

## Final Report to the Bishop of Hertford on Pastoral Care for Readers.

In January 2001, Bishop Robin, as Warden of Readers, asked me to investigate the structures of pastoral care for Readers in the St. Albans Diocese. In particular, he passed on to me questions raised by a meeting of Readers and Readers in training of the Dunstable Deanery:

1. Would it be possible to have clarification of the roles of those who support Readers and Readers in training?
2. How do such people relate to each other: who supervises the supervisors?
3. Is it possible to set up a process so that action is not left until a response to a crisis is needed?  
( usually when a crisis involves a 'threat' to full-time stipendiary clergy ).
4. What resources have Readers in training who feel isolated?
5. Why in this diocese are all Reader Advisers, and the Warden of Readers, clergy and not lay?  
Is it appropriate to have a Bishop as Warden, whose primary responsibility is towards his stipendiary, ordained personnel?
6. Is it possible to have a chaplain for Readers?

Other questions to be considered included the possibility of having an 'Ombudsman' for Readers, who would be called in when local attempts to resolve situations failed; and who should keep the list of Readers' skills and experience which they were asked to complete some time ago?

### Deanery Advisers' Opinions

In order to try to gauge the feeling and experience among Deanery Advisers for Readers on various matters relating to pastoral support, I distributed a short questionnaire to Deanery Advisers; I gave 9 to DAs at their meeting with the Warden and sent copies to 5 others ( experienced Advisers ) by post. I have had 8 replies, and a message from one to say that he feels unable to fill it in because he has too short experience of being an Adviser.

I asked Advisers about contacts with Readers previous to becoming an Adviser. Two had been Readers before ordination; seven had Reader friends, or had worked with Readers. One had trained and two had done post ordination training with Readers; one had had no contact with Readers before becoming a DA.

I asked about contacts with student Readers, apart from the initial meeting to report to the selection panel. Three invited students to the regular meetings of the Deanery Readers. Some have involvement with training as tutors, so have involvement with some students in their areas.

Contacts with Readers on a regular basis came through meetings to draw up job descriptions every 3 years ( 3 ); regular, usually twice a year, meetings of the Readers in their area ( though this was difficult for some to organise ); others ( 5 ) had contact at Chapter meetings, to which Readers were now invited; one had regular contact in the staff meetings of the team ministry to which both Adviser and Readers belonged. ***If Advisers are to be sufficiently well known to the Readers in their area to be approachable and trusted to help if the Readers find themselves in need of pastoral support, then contact through regular meetings, either in a group, or one to one is essential, I believe.***

Only three Advisers had found themselves involved in situations of conflict between a Reader and their incumbent or other clergy. This may be because most of those who have responded had not been advisers for long - 6 out of the 8 had been appointed in the last 3 years. The longest serving DA had been involved in 5 such situations in his 13

years as an adviser: in each case reconciliation proved impossible, and the Reader moved parish. The adviser felt the incumbent was to blame in 4 out of these 5 situations. This does not seem to me to be a very satisfactory situation from the Readers' point of view. In the two other cases, the situations were still unresolved. In one case, where a Reader was continually seeking selection for the priesthood, all levels of Diocesan clergy, including the bishop, had been involved in seeking a solution.

None of the Deanery Advisers who responded had been asked to mediate in situations of conflict between Readers serving in the same parish, nor between Readers and other lay people in their congregations.

From the Advisers who responded, there was no clear majority opinion about whether it was helpful for all Deanery Advisers to be clergy, nor whether it would be helpful to have a lay adviser working alongside a clergy DA; nor whether it would help to have a DA from outside the Deanery. There was a similar lack of consensus over whether Readers should be consulted about DA appointments, or if there should be a Diocesan Director of Lay ministry. The majority of Advisers felt it helpful to have a Bishop as Warden - they felt it gave Readers more clout and thought he would know the history of any clergy involved in pastoral problems. Six out of the eight however, felt it would be useful to have one or more ombudsmen for Readers; all felt there should be a mixture of lay and ordained 'ombudsmen'. Of the two others, one felt that the Bishop fulfilled this role, the other that the Rural Dean should act as 'ombudsman'. Other long-serving DAs felt that the Chief Tutor and /or the Secretary of the Readers Association already undertook this function. None felt that having a Diocesan Chaplain for Readers was a good idea; comments were that it would complicate relationships, and that, at a local level, the Deanery Adviser acted as Readers' Chaplain.

