



# DIOCESE OF BATH & WELLS

Changing Lives, Changing Churches for Changing Communities

## Reader Ministry Bridging the Gap



Could this be you?

# Contents

Introduction	2
What is Reader ministry all about?	3
Reader training then and now	4
How Reader training has changed	6
Discernment, selection and training	8
A week in the life of a Reader	10
Reflections on becoming a Reader	12
The route to Readership	16
Flow chart of entry to Reader ministry	20
Useful addresses	21

# Introduction

Reader ministry is over 130 years old. It has necessarily developed to serve the Church in each generation. Among our Readers are the principal lay theologians, liturgically trained, literate and articulate, who serve God in the parishes of our Church.

The Diocese of Bath and Wells takes considerable pride in the achievements of its Readers in our generation and especially in their training and support. The Bishop and his staff take Reader ministry seriously. The evidence for that is its place on the Council for Ministry together with all the work presently undertaken to integrate Readers into the places where the policy and strategy for the mission of the church are formed both in diocese as well as in parish.

The Reader ministry makes demands, make no mistake about that. As Warden of Readers I look for commitment and spiritual maturity so that the freshness of the Gospel and its seriousness can be communicated. That is why I place so much emphasis on a disciplined spiritual life, refreshing study and reading, as well as review of what has been done so that new directions may be discerned.

However, Reader ministry should be no burden. There should be a great deal of joy and laughter both in the preparation and in the practice of the ministry. So local Reader Fellowships, training days, Reader Review are all part of the network of relationships and activities designed to give a cohesion to the whole and a common purpose in a vital ministry that is buoyant, alive and energetic in the service of God and His Church.

John Reed

Archdeacon of Taunton and Warden of Readers

# What is Reader Ministry all about?

The Reader ministry can be described as a bridge - a bridge that encourages lay people whilst remaining lay, to exercise an official and crucial leadership in the Church of England, a bridge between the world of the workplace and the world of the church, a bridge which witnesses to the unchanging love of God in a changing world. This booklet explores the opportunities that Reader ministry affords and explains how someone might be admitted to the office.

You will find here a description of how the ministry of Readers has evolved, examples of present day ministries and help with the process of applying for Reader ministry today.

Those who are Readers within our diocese know that the challenges are great, the work is rewarding and the friendship of the fellowships particularly supportive. Training for Reader ministry is essential, not only so that we have a high standard of ministers, but also so that individuals are fully prepared for the challenges which will come their way.

You will find in this booklet an outline of the new training, which has been developed over the past decade as well as the requirements for the formation of Reader ministry. Alongside this you will read of one person's experience of the training and formation. Much more information about it all can be obtained from me by calling me in the diocesan office

If after having read this booklet you wish to go on to apply for Reader ministry you should first contact your local minister, who will direct you toward the Vocations Advisers as a first step, thus setting the process in motion.

Revd Preb Dr Graham Dodds – Principal of the School of Formation

## Then and Now

The office of Reader is very old. It can be traced back in its origins to the early church. However, the office as we now know it was reinstated only in the 1860s. Its purpose was established as the office of lay people to preach, teach, lead the worship and be involved in any pastoral work emerging from these ministries. There is evidence to suggest that in the latter part of the last century, Readers carried their ministries to pubs and other places in the communities as missionaries, taking the gospel and making it known. Some say that Readers have always been those with missionary zeal. Others say that they became so because of the lack of a role within the normal services of the church. Either way, what ensued was an office of lay people, theologically trained and available for ministry. Today dioceses are increasingly recognising the immensely valuable resource Readers are in the Church of England.



GARETH REALISED HE'D THUMPED  
THE LECTERN TOO HARD

In Bath & Wells there are almost 400 Readers. In any one year approximately 20 new ones will be training. We believe that they have major roles to play within the church. The first is as an **icon of partnership**. In Bath & Wells we believe very strongly in collaborative ministry. The Diocesan Synod whole-heartedly supported this pattern of ministry in its March 1995 meeting. Readers work in partnership

with the congregation and with the incumbent, to forward the mission of the church. **Koinonia**, usually translated fellowship, has a predominant meaning of partnership, as two directors working together in a company. We believe, that as the incumbent is the president of focussed ministries within the church, so the Reader is the icon of partnership. In other words, through her or him we see people working together in a complementary way in ministry.

