



National guidance for Reader /
Licensed Lay Minister (Reader)
ministry within the Church of England



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DEFINITIONS

Canons

Canons are the laws governing the Church of England. [They are available on the Church of England website here.](#)

Incumbent, parish and PCC

Recognising that the ministry of many Readers / LLM (Readers) is in a chaplaincy situation, the words incumbent, parish and PCC are used to include the sponsoring clergy, area of ministry and responsible authority respectively. In a parochial situation incumbent includes team rector, team vicar, priest-in-charge or other minister with responsibility for a parish.

The Central Readers' Council

The Central Readers' Council (CRC) also provides resources for Wardens of Readers / LLMs. The CRC is an independent charity set up by the Church of England in 1922 to 'maintain and develop' the work of Readers in The Church of England and the Church in Wales. The CRC provides a quarterly magazine for Readers / LLM (Readers) and other lay ministers, resources for learning and development, grants for ministry development, events and conferences: [About us – Central Readers' Council](#)

Wardens of Readers / LLMs

Each diocese should have a person or people with delegated responsibility from the bishop for Readers / LLM (Readers) and those in training within the diocese. Their role is likely to include oversight, organisation and pastoral care. This person is appointed by the Bishop and usually has the title Warden of Readers or Warden of LLMs so the umbrella term 'Wardens of Readers / LLMs' is used throughout this guidance. They may be lay or ordained, a member of staff or a volunteer.

Wardens of Readers / LLMs are invited to join the national Lay Ministries Network which is supported by the national Lay Ministries Team. The Lay Ministries Network provides opportunities for people with roles that support lay ministries to get together, share ideas, inspiration, learning and challenges. It is for those with a role that helps equip and support others in lay ministries. Wardens of Readers / LLMs are welcome to join by contacting the National [Lay Ministries Team](#).

1. INTRODUCTION TO THIS GUIDANCE

1.1. Within the ministry of the Church of England there are thousands of Readers / Licensed Lay Minister (Readers) giving generously of their gifts and time. As lay leaders with a public and representative ministry, Readers / LLM (Readers) have a significant role within the life of the Church of England and minister in diverse ways in a range of contexts across it.

1.2. Different dioceses have different titles for this role, usually either 'Reader' or 'Licensed Lay Minister' abbreviated to LLM. The term 'Reader / LLM (Reader)' is used within this guidance to encompass all those licensed as readers as understood within [Canons E4 -6](#) which relate to this ministry. This is also intended to avoid confusion with other lay ministry roles which are licensed, though much of the good practice guidance within this document is relevant to lay ministries more widely.

1.3. All Readers / LLM (Readers) are trained, equipped and licensed by a bishop for ministry. But Reader / LLM (Reader) ministry looks different in different places depending on the local context. Many Readers / LLM (Readers) teach, preach, lead worship and are involved in mission and pastoral care. Some minister as chaplains and many also take funerals after additional training. Readers / LLM (Readers) are usually voluntary ministers.

1.4. The Church of England is committed to safeguarding as an integral part of its ministry and mission, promoting a safer culture and the welfare of every child, young person and adult. All licensed lay ministers, including Readers / LLM (Readers) are required by section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 to have 'due regard' to safeguarding guidance issued by the House of Bishops and must comply with Safeguarding Codes of Practice, the first of which came into force in 2023. All up to date documents can be found on the [Safeguarding e-manual](#). Failure by a Reader / LLM (Reader) to comply with a requirement would be grounds for the revocation of their licence by the bishop.

1.5. This national guidance for Reader / LLM (Reader) ministry provides information and support for Readers / LLM (Readers), their incumbents, Wardens of Readers / LLMs (or their equivalent) and more widely. It is commended for use by the House of Bishops. There is some information which must be adhered to, for example in relation to the Canons of the Church of England and in relation to safeguarding, and these areas are indicated by the use of the word 'must'. Other information is offered as recommended good practice guidance.

1.6. This guidance was published in 2026 and will be reviewed in 2031 unless earlier updates are required. It supersedes the Bishops' Regulations for Reader Ministry (2000).