## **Readers' Opinions**

In order to try to gauge the feeling and experience among Readers on various matters relating to pastoral support, I sent out a questionnaire to 1 in 10 of those listed on the Secretary's list of Readers, which includes Trainees, Licensed, those with Permission to Officiate and Emeritus Readers. I took each tenth name, then adjusted to try to get a proportion of male and female ( 4 to 3 ) , and of each category, that reflected the numbers in each category in the diocese. Initially, I sent out 35 questionnaires. At the end of the covering letter, I asked the Readers I contacted if they would ask others they knew of who had experienced difficulty to contact me. The result of this was that I sent out 6 more questionnaires, 4 to women and 2 to men ( neither of these 2 men responded). Of 41 sent out, I have had 28 back. I have also heard anecdotal accounts from another two Readers who have experienced serious difficulties in their ministries.

Of the Readers' questionnaires which were returned, 17 were from women and 11 from men. It is interesting to note that this is a reversal of the proportions of men and women in those contacted. Ages ranged from 38 to 81, with most from those in their 50s and 60s; 6 had been admitted before 1990 ( the earliest in 1963), 18 in the 1990s and 1 this year. All bar one ministered in a parish situation. Three were still in training.

In training, the majority looked to their tutors and their parish priests for pastoral support. Those who trained through MTS also looked to support panels. Other Readers, other trainees, friends and family gave support also, and several looked to the RTS administration for pastoral support. Only one respondent said she had no-one to support her during training.

Eight respondents reported problems with clergy during training. Of these 7 were women. The one man had trouble with an incumbent he was seconded to work with, who put pressure on him to do more in the parish than he felt able to do, given the demands of his full time work. The situation was resolved with the help of the student's vicar, and the

Chief Tutor. This same incumbent ( who was a Deanery Adviser ) also caused problems for a woman Reader student in his parish, by putting pressure on her to preach before she felt confident to do so. Her spiritual director gave her the courage to resist the incumbent's pressure, by threatening to stand up in the pulpit and say nothing. Three women felt undermined by their incumbents during training, because of the incumbent's opposition to women ministers. The form this took varied from blocking any opportunity for the trainee to exercise ministerial skills, which led to conflict with the training establishment; asking the Chief Tutor to remove the student from the training scheme, without first speaking to the student; and in two cases, saying towards the end of the training period that they were unwilling to work with the Reader after licensing. Where these issues were resolved, the trainees mostly had to work things out for themselves, with support either from the RTS or from other clergy ( Rural Deans and Deanery Advisers were helpful). In one case the conflict was resolved by the Reader student moving to another parish; in other cases the situation was resolved because the clergy person involved retired or moved. Other trainees simply felt 'in the wilderness' with no support from their incumbents during training, particularly where their incumbent had no previous experience of Reader ministry. Generally, students found their PCCs and congregations supportive, even if incumbents were not.

Another woman student was given as a tutor a clergyman was subsequently arrested and imprisoned for offences against children. She and her two fellow students ( both female) found that they received no support from this person, and their progress was obstructed as he failed to comment on, or return, assignments. The lady student in question, who had already completed two-thirds of the course, was able to complete her studies on her own, and was licensed. Another is reported to have given up; a third was about to be removed from the training scheme, on the basis that she had done no work for three years, when a number of her assignments were found in her tutor's house, and she was allowed to continue with a new tutor. The tutor who treated his students in this way was a Deanery Adviser, and a member of the Reader Association Committee, so it was very difficult for the three women students to get their problems with him taken seriously.

