

May 2026

Dear Readers,

I'd like to draw your attention to the updated National Guidance for Reader/LLM ministry within the Church of England, published in February of this year. It replaces the Bishops' Regulations for Reader Ministry from 2000. I can highly recommend reading the document for yourself at the link at the end of this letter, but I will highlight the key changes for readers in our Diocese here. Dioceses have been given two years to implement these changes locally.

1. Section 3.4 of the guidance notes that a Reader license may continue after their 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, this is because national church are doing away with Reader PTO status. So **all Readers will need a Bishop's license regardless of their age**. Within Sheffield Diocese currently the only differences between Reader and Reader PTO is that Reader PTO are not required to do a three yearly review, and that their PTO is renewed slightly more regularly than the licensed readers.

This change helpfully removes the distinction between ministry offered before and after the age of 70, and also recognises that many people are entering this ministry later in life and providing fruitful ministry well into their 70s and 80s and beyond, and so we are able to license people later in life and treat all readers the same. It also means that all readers regardless of age in this diocese will be supported with a three-yearly peer review of their reader ministry.

- We currently have over 50 Readers with PTO, and so we want to give ourselves plenty of time to process these new licenses, therefore we will look to license these folks at our Reader AGM in 2027.
- Before that time, information and an application form will be sent to Readers with PTO, so that they can prayerfully consider applying for a license.
- If Readers with PTO don't want to apply for a Reader license, they will need to step back from all public ministry and take on Reader Emeritus status.
- If any Reader with PTO would like to discuss these changes, there will be an opportunity to ask questions of the Warden and Assistant Wardens at this year's Reader AGM on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2026. The wardens team will also be available to chat with Readers through the year if required.

2. Section 4.10 of the guidance concerns funeral ministry, and states that **Readers must have the Bishop's specific authorisation to conduct funerals**, and this will normally mean completing additional funeral training.

- The Diocese of Sheffield is currently delivering a pilot Funeral Ministry training course which is open to any lay person (nominated by their incumbent and PCC). The current cohort is made up of some Focal Ministers, some Readers and some people who don't hold another lay role.
- Those who successfully complete this course will be Licensed as Licensed Lay Funeral Ministers at the Celebration of Lay Ministries Service in September – unless they already hold a Reader License.
- It is likely that this course will be run again – and so new readers will be encouraged to attend this if they feel a call to funeral ministry.
- We know that some Readers in our Diocese take a significant number of funerals and have done for some time, and so might not be required to undertake this additional training (indeed some Readers are involved in delivering this training due to their vast experience). Therefore we will be writing to all Readers before the end of 2026 and asking:

- Would you like to take funerals in your parishes and therefore be added to the Bishop's authorised list?
- If so, have you taken 10 funerals or more in the last 5 years?
- If yes, we will ask your Oversight Minister/Incumbent (or Area Dean in the case of a vacancy) for a reference.
- Some Readers may have taken the required amount of funerals but would still like to attend the training as a refresher/Ongoing Ministerial Development – this will be subject to places on the course and can be explored with the Lead Lay Ministry Enabler.

We appreciate your cooperation and patience as we look to implement these changes.

With gratitude for your important ministry,

Beth Burras

Warden of Readers and Lead Lay Ministry Enabler.

New Guidance can be found here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/national-guidance-for-reader-ilm-ministry-2026-v2.pdf>