2. BECOMING A READER / LLM (READER): DISCERNMENT & FORMATION

2.1. God calls a wide range of people to Reader / LLM (Reader) ministry and these conversations usually start within a parish or other worshipping community and with prayer.

2.2. Because Reader / LLM (Reader) ministry is licensed, discernment must also involve conversations at diocesan level, usually including contact with the Warden of Readers / LLMs. Candidates should normally be nominated to the bishop by the incumbent of their parish or the minister of the place where they intend to minister, with the agreement of the PCC of the parish or its equivalent in other contexts.

2.3. Dioceses are responsible for discerning and selecting candidates for Reader / LLM (Reader) ministry and should do so in a way that is rigorous, transparent and fair, including use of the [national discernment framework](#) which explores the following areas: love for God, call to ministry, love for people, wisdom, fruitfulness and potential.

2.4. As part of this process, a candidate's eligibility for this ministry must be checked, including being baptised, confirmed and a regular communicant of the Church of England as well as relevant safeguarding checks (see 2.9).

2.5. Dioceses should ensure that appropriate pastoral care is provided for candidates who are not recommended for Reader / LLM (Reader) training.



2.6. As part of its vocations work the diocese should encourage and model a diversity of people and culture within Reader / LLM (Reader) ministry. Hence dioceses should ensure that the discernment and formation for potential Readers / LLM (Readers) is accessible without discrimination or disadvantage to all eligible candidates. Thought should be given to physical accessibility as well as other potential barriers such as timing and the mode of assessment in order to create accessible and inclusive environments for candidates. There is a need to guard against bias or the perception of bias in any aspect of discernment and formation.

2.7. Each diocese should provide training and formation which appropriately prepares potential Reader / LLM (Readers) for the exercise of ministry using the [national formation framework](#) for Reader / LLM (Reader) Initial Ministerial Education. This framework explores the following areas: love for God, call to ministry, love for people, wisdom, fruitfulness, potential and trustworthiness. All training for Reader / LLM (Reader) ministry falls within the [national quality assurance framework](#).

2.8. Training should be financed by the diocese or parish, at no cost to the trainee. National funding is available to provide additional support for disabled candidates or those with additional learning needs.

2.9. All Safeguarding policy must be adhered to in the processes of discernment and formation of Readers / LLM (Readers). This includes [Safer Recruitment and People Management](#) which sets out requirements around interviews and assessment, pre-appointment Checks, and Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) and the [Safeguarding Learning and Development Framework](#). The national discernment and formation frameworks for Readers / LLM (Readers) also explore attitudes to and awareness of good safeguarding culture.



3. BECOMING A READER: ADMISSION AND LICENSING

3.1. Before exercising ministry, Readers / LLM (Readers) **must**:

- be baptised, confirmed and a regular communicant of the Church of England; and
- be admitted to the office by a bishop;
- have fulfilled all relevant safeguarding requirements including having a valid enhanced DBS with Barred List check in place; and
- hold a current licence from the bishop in the diocese in which they intend to minister.

3.2. Admission to the office of reader happens only once and is not repeated if a Reader / LLM (Reader) moves to a new parish or diocese. At admission a Reader / LLM (Reader) **must** make the declaration of assent and obedience as prescribed in Canon E5.4 and receives a certificate of admission and a copy of the New Testament.

3.3. Before admission to the office of reader, the bishop, in consultation with the Warden of Readers / LLMs and those responsible for diocesan discernment and formation, **must** be satisfied that those to be admitted are nominated in accordance with Canon E5 and are suitable in faith, learning and personal life as described in Canon E5.2 and 3 and that all safeguarding requirements have been fulfilled.

3.4. Licensing provides authority to exercise ministry in a particular place and may be for a set length of time. Before being licensed the Reader is required to make the declarations as prescribed in Canons E5.4 and E6.2 and must not be disqualified under paragraph one of Canon E6.6. Anyone admitted to the office of reader **must not** exercise that ministry without a licence. A Reader / LLM (Reader) licence may continue after their 70th birthday.