Answers to a question about contacts with Deanery and Diocesan officials gave an impression of Readers operating in isolation. 22 out of the 28 said they had little or no contact with their Deanery Adviser; others had twice yearly meetings, and one Deanery had recently started having quarterly meetings of Readers. A similar number said they had little or no contact with the Warden, or the Secretary of the Association, or their local Area Secretary ( apart from by post, or at Readers' Days); or with the Deanery Pastoral Committee (unless they were on it ). More had contact with their Rural Dean, but this was either because they were in his/her parish, or on the Deanery Synod, or they were invited to Deanery Chapter meetings. Ten were not invited to Deanery Chapters at all, 11 were invited to all, 7 were invited to some - but 6 could not attend because Chapter meetings were held during the working day. ***All of these people and groups could provide pastoral support for Readers and Reader trainees, but it is often a matter of chance whether Readers and students are in sufficient contact with them to be able to get support when needed.***

Seven respondents found their Deanery Advisers supportive, especially those currently in training, or those whose incumbent was Deanery Adviser; five had had mixed experiences with DAs, but all the others found their DAs unsupportive of their ministry, or not much in evidence. Some felt Advisers were reluctant to become involved in situations outside their own parish. Several Readers said they did not know who their DAs were, or what they were supposed to do, apart from the initial interview.

Nine respondents had experienced problems with their incumbents or other clergy during their ministry. (just under one third ). In addition, the anecdotal evidence produced accounts of problems with another four members of the clergy. Nine of those of those who had experienced problems were female and two male. The two men had

experienced conflict in other dioceses, resolved with the help of the Warden. In one of the cases in this diocese, which involved a disagreement between a woman Reader and her incumbent over the ordination of women to the priesthood, the Warden had assisted, and the Reader moved parishes. Two cases involved conflict with assistant curates, and in another the Reader felt herself displaced in parish ministry by a potential ordinand, who was working as a pastoral assistant in the parish. In several of the cases, the problem was lack of communication between the incumbent and the Reader about ministerial duties, or lack of support. One of the anecdotal cases concerned a Reader working full time in a chaplaincy, who had serious problems with her supervising chaplain. In this case it would appear that the clergy person involved was suffering from a serious psychological condition, but the Reader involved was not able to get her anxieties about him heard by the senior church authorities, until her secular employers became involved. In another two cases it appeared to the Reader involved that the clergy person involved was of unstable mental health. In one case the clergy person involved was involved in criminal activity, but the anxieties, which many Readers who had contact with him expressed, were not listened to by the church authorities, either before or after his arrest.

In most cases, the Warden and Deanery Advisers were not involved in trying to resolve a situation of conflict and the situation was dealt with by the Reader adjusting her ministry to cope with very painful situations as the problems continued; or the situation was resolved by the clergy person retiring, or by the Reader moving to another parish. Some of the Readers found that attempting to involve the church hierarchy simply made matters worse. ***In 3 situations, it was the Deanery Adviser himself who was the clergyman causing a problem to the Reader. Where then was the Reader to go for pastoral care and support?***

No cases of conflicts between Readers or with other lay ministers were reported. Two cases of conflicts with parishioners were reported. One was resolved with the help and support of the incumbent; the other is unresolved, but the situation may improve following a change of incumbent.

Respondents were fairly evenly divided about whether it was helpful to have clergy as Deanery Advisers:

nine thought it helpful; 14 didn't know or had no preference, or had so little contact with their Deanery Advisers that they didn't feel able to comment; 5 thought it unhelpful. Comments made included: it gives objectivity and distance, but they need to be active in support of Readers; it's the person that matters, not the office; clergy don't have the time and Readers come low on their priorities. Twenty respondents thought it would be helpful to have a lay Deanery Adviser, possibly an experienced Reader, to work alongside the clergy person, or instead of a Deanery Adviser who was clergy. Those who thought it would be unhelpful thought that there was no need for two people to advise, and that clergy would not take notice of a lay person. Ten thought it might be helpful to have a DA from outside the deanery, to give objectivity in dealing with local clergy, though ten others thought local knowledge was important, so DA should come from inside the Deanery. Twenty three thought Readers should be consulted about DA appointments, since Readers would have more confidence if they had a say, even if only to ask for certain attributes and suggest names to be put forward ( or not!). Those who thought it would be unhelpful thought it would be impossible to please everyone, or felt unequipped to make such a judgement.

