

SHEFFIELD DIOCESAN READERS ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Monday 23rd June 2025

ASSISTANT WARDENS' REPORT

We presently have 109 Readers on our records, of whom 54 are male and 55 female. 60 are licensed and 49 have Permission to Officiate (PTO) as they are aged 70 or more. However, following the Annual Meeting, the balance will change. Eight will cease to hold a licence, some of whom will receive PTO instead, so that, for the first time, a small majority of us will have PTO rather than a licence.

We were saddened to hear of the deaths of three serving Readers in the last year (Geoff Snell, John Hoare and Joan Robinson). Four others have retired on grounds of age or health, two were ordained and five have resigned for various reasons.

However, the good news is that we are starting to see a flow of new Readers within the Diocese. Three, newly qualified from the new course at St Hild's, are due to be admitted in September at the Celebration of Lay Ministries service at the Cathedral in September and two more will follow in 2026. And current enquiries suggest there could be up to eight more in 2027, though subject to further discernment and the selection process. We encourage you to pray for them all.

Readers have sometimes expressed concerns that Reader ministry is being superseded by Focal Ministry. The Wardens' Team and the Readers Executive Committee are aware of the concern and can emphasise that this is not going to happen. The Diocese is committed to ongoing support for Reader ministry and if you are aware of anyone who might have a calling to Reader ministry, or be open to exploring it, we hope that you will encourage them to consider the possibility. Information is available on the Diocesan website and the Central Readers Council website. We would also be happy to discuss with anyone exploring their vocation.

It is, perhaps, inevitable that, as a new form of ministry meeting new needs, Focal Ministry has had more attention. However, it is quite different from Reader ministry. Readers' distinctive role is as preachers and teachers of the faith who bring first-hand experience of the everyday world of Monday to Saturday. We have been described as lay theologians. Focal Ministers (and Focal Ministry teams) have a more general leadership role, contributing to the overall development and delivery of mission and ministry in their parish. The respective roles of Reader and Focal Minister, though different, do potentially overlap and if you are also exercising wider leadership in your church (beyond that of Reader) we'd encourage you to discuss the possibility of authorisation as Focal Minister with your PCC. A number of Readers already exercise both roles effectively. But there are also Readers whose responsibilities outside the church mean they don't have the time for more general leadership within their church. And there are Focal Ministers who certainly don't see themselves as preachers or teachers of the faith!

We are keen to encourage a high quality of Reader ministry, which does mean more than receiving the initial training to be admitted as Reader. Ongoing learning is important in the light of our actual ministries and contexts. So we'd encourage you to take up the opportunities offered through the monthly Ongoing Ministerial Development (OMD) sessions. Should the themes covered there not address your needs, please let us know what topics you would like to be included. We'll then see if we can provide them as part of Diocesan OMD or direct you towards where suitable training is available.

Some Readers exercise funeral ministries and, if this is something you are doing or considering, you may wish to join the forthcoming Funeral Ministry course, shared with others in pastoral lay ministry who have a calling to work with the dying and bereaved. We also hope there will be a good response to the Preachers' day in November. That will develop core skills for all of us!

As Assistant Wardens, we are part of the Readers Association Executive Committee and we have worked with the Committee on two aspects of communication. The first is the website, where we realised some changes were needed to make it easier to find the information we're looking for. There are still a few loose ends but we hope it is working better now. We have also worked with the Committee to pilot a regular news bulletin. The first two bulletins had a positive response so we will continue to issue this every two months or so. If there is anything you'd like including please let Tina know, as chair of the Committee

A part of our work is arranging renewal of licences and Permissions-to-Officiate and organising peer reviews. We continue to be most grateful to Dominique Horsfield, the Bishop of Doncaster's PA, for all the excellent administrative support she has given. Our thanks, too, to the panel of reviewers. We hope those of you who have had reviews have found them helpful for reflecting on your ministry. We're happy to receive any feedback about how the process is going.

Sometimes issues blow up in the parish between reviews. If you need somewhere to discuss things that it wouldn't be appropriate to raise in the parish, we continue to be happy to offer support.

One of the issues in reviews is the balance of work and rest and of labour and leisure. Can we encourage you, as we encourage ourselves, to make time and space for what nourishes your lives and ministries. It not only relieves and refreshes us personally but also resources and revitalises our ministries.

As always, thank you for all you do as Readers in Christ's service.

Beryl

Giles

Peter

Assistant Wardens