3.5. All Readers / LLM (Readers) in active ministry **must** hold a bishop's licence which should be subject to regular renewal. This might take place every three or six years, dependent on fulfilling safeguarding requirements. Re-licensing also provides an opportunity to gather diocesan Readers / LLM (Readers) for a time of celebration and recognition of their ministry. Readers / LLM (Readers) **must** seek permission from the bishop before exceeding the terms of their licence.

3.6. On rare occasions, Readers / LLM (Readers) may hold more than one licence simultaneously, for example if they minister in more than one diocese.

3.7. The licence should indicate the area in which they may minister and the duties they are permitted to perform. Licensing Readers / LLM (Readers) to a diocese rather than a benefice or parish may provide additional flexibility in terms of deployment where that is agreed between Reader / LLM (Reader), incumbents – in consultation with the PCCs – and the bishop. Clarity around to whom the Reader / LLM (Reader) is accountable and from where support will be provided – including pastoral care as well as practical support such as expenses – will be of particular importance where someone is not licensed to one benefice or parish.



Photo credit: Martin Sheppard

3.8. Readers' / LLM (Readers') licences authorise them to minister in their own dioceses; they **must not** minister in a diocese other than that in which they are licensed on a temporary basis without written permission from the bishop of the diocese concerned. Invitations to preach or conduct a service (including at a funeral service) in a different diocese **must** be referred to the bishop of that diocese, normally through the Warden of Readers / LLMs of that diocese. It is also good practice for the Reader / LLM (Reader) to consult their incumbent before accepting an invitation beyond their own parish or district.

3.9. Sometimes a Reader / LLM (Reader) may exercise ministry in a new area within their diocese, whether geographically or to a specialised (sector) ministry e.g. Chaplaincy and this may require a new licence.

3.10. Readers / LLM (Readers) hold positions of leadership and trust and should always be conscious of the power dynamics involved within their ministries. All licensed lay ministers, including Readers / LLM (Readers) **must** have 'due regard' to safeguarding guidance issued by the House of Bishops and must comply with Safeguarding Codes of Practice. If safeguarding requirements are not complied with, this would be grounds for a licence being revoked by the bishop.

3.11. The bishop of each diocese **must** ensure that a register of all Readers / LLM (Readers) is kept and this should be regularly updated. It should contain the Reader / LLM (Reader)'s date of birth, full name and address, dates of admission and first and subsequent licensing, and details of the parish or context in which the ministry is exercised. The record keeping requirements within the Safer Recruitment and People Management Guidance **must** also be adhered to.

4. EXERCISING READER / LLM (READER) MINISTRY

4.1. The responsibilities that Readers / LLM (Readers) may undertake are set out in [Canon E4](#). These include preaching and teaching, pastoral ministry and reading Morning and Evening Prayer (save for the absolution), but these will vary for each individual and context. It is important that Readers / LLM (Readers), clergy, PCCs, congregations and others among whom the Readers / LLM (Readers) are to minister are clear about the role and responsibilities of Readers / LLM (Readers) broadly as well as individually. Signposting information about this ministry – including this guidance and relevant diocesan information and guidelines – is valuable in supporting this.

4.2. Readers / LLM (Readers) may lead parts of the Gathering and Liturgy of the Word delegated to him or her by the president during services of Holy Communion as well as assisting the president in the other ways described in the Note headed “Ministries” in the [General Notes to Common Worship: Holy Communion Service](#). They may also distribute the sacrament at Holy Communion.

4.3. Readers / LLM (Readers) **must not**:

- preside at Holy Communion;
- officiate at the sacrament of baptism except in an emergency situation when it is lawful for a lay person to baptise;
- officiate at a marriage service;
- pronounce the Absolution or give a Blessing but should use an authorised alternative form of words.

4.4. Readers / LLMs are usually voluntary ministers. In a few cases they may be paid; unless their duties are purely canonical, they are likely to be employed and not on common tenure.