The majority - 22 - thought it was helpful to have a Bishop as Warden - it gave 'clout', a line to senior management and it meant at least one Bishop was in touch with Readers. The few who thought it unhelpful thought we needed 'someone of our own' who did not have a potential conflict of interest with his responsibilities to care for clergy. Others felt the Bishop was too distant to go to if they had a problem, or had too many other calls on his time. Fifteen thought it would be useful to have a Diocesan Officer for Lay ministry, if they had authority to act as a 'champion of Readers' - though 5 were against, because it would mean more bureaucracy. Some thought the Local Ministry Officer might act in this

capacity. Twenty three felt we should have one or more ombudsmen for Readers: most of these thought the best combination would be one clergy and one lay person. The idea of a Diocesan Chaplain for Readers was less popular: roughly equal numbers said yes and no.

The majority of Readers who responded were content in their parishes. Most (19) of them went to their Parish Priest for spiritual and pastoral support; other major sources of support were spiritual directors or soul friends (12) family (12) and other Readers. Two were in parishes which had parish support groups who prayed and supported all the staff, Readers and clergy alike. The majority felt supported in their ministry by their incumbent, other clergy in the parish, other Readers, churchwardens, PCC members and congregations. Where support was less obvious was from the diocese and the deanery ; only 14 felt supported by the diocese and only 11 felt supported by the deanery. One Reader commented he found the diocese almost irrelevant in a Reader context.

## **Experience from other Dioceses.**

I had hoped that several Readers and Deanery Advisers would have had experience of Reader Support from other dioceses, from which we could draw comparisons, but this has not been the case. Several had experience, but in such different contexts ( one in the Solomon Islands! ) or so long ago, that they did not feel their experience would be relevant to the present enquiry. Several said their experience in other dioceses had been of a similar level of support to this diocese, though one Reader, who had served in three dioceses, felt his previous diocese had provided a much better level of support. I then contacted Reader Associations in other dioceses via the CRC web site and received details from three. I have also consulted a paper produced by CRC about three years ago, which gave examples of pastoral support for Readers from six dioceses. It is obvious that many dioceses are reviewing the support systems they have for Readers at the moment. The Diocese of Salisbury sent me a copy of their new handbook about Reader Ministry, given to Rural Deans and Deanery Wardens, which explains their newly agreed system for administration and pastoral support of Readers in great detail.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations.**

### **1. Student Readers**

It would seem that the majority of Readers in training felt supported during their training, by their incumbents, tutors and parishes.

None of the three currently in training who were contacted in my research had any problems. This may be because the current Reader Training Scheme provides each student with two tutors: one, a Personal Tutor, supervises academic work and assignments; the other, a Pastoral Tutor, supervises ministerial experience, and explores spirituality and vocation. The Personal Tutor is very often a lay person, sometimes an experienced Reader. The Personal Tutor is usually the student's incumbent, though is sometimes a curate, a clergy person from a neighbouring parish, or a senior Reader in the parish. Although the two tutors are supposed to have distinct roles, very often the Personal Tutor is able to provide a trainee with pastoral support, especially if they encounter difficulties with their incumbent / Pastoral Tutor. Similarly, if a trainee has problems with their Personal Tutor, their Pastoral Tutor can provide advice and support, and help to sort things out.

