister or other member of the leadership team, should be scheduled. The frequency of supervisions will depend on the extent and the responsibilities of the ministry being offered.
8. The responsibility for ministry in a parish lies with the Oversight Minister in consultation with the PCC. All ministries, authorised or commissioned, take place only with the approval of the Oversight Minister.
9. All ministers should have an approved ministry agreement with their Oversight Minister (If there is no Oversight Minister in the Mission Area, this should be done with the Church Wardens and/or the Area Dean). This should be in place at the time of authorisation or commissioning, and should be reviewed regularly with the Oversight Minister (ideally annually). The Ministry Agreement should set out the time commitment that the minister offers to the Church (including expectation of rest times and holidays), the duties that s/he is expected to

¹ For the purposes of this guide "Oversight Minister" includes Oversight Ministers as well as incumbent-status clergy who have not yet been licensed as Oversight Ministers.

undertake and the support that the church will offer him or her.

10. When a new Oversight Minister comes to a parish all authorisations and commissions should be reviewed, together with this Ministry Agreement, after a period of about six months. This is to ensure that honest conversations are able to take place about ministry deployment in the parish and mission area. Where changes in ministries are made, these should be confirmed to the appropriate warden or (in the case of commissioned lay ministries) to the Director of Mission and Ministry.

Licensed Lay Ministries

1. Licensed Lay Ministries include: Readers, Lay workers licensed under Canon E7 and Church Army evangelists.
2. In the case of Readers and Church Army evangelists training is delivered to a nationally recognised standard through a theological education institute or Church Army.
3. Licences for Readers and Church Army evangelists are nationally portable meaning that ministry in one diocese can be expected to be received in another diocese without further training (subject to safeguarding and safe-to-receive checks). New licences are issued on the confirmation of a “safe to receive” communication from the sending diocese.
4. In respect of Licensed Lay Workers, because the decision to licence them will be determined by local context and need portability will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
5. A licence is given under seal after the appropriate oaths and declarations are made before a bishop or the bishop’s commissary. The licence is held at the pleasure of the bishop and may be revoked at any time.
6. It is a condition of all licences that appropriate DBS checks and safeguarding training are up to date.
7. Readers and Lay Workers licensed under Canon E7 are directed to the Readers’ good practice guide which is available on the Diocesan Website.
8. A bishop’s licence, amongst other things, enables a Reader or Lay Worker to preach frequently at Sunday service and to take funerals. These duties are not automatically extended to authorised or commissioned lay ministers as they do not hold the bishop’s licence.
9. Examples of licensed lay workers in the Diocese of Sheffield may include lay funeral ministers, experienced and qualified ministers from another church denomination for whom Reader training is not considered appropriate, DBF employed staff for whom preaching and service leading is a necessary part of their role.

Authorised Lay Ministers

1. Authorised Lay Ministries (ALMs) include focal ministers, children youth and family's ministers and parish evangelists. They also historically include worship leaders and pioneer ministers although at the present time (2024) there is no central diocesan training provision for these ministries.
2. ALMs are trained centrally through the diocese through the Aurora course (CYF ministers), Faith Empowered (parish evangelists) and Getting Ready (Focal Ministers). They are portable across the diocese meaning that when a minister changes parish they are not expected to train afresh for the role. As with all ministers they are expected to continue with Ongoing Ministerial Development in the new parish.
3. Each ALM will have a warden responsible for their ongoing learning and pastoral care. These wardens are listed under useful contacts, above.
4. With the exception of focal ministers, authorisations take place each year at the Celebration of Lay Ministries held either at Sheffield Cathedral or Doncaster Minster. Focal ministers are authorised in their parishes and are formally welcomed at the Celebration.
5. ALMs do not hold a bishop's licence. This means that they are not authorised to do those things that require a licence (principally frequent preaching and taking funerals).
6. Authorisations are time limited (usually three years). Authorisations are organised by the relevant warden and renewed with the consent of the Oversight Minister and the PCC. They are dependent on all safeguarding requirements being met.
7. ALMs are expected to have a ministry agreement which should be subject to annual review.
8. ALMs and Oversight ministers are expected to meet regularly for supervisions. The frequency of these supervisions will depend upon the extent and responsibility of the ministry.

Commissioned Lay Ministers

1. Commissioned Lay Ministers (CLMs) include all ministries that take place on a parish level and for which a licence or authorisation is neither required nor customary.
2. All CLMs must be baptised and be regular communicants in their parish church. The language of commissioning is taken from the baptism service in which, amongst other things, the newly baptised disciple promises to seek and serve Christ in all people and proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ. The ministry undertaken by a CLM should be identifiable within this list.
3. The purpose of commissioning is to affirm those who are already serving but perhaps have never received any formal recognition, to encourage those who would like to serve but are concerned that they don't have the right qualifications or skills, and to equip all of the baptised people of God to flourish in whatever area of ministry to which they have been called.