4.5. Regular reflection and review are essential for every Reader / LLM (Reader). Every incumbent with a Reader / LLM (Reader) should ensure that they have **regular reviews**, usually annually. These may involve the Warden of Readers / LLMs. Provision should also be made for Readers / LLM (Readers) without an incumbent to have regular reviews of their ministry which may involve the Rural / Area Dean and / or Warden of Readers / LLMs. These reviews provide the opportunity to pay attention to the ongoing sense of call to ministry and wider vocation, areas of fulfilment and satisfaction, and challenges that have arisen.

As a part of these discussions it may be helpful to consider updates to the written agreement (see 4.6 below), noting opportunities for expansion or reduction of ministry or re-deployment, for Continuing Ministerial Development and training requirements including safeguarding and for opportunities for refreshment e.g. a retreat or sabbatical. Readers / LLM (Readers) may find it helpful to keep a record of ministry exercised to reflect upon as part of these reviews. Readers / LLM (Readers) should also have a regular Ministerial Development Review (MDR) which provides the opportunity for a more in-depth review of their ministry.

4.6. Each Reader / LLM should have a **written agreement** with their incumbent (or the person to whom they are accountable) to provide clarity of expectation to everyone involved. Dioceses may wish to provide a template written agreement for use. It is important that this agreement is reviewed regularly by the Reader / LLM (Reader) and incumbent together, as it is likely to change over time as circumstances change. Reviewing the written agreement should usually take place annually and may be incorporated into a review conversation (see 4.5 above). Written agreements should take into account:

- the particular expression of this person's ministry;
- their role in the local ministerial team and in relation to the PCC;
- what ongoing learning and training may be valuable and/or required, including safeguarding training and diocesan / national opportunities;
- the balance between ministry and wider commitments for example to family, work and leisure;
- what support and supervision will be appropriate to and available for this person, including arrangements for reimbursing expenses incurred through performance of the Reader's / LLM (Reader's) ministry;
- what a regular meetings with the incumbent and other staff might look like.

4.7. Dioceses should encourage licensed Readers / LLM (Readers) to undertake **post-admission training and Continuing Ministerial Education / Development** and provide financial help for them to do so. Where appropriate such training should be held in conjunction with other ministers, lay and ordained. Readers' / LLM (Readers') reviews and MDRs may help to identify developmental opportunities. Grants are available for Readers / LLM (Readers) for post-admission training from the Central Readers' Council.

4.8. Readers / LLM (Readers) should be reimbursed fully for travelling and other expenses incurred through the performance of their duties. In the case of expenses relating to duties undertaken in the parish where the Reader / LLM (Reader) is licensed, arrangements for their payment should be clearly indicated in the written agreement. Expenses would not normally be received for taking services in their usual place of worship although should be paid for services taken at other churches within a multi-parish benefice. Travel expenses should be the actual cost or mileage at the current rates of approved mileage allowance payments set by HM Revenue and Customs. Further details can be found in the Booklet The Parochial Expenses of the Clergy: A Guide to their Reimbursement. In the case of expenses incurred through serving elsewhere, that parish should ensure that the Reader / LLM (Reader) is fully reimbursed.

4.9. Some dioceses authorise Readers / LLM (Readers) to administer **Communion by Extension**, having undertaken appropriate training to do so. The explicit permission of the bishop **must** be obtained for the use of this rite and the Guidelines issued by the House of Bishops should be observed.

4.10. Bishops may authorise Readers / LLM (Readers) to conduct **funerals**. Readers / LLM (Readers) who are exploring a call to funeral ministry **must** seek authorisation for this area of ministry and would usually complete appropriate additional training in order to conduct funerals. Readers / LLM (Readers) **must not** conduct a funeral, bury the dead or read the burial service before, at or after a cremation unless authorised by the bishop for funeral ministry. If authorised, they may conduct a funeral in a church or churchyard with the goodwill of the persons responsible and at the invitation of the minister of the parish. Where the service is to take place at a crematorium, cemetery or other place which is not a church or churchyard, Readers / LLM (Readers) need to have the consent of their own incumbent and have been asked by the persons concerned to perform the service. They must also, so far as practicable, have informed the “relevant minister” and sought his or her goodwill. The “relevant minister” is the minister of the parish on whose electoral roll the deceased’s name was entered or, failing that, the minister of the parish where the deceased usually lived.