Those Readers who trained on MTS were able to find support from their support panels. These were usually chaired by someone from outside the home parish, which provided a point of detachment and objectivity. ***The RTS handbook recommends that trainees on the scheme should form a support panel. Many do not do so; I think it would provide***

***a further level of support if such panels were made obligatory.***

The Reader Training Scheme now includes a ***mid-term assessment***, when a trainee has completed half the necessary assignments. ***This should provide an opportunity for a trainee to speak about any problems they are having with their tutors*** - although it would be difficult for many people to do so when the people concerned are sitting in the room with them. Since July 2000, trainees and tutors have been asked to fill in ***an assessment form every six months***, and return it to the RTS administration. It is to be hoped that this will ***provide a means for trainees to pass on any anxieties they may have in a non-confrontational way, so that action can be taken before things get to the desperate situations described by a few of my respondents.***

Many trainees turn to the RTS Administration for pastoral support, in spite of the fact that the Handbook says the Administration does not provide it. The present Chief Tutor and Administrator are both approachable and sympathetic people, but with the number of students they have to deal with, and a parish to run as well, the time they have available to give pastoral care is limited. ***It would be better if the diocese could employ a Chief Tutor and Administrator whose sole jobs these were.***

It is always difficult to find people to act as tutors, ***but care does need to be taken to check whether people are suitable before a student is assigned to them, and it does need to be made clear to the trainee that they can request a change of tutor if things are not working out. Special care needs to be taken in assigning tutors to women students, to ensure that the tutors are really comfortable with the idea of women ministers.***

I found evidence that some incumbents / Pastoral Tutors put pressure on trainees to carry out ministerial duties, especially preaching, before they felt ready to do so; or asked them to give more time to duties in the parish than the students were able to fit round their full time occupations or domestic responsibilities. Students differ in the amount of previous ministerial experience they bring to their training; they differ in their level of self-confidence; they differ in the amount of time they can give to training while still meeting their responsibilities. The confidence of trainees in their Pastoral Tutors is undermined if they feel bullied into preaching or leading worship before they have the knowledge and confidence to do so. This seems from my respondents to be a particular problem for some women students.

My respondents indicated that relationships which were free of problems at the start of training sometimes ran into problems as training neared completion. It is probable that the trainee's confidence and competence grow as they undergo training, and they may develop different opinions, and see their ministry developing in new ways. ***Some incumbents, who had welcomed, and even recommended the trainee in the role of 'parish helper', may feel threatened by this, and no longer give support as wholeheartedly. These are issues that need to be explored through mid-term meetings, self assessment forms, and the annual meeting of tutors with the Chief Tutor.***

While it is obviously best if a student has his or her own incumbent as ***Pastoral Tutor***, some incumbents, especially in newly created ***multiple parish benefices, with, perhaps, several trainees to supervise***, feel they cannot give them as much support as they need. In these circumstances, it would seem to be appropriate for a trainee to be allocated another Pastoral Tutor, perhaps an experienced Reader, to supplement the support given by the incumbent. ***If trainee Readers were invited to regular meetings of the 'Readers' Chapter', they might also find a sympathetic person who could supplement the support given by their Pastoral Tutors. This would also bring trainee Readers into regular contact with the Deanery Adviser, which might enable difficulties, and feelings of isolation to be dealt with by somebody local, before things got to crisis point.***

## 2. Readers

At present, pastoral support for Readers in the diocese is provided by their incumbents, by Deanery Advisers and by the Warden. Under the present system, all of these are clergy. They also form the 'discipline system' for Readers. The administration of Reader ministry is carried out by the Diocesan Reader Secretary and Area Secretaries. These are fellow Readers. They are not supposed to exercise any pastoral oversight of Readers, though they may help in cases of difficulty; this is particularly so of the Secretary of the Diocesan Readers Committee.

Bishop's Regulations for Reader Ministry ( Archbishops' Council 2000 ) give no indication of what pattern of pastoral care should be set up for Readers. It only indicates the disciplinary procedures that should be followed if a Reader's licence is to be revoked. Each diocese, then, sets up its own pattern of pastoral support. Reader ministry is not integrated into the synodical system. Readers are only represented on the PCC if the Annual Meeting so decides; unlike clergy, they do not have automatic representation on Deanery or Diocesan Synods. It is up to the Rural Dean if Readers are invited to meetings of the Deanery Chapter, to Greater Chapters, or none. The responsibilities of Deanery Pastoral Committees and Rural Deans for Reader ministry are unclear. Reader ministry is also 'semi-detached' from the Diocesan structures for oversight of ministry. They are only indirectly represented on the Board of Christian Development. The length of time it has taken for the Diocesan Guidelines to Bishops' Regulations to be agreed ( they have still not been!) indicates to Readers ( rightly or wrongly) that their ministry is given a low priority in the Diocese.