4. CLMs receive their training at a local level. This may be parish, mission area or deanery. Training may be provided by an Oversight Minister, Focal Minister or ministry team. Many training materials are available online through the diocesan website and can be adapted according to context. It is expected that CLMs receive some training prior to, and after, commissioning.
5. CLMs are appointed by the Oversight minister with the approval of the PCC.
6. Commissioning is time limited. A three-year period is recommended. At the end of that time the ministry may be renewed or may lapse. The decision rests with the Oversight Minister in consultation with the PCC.
7. Commissioned ministries may include infrequent preaching and service leading. The definition of “infrequent” is no more than six times a year or twice in a four-month term. It is expected that where a CLM preaches or leads a service there will be a focal minister or licenced/ordained minister in attendance. Where a commissioned preacher or service leader feels a call to minister more frequently in this capacity they should seek guidance from the vocations team as to whether ordained or Reader ministry is the right path for them.
8. There are no designated wardens for CLMs. Oversight Ministers are asked to record details of commissioning with the Director for Mission and Ministry.
9. It is the responsibility of the Oversight Minister and parish safeguarding officer to ensure that all CLMs are DBS checked (if required) and receive the appropriate level of safeguarding training.
10. Commissioning takes place within an act of worship in the local church or congregation. Liturgical resources are available from the Resourcing Mission and Ministry team if required. Oversight Ministers are also invited to write their own form of appropriate wording.

Discerning and Selecting Lay Ministers

1. The whole people of God are responsible for encouraging one another to grow in love and service. Oversight Ministers have a particular responsibility in identifying those who have the gifts, time and passions to serve in ministry.
2. It is expected that any potential lay minister will have been a regular worshipping and communicant member of the church for a minimum of six months before being considered for service. This is also true for any lay minister who has recently moved from being a regular worshipper at another church.
3. All lay ministers must be baptised. For those considering licensed ministry and focal ministry it is also a requirement that they are confirmed.
4. It is recommended that those who are exploring ministry consider taking the Foundations Course. This is a requirement for those wishing to be authorised as parish evangelists.
5. For those wishing to undertake any form of public ministry, especially occasional preaching and service leading, it will be necessary for them to be able to test out their calling in a safe way under the supervision of the Oversight Minister.

6. Those considering Reader ministry, having spoken with their Oversight Minister, are invited to contact the Diocesan vocations team in the first instance.
7. Any questions relating to authorised or commissioned ministries should be directed to the relevant warden or the Director of Mission and Ministry.

Expectations of the conduct of Lay Ministers

1. Lay ministers should be clear about their roles as church workers and the boundaries which they need to observe. They may be seen as role models by those with whom they are in contact at all times, including when they regard themselves as off duty.
2. Lay ministers must have a clear understanding of safeguarding procedures and must also make sure that they attend regular training which is relevant and appropriate for their ministry and should keep a record of such training. It is the responsibility of the lay minister and parish safeguarding officer to ensure that all safeguarding training is kept up to date.
3. Lay Ministers should be familiar with the *Parish Safeguarding Policy* sheffdio.org/policy. This sets out helpful guidance for behaviour of church workers in all contexts.
4. All those holding positions in the church whether ordained, licensed, authorised or commissioned are expected to model the fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5) in their lives and ministries. There is no place in ministry for any behaviour that might be considered to be controlling or bullying.

Dealing with complaints and concerns about a Lay Minister

1. All grievances and complaints, unless of a safeguarding nature, ought to be dealt with between the complainant and the lay minister in an informal yet professional manner. In most cases an apology is enough to resolve the issue.
2. Where a complaint is made against a Licensed Lay Minister then please refer to the appropriate good practice guide.
3. As authorised and commissioned lay ministers do not hold the bishop's licence they do not come under conduct regulations. There is no formal complaint procedure and difficulties need to be addressed appropriately at the local level.
4. Where difficulties arise in relation to an authorised lay minister attempts should be made to resolve the matter informally by the Oversight Minister. An informal resolution should ideally be attempted as part of a regular schedule of supervisions.
5. Where difficulties persist in relation to an authorised lay minister the relevant warden should be informed. If necessary the warden will meet with both the lay minister and the oversight minister in order to reach a resolution.
6. Where it is not possible to reach a resolution then it may be appropriate to ask the lay minister to take a defined time out of ministry with a date set for a further meeting to decide whether the Lay Minister can continue in their

ministry.

7. In respect of a commissioned lay minister it is recommended that Oversight Ministers seek the counsel of trusted members of the church, ideally churchwardens or PCC members, before deciding to suspend or end a ministry. A CLM should be given reasons as to why they are no longer being asked to minister and appropriate pastoral support should be offered.
8. Any allegations of a safeguarding nature should be immediately referred to the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer.

Dealing with complaints about an Oversight Minister

1. As with complaints against a lay minister it is recommended that all grievances and complaints are dealt with in an informal yet professional manner.
2. In respect of authorised ministers, if a complaint is not satisfactorily resolved the minister should ask the relevant warden for help in mediation.
3. Where allegations are of a serious nature such as bullying behaviour it may be necessary to contact the relevant archdeacon. This approach should only be made after consultation with the relevant warden.
4. Any allegations of a safeguarding nature should immediately be referred to the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer.
5. In respect of a Commissioned Lay Minister, if a complaint is not satisfactorily resolved the minister seek a meeting with the Oversight Minister and Churchwardens.

Guidelines about the completion of the Ministry Agreement

1. Lay Ministers and their Oversight Ministers should have a common understanding of the nature of the work that the Lay Minister will undertake in the parish, or in the wider church, how it is to be supported and reviewed, and how it relates to the mission of the parish as a whole.
2. This understanding should be laid down in a short ministry agreement. The ministry agreement sets out the expected duties and responsibilities of the lay minister, who the lay minister reports to and how often supervisions are expected to take place. The ministry agreement should be reviewed annual