4.11. The expenses incurred by the Reader / LLM (Reader) for performing a funeral service, including travel and loss of earnings, should be reimbursed. It is for each Diocesan Board of Finance to decide what proportion of a funeral fee might be paid to the minister performing the service. Where Readers / LLM (Readers) receive payment for funerals, it should be made clear to them that they are responsible for declaring this income to HMRC for tax purposes and / or made aware of potential benefit implications.

4.12. In some dioceses the parishes (or places where the Readers / LLM (Readers) exercise their ministry) pay an annual retaining fee to the Diocesan Readers’ Board or equivalent. In such places a fee is also usually payable by, or a donation is invited from, parishes which use the services of a Reader / LLM (Reader) from another parish, especially during an interregnum.

4.13. Readers / LLM (Readers) are **not automatically ex officio members of the PCC**; each parish should decide at an Annual Parochial Church Meeting its policy for Readers / LLM (Readers) as regards membership of the PCC (see Rule M15 of the [Church Representation Rules](#)). Readers / LLM (Readers) may be ex officio or co-opted members (or, where there are several Readers / LLM (Readers) one or two may represent the others) or may be elected by the APCM as one of the parochial representatives.

4.14. A Reader / LLM (Reader) who is a member of a PCC is eligible for appointment as a parish representative during a vacancy under section 11(1)(b) of the 1986 Measure.

4.15. The **normal dress** of licensed Readers / LLM (Readers) for liturgical duties is cassock, surplice, hood of degree (where appropriate) and plain blue scarf. A cassock alb may be worn at the Holy Communion if this is the custom of the parish. Readers / LLM (Readers) may adopt another form of clothing with the agreement of the incumbent and if it has been ascertained by consultation with the PCC that it will be acceptable and will benefit the mission of the Church in the parish.

4.16. Dioceses may wish to consider a form of identification or signifier for Readers / LLM (Readers) who minister outside the context of gathered worship.

4.17. Readers / LLM (Readers) may accept invitations to take part in **services in a church of another denomination** to which the Church of England (Ecumenical Relations) Measure 1988 applies provided that the duties they undertake in the service are the same as or similar to those they are authorised to perform in the Church of England. Readers / LLM (Readers) should obtain the approval of the incumbent of the parish where the service is to take place or, where they intend to participate regularly in such a service, of the bishop of the diocese and the PCC of the parish where the service is to take place. The Reader / LLM (Reader) **must** adhere to safeguarding requirements determined by the other denomination.

4.18. In local ecumenical projects and partnerships (LEPs), Readers / LLM (Readers) may, with the permission of the bishop (given after consultation with the PCC), undertake such duties in the area covered by the project as the bishop may specify. The Reader / LLM (Reader) must adhere to safeguarding requirements determined by the other denomination.

4.19. When a Reader / LLM (Reader) moves to another parish or place within the same diocese they should inform the Warden of Readers / LLMs if they wish to continue to exercise Reader / LLM (Reader) ministry. After a period of time for exploration and discernment – it is suggested normally around six months – the incumbent of the parish or minister in charge of the place where the Reader / LLM (Reader) worships, in consultation with the Reader / LLM (Reader) and with the agreement of the PCC, may contact the Warden of Readers / LLMs to ask that the Reader / LLM (Reader) licence be transferred, or a new licence prepared. Decisions as to the grant of a new licence rest ultimately with the diocesan bishop.

4.20. When a Reader / LLM (Reader) moves to another diocese and would like to continue to exercise Reader / LLM (Reader) ministry they should contact the Warden of Readers / LLMs as early as possible to start exploring this, ideally before they move. The Reader / LLM (Reader) should explore this with the incumbent or minister in charge of their new parish. In order to request a licence, once they have worshipped in a new context for a period of time – it is suggested normally around six months – the incumbent may apply to the Warden of Readers / LLMs in consultation with the Reader / LLM (Reader) and with the agreement of the PCC to request that the Reader / LLM (Reader) is licensed. Because Reader / LLM (Reader) ministry varies in each diocese, some additional training may be required by dioceses, which should be mindful of pre-existing learning, knowledge and experience. The Warden of Readers / LLMs of the new diocese should also contact the Warden of Readers / LLMs of the diocese from which the Reader / LLM (Reader) has moved to ensure that the Reader / LLM (Reader) left in good standing or if there is any reason why a new licence should not be given. [Safer Recruitment and People Management guidance](#) must be adhered to. Decisions as to the grant of a new licence rest ultimately with the diocesan bishop.