My respondents indicated that most had very little contact with Deanery or Diocesan officials, even the Deanery Advisers. Where they did have contact, it was usually because they had been elected to the Readers Committee or the Deanery Synod , because they were invited to Deanery Chapters regularly, because the Deanery Adviser organised regular meetings, or because the person concerned ministered in the same parish.

While we cannot change the representation of Reader ministry at national level, ***I think it would help Readers to feel their ministry was valued if they were represented directly on the diocesan and deanery Boards which make decisions about their ministry - the Board of Christian Development, and Diocesan and Deanery Pastoral Committees. It would also be helpful if the bishops made it clear that they expect Readers serving in parishes to have a voice on their PCCs. Similarly, it would help Readers to feel part of ministry teams if it was made clear by the bishops that it was expected that Readers were invited to Chapter meetings on a regular basis. Similarly, an episcopal reminder of the clause in Bishops' Regulations that stipulates regular meetings between Reader, clergy and other staff (5.2.f) might prompt some incumbents to set up such arrangements.***

My respondents indicated that they thought it was a good thing to have a Bishop as Warden of Readers, and the majority had found the Warden a help in sorting out problems. However, anxieties were expressed about placing yet another demand on the Bishop's time, and about possible conflicts of interest with the episcopal responsibility for clergy. ***A suggestion has recently been made at the Readers Board that there should be a Sub-Warden for each of the three Archdeaconries. If this suggestion is pursued, I would recommend that the Sub-Wardens should be lay people rather than clergy. Many dioceses have a Vice-Warden of Readers, who is him/herself a Reader. This is seen as a visible expression of the respect in which Reader ministry is held.***

A suggestion has also been made that a ***half-time stipendiary post of 'Bishop's Officer for Reader Ministry' should be created, to assist the Warden in his responsibilities for Readers. If such a post is created, I would again suggest that the person appointed is a lay person.*** In both cases, the appointment of lay people would be a public statement of the value which the diocese placed on lay ministry. ***They would***

**also provide, within the diocesan structures, a combination of lay and clergy people with responsibilities for Reader ministry, who could act as 'ombudsmen' if pastoral problems required mediation. They could also provide support for the Warden and Chief Tutor in "supervising the supervisors", that is tutors and Deanery Advisers. I found little support for the appointment of a Diocesan Chaplain for Readers. There is strong support for the appointment of two or more 'ombudsmen' to act as a 'place of last appeal' for Readers who find themselves in situations of conflict. I think that a mixture of male and female, clergy and lay 'ombudsmen' would meet with approval from Readers.**

Pastoral support for individual Readers is provided mainly by their incumbents ( or equivalent clergy for those working outside parochial ministry ). In the vast majority of cases these relationships work well. However, the relationship between a person and their incumbent does change when they become part of the ministry team. Those Readers who had Spiritual Directors or soul friends found them valuable in providing a source of spiritual and pastoral support which was detached from the parish situation. Others found that the Assisted Self Appraisal Scheme provided a similar opportunity for a supportive but detached review of their ministry. **I would recommend that all Readers be strongly encouraged to find themselves a Spiritual Director or equivalent, or to make use of the Assisted Self-Appraisal Scheme.**

Until now, the roles which Readers play in parish ministry teams have largely been worked out by direct negotiation between incumbent and Reader. There has not often been the chance for the whole ministerial team to discuss roles and relationships in a collaborative way. **It is hoped that the introduction of Local Ministry Teams will encourage all parishes which have a ministerial team composed of ministers, lay and ordained, from different orders of ministry, to discuss and review how each minister's time and talents can best be employed in the service of the Church. The Local Ministry Officer has an important role in enabling such discussions to take place.** There is also a good deal of discussion about various patterns of ministry ( for instance, the recent report on the diaconate ). It is important that such discussions do not treat each ministry in isolation, but take into consideration how the evolution of other ministries affect, and are affected by, the ministry under discussion.