4.21. During a **clergy vacancy** it is normally appropriate for the Reader's / LLM (Reader's) ministry to continue and supervision and support should be provided for them from the Area / Rural Dean, churchwardens, Warden of Readers / LLMs and / or others involved as appropriate. However, it should not be assumed that the Reader / LLM (Reader) will necessarily continue indefinitely, particularly if the vacancy is protracted and regular reviews remain essential. A potential incumbent should be made aware of the expectation that they will foster an environment of collaborative ministry within the parish, ministering alongside existing lay ministers with mutual respect and support.

4.22. At a suitable time after the **end of the vacancy** the new incumbent and Reader / LLM (Reader) should meet to discuss the shape of their collaborative ministry within the parish. If there is disagreement around the ongoing role of the Reader / LLM (Reader) then the matter should be considered by the Area / Rural Dean and Warden of Readers / LLMs in consultation with the bishop. This might include a review and revision of the **written agreement**, or externally facilitated conversations about changing ministry expectations, or discussion of opportunities for ministry elsewhere if appropriate. Any decision should be taken sensitively and transparently, with appropriate pastoral care for all those involved.

4.23. Dioceses should have a clear information available to all Readers / LLM (Readers) about **expectations of them and their conduct**, including signposting these Guidelines and key diocesan policies. Readers / LLM (Readers) should abide by the policies of their diocese.

4.24. It is also recommended that dioceses have a clear policy and process for **how to deal with difficulties** that arise within Reader / LLM (Reader) ministry and **disciplinary issues**, including provision of appropriate pastoral care for those involved. Most issues are likely to be resolved informally, for example through mediation.

4.25. **Dioceses may wish to collect information** that enables them better to understand the nature and value of Reader / LLM (Reader) ministry within the diocese. Consideration will need to be given to avoiding this being unduly onerous for those involved and to compliance with the GDPR.





5. FINISHING READER / LLM (READER) MINISTRY

5.1. Readers / LLM (Readers) may pause their ministry for a period of time or decide to step down completely for a range of reasons including changes in personal circumstances, discerning a new vocation, moving to a new area or other factors. Having regular ministerial reviews will enable Readers / LLM (Readers) to explore when the time might be right for them to step away from this ministry for an agreed length of time or to end this particular ministry and how to end it well including appropriate celebration and recognition of the ministry which they have offered.

5.2. If a Reader / LLM (Reader) pauses their ministry for a period of time there should be clarity as to what tasks it will not be appropriate for them to undertake within their context during this time. When they return to Reader / LLM (Reader) ministry it may be necessary to do some re-training, including in relation to safeguarding.

5.3. Readers / LLM (Readers) **must** surrender their licence if it is revoked by the bishop. The Reader / LLM (Reader) should be informed of the reason and sufficient opportunity should be given to the Reader / LLM (Reader) to show reasons to the contrary. Where a licence is revoked summarily, the Reader / LLM (Reader) **must** be notified in writing of the revocation and of the right of appeal to the Archbishop as laid down in Canon E6.3.

5.4. It is recommended that each diocese have a stated policy about Reader / LLM (Reader) retirement. Issues around retirement should be handled with pastoral care and sensitivity. It should be made clear that Readers / LLM (Readers) are not expected, as a matter of duty, to continue with their ministry indefinitely and MDRs should consider these issues regularly.

5.5. Readers / LLM (Readers) who have surrendered their licence may be given the title Reader Emeritus / Emerita as an indication of their continuing link with the Reader / LLM (Reader) network. Reader Emeriti are retired from active ministry and should not robe.