At the local level, Deanery Advisers have a crucial role in providing pastoral support for Readers as a group. **Therefore, the appointment of Deanery Advisers is something that requires a great deal of care to find the right person.** However, there is evidence, both from my surveys and other sources, that unsuitable people have been appointed to care for Readers in the Deanery. It has sometimes seemed to be the case that the Diocese thinks any clergy person can fill the role, regardless of their previous experience with Readers. All clergy are under increasing pressure, and it is obviously sometimes difficult to find someone to take on this extra responsibility. However, at the very least, **anyone appointed to be a Deanery Adviser should have an understanding of Reader ministry, support it strongly, be able to relate easily to both men and women exercising this ministry, have the time to give to pastoral support of Readers in the deanery ( or deaneries ) he or she is responsible for, and be accessible to Readers. Some dioceses try to appoint Deanery Advisers who have themselves been Readers, but this will not always be possible.**

In the past, Deanery Advisers in this diocese have always been drawn from among the clergy. With falling numbers of clergy, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find people to take on this role. Recently an adviser was appointed who had caused a great deal of trouble to a Reader in another part of the diocese. This Reader's concerns at the appointment were met with the response, "There was no-one else available". Another Deanery has a school chaplain as adviser, who is often not available during school holidays. This is not a satisfactory situation for Readers who may need pastoral support . Having only clergy as Deanery Advisers may have been suitable in a church ordered on a hierarchical model; it seems an anachronism in these days of collaborative ministry. **There is a strong case for the appointment of a lay person, ideally an experienced**

**Reader, as a Deanery Adviser, where no suitable clergy are available; but there is also a strong case for the appointment of a lay person, to demonstrate the belief that all ministries are held to be of equal worth and that Readers can be trusted to supervise their own ministry.**

The Diocese of Salisbury has a structure of **pastoral support for Readers, where responsibility at the local level is shared between the Rural Dean and a Deanery Warden, who is a Reader. I think that this is a good model, which gives greater responsibility to Readers for their own pastoral support and organisation, but also integrates Reader ministry into the deanery structures, while not placing extra duties on hard-pressed clergy.**

Whoever is appointed as Deanery Adviser, **I think that Readers should be consulted before any appointment is made. It would also make Readers feel more integrated into the deanery structures if they were consulted, as are local clergy, about the appointment of Rural Deans. It might also be helpful if Deanery Advisers were appointed for a set number of years ( as Rural Deans are); this would give a chance for appointments - particularly those which proved problematic - to be reviewed before major problems arose.**

The Diocese of Salisbury has a **handbook of Information about Reader Ministry for Deanery Wardens and Rural Deans. I think it would be helpful for this diocese to have such an information booklet.** My surveys have shown widespread ignorance and confusion about the responsibilities and duties of Deanery Advisers, and of Rural Deans, with regard to Reader ministry. A booklet could detail the responsibilities of Deanery Advisers to assist in the initial selection process by interviewing candidates and making recommendations to the selection board, and to assist in the drawing up of the first Job Description prior to licensing. However, it should also set out their continuing responsibilities: to provide opportunities for Readers to meet each other, to assist with CME for Readers, to keep in regular contact with Readers and to provide pastoral support for Readers in any difficulties. Such a handbook should also clarify the role of the Deanery Adviser in helping the Reader to review the pattern of their ministry with their incumbent every three years, when their job description is rewritten. Some Deanery Advisers have indicated that some Readers and incumbents do not involve them in this review, thereby missing an opportunity for someone outside the parish situation to offer advice, pick up problems, and possibly bring before the people involved the needs of the wider church. **If the review of job descriptions took place regularly, with the involvement of the Deanery Adviser, problems within parishes might be picked up earlier, before things reach crisis point. I think Deanery Advisers are probably the best people to hold the lists of Readers' skills and experience, as they are in the best position to feed this information into local situations and also up to the diocesan level. The review of job descriptions would provide an opportunity for this information to be reviewed.**

Such a handbook might also be useful to clergy and PCCs in clarifying the nature of Reader ministry. A stipulation in the handbook that Readers and incumbents should meet at least once a year to review the Reader's ministry, and that Readers should be involved in regular meetings with other staff in the parish or organisation, would also emphasise the expectation that Readers are to be involved in planning the use of ministerial resources in the parish. The triennial review of the job description could check whether such consultation takes place. The involvement of Deanery Advisers in such reviews helps to emphasise that Readers are diocesan ministers, holding their authority directly from the bishop; and that they have a 'bridge ministry' with the secular sphere being an important area of ministry for many of them. **A handbook might also clarify for Readers what the Deanery Advisers are supposed to do.**

My survey appeared to show an alarmingly high proportion of Readers who had experienced problems with the clergy with whom they ministered, either in training or after

licensing. It is usual in surveys to assume that those who do not respond divide up in roughly the same proportions as those who do respond. I do not think that this is a safe assumption in this case; I think that those who have experienced problems are more likely to respond than those who have not, and therefore it is safe to assume those who did not respond have not experienced problems. Also, because I asked to be put in contact with those who had experienced problems, the proportion in that category has been increased. However, this still leaves a proportion of one-fifth of Readers who had experienced problems, which is a disturbingly large one.

A majority of responses to my survey came from women Readers; and a majority of those who had experienced problems, either as trainees or serving Readers, also were women. I think this finding is of significance. Other surveys of women in ministry have found that they continue to encounter obstruction, bullying and prejudice within church structures. The Church of England is still a very 'male' organisation, both in its personnel ( particularly those in positions of power and authority ) and in its structure. There remain pockets of misogyny among both clergy and laity. ***I would recommend that if we are to provide proper support and pastoral care for women Readers, we must make sure that they are not placed in situations where they are supervised by people who cannot relate to women as ministerial colleagues. Tutors and Deanery Advisers need to be alert to such possible conflicts, and those who appoint tutors and Deanery Advisers need to ensure that those appointed can work with women as well as men.***

However, I have also come to the conclusion that some conflict situations arise because of the different ways of working and speaking to which men and women incline. While not accepting the premise that " Women are from Venus and men are from Mars", there is evidence from research ( such as that reported by Deborah Tannen, the socio-linguist ) that ***men and women use language in different ways, and naturally prefer different patterns of working with others.*** Different expectations and interpretations can lead to misunderstandings. ***I think working relationships between men and women ministers might be improved if we all had some training in recognising these differences.***

All forms of ministry are experiencing a time of change. Reader ministry is now being seen as a ministry with its own integrity and completeness, rather than as 'the ministry of the stop-gap' or as a consolation prize for those turned down for the ordained ministry. Those who feel a conscious vocation to a lay, non-stipendiary ministry have different expectations from those who saw their chief vocation as 'helping out the Vicar when he needed it'. Some of the responses to my survey reflect this change in expectations. Two respondents, both male Readers Emeriti, expressed the view that Readers should not serve where they are not wanted by the clergy or congregations. If this is the case, the Reader should move or give up their licence. From more recently licensed Readers came expressions of frustration that their talents were underused, that they were not included in staff team meetings and that they were regarded as a second best ministry, and that pastoral care for them seemed to be a low priority in the diocese and deaneries.

More and more is being asked of Readers, in preaching, leading worship, and in pastoral and educational work, both within and beyond parishes. The Readers in this diocese are very contented to be asked to minister in these ways, and the majority have good relationships with those in other forms of ministry with whom they work. However, for a significant minority, the exercise of their ministry has brought conflict with colleagues, and in some cases, great personal pain. All ministry is made up of human beings, and therefore, things will always be less than perfect. However, I hope that this report may indicate some ways in which pastoral support for Readers and trainee Readers may be improved in this diocese.

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