We also see Readers as lay theologians. From South America to Africa, the Indian Subcontinent through Asia, lay people are exploring new insights of theology. Readers are bringing the experience of the workplace and reflecting on it in the light of biblical understanding.



MARSHA FOUND IT HARD TO  
FORGET SHE WAS A TEACHER

We in Bath and Wells believe that Readers play a crucial and developing role within the Church of England. As collaborative ministry becomes the normal pattern of ministry for each parish the office of Reader will demonstrate the partnership and lay leadership so crucial to work alongside the incumbent in the mission of the church.

Revd Preb Dr Graham Dodds

## How Reader Training changed in the 1990's

Headache! - How to find a tutor for each individual Reader trainee! Parish clergy might be willing to help? experienced Readers? retired academics? Much persevering persuasion was called for from those doing the searching and even then, one look at the vast syllabus was often more than enough to cause an attack of the cold feet - to say the least. That was the general picture until the end of the 1980s. Tutors, when they were recruited, worked with great devotion and commitment though they and their students often found the topics too wide for real coverage in the time available. Examiners were frustrated that so little encouragement to reflect was given to students, who frequently thought success depended on more reproduction of facts.

A sorry tale, you may well think. Yet numerous brave and determined souls got through all this and have been exercising a wonderful ministry over the years. However, around 1990 the dioceses were all asked to create their own syllabus for approval and moderation by ABM (Advisory Board of Ministry) on behalf of General Synod. The result of that in Bath & Wells was, for one thing, the birth of a course of Christian studies, a lay training course open to all and to be used by Reader trainees for their first two years of study. Secondly, the formation year came into being, the third year of training for Readership.

Advantages? Many! Here was a chance to bring people into contact with each other and to weld together fellowships of study. Many of these have gone on meeting, caring and praying for each other over the years. Students soon realised that there were others training for Readership whose problems and opportunities were like their own and so mutual society, help and comfort began to flourish and abound.

Awaiting anyone going forward for Readership nowadays, then, is a lively and enjoyable course of Christian studies, which marries the Gospel and popular culture, followed by an equally exhilarating and productive formation year, with a stimulating formation year 2 coming after licensing. Following that, there is in-service training on offer to all year by year. Read on to discover more about all this and then talk to anyone who has done it!

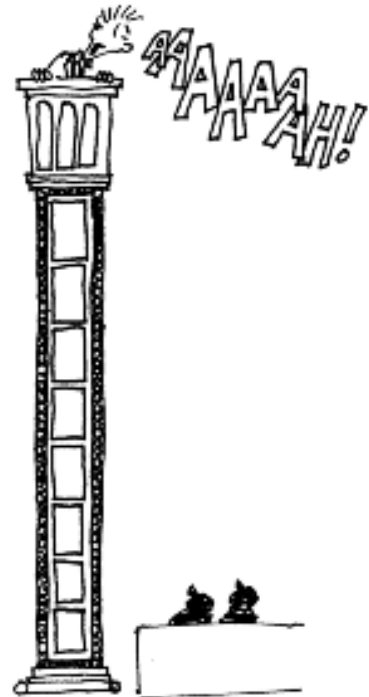
Revd Alan Nicholls  
(previous Director of Reader Studies)



KEITHS' ATTEMPTS TO MARRY THE  
GOSPEL AND POPULAR CULTURE  
MET WITH VARYING DEGREES OF SUCCESS

## Discernment, Selection and Training

1. The Reader ministry is one of preaching and teaching, and leading worship and appropriate pastoral work arising from these ministries. Readers are not **primarily** pastors, but preaching, to be effective, needs to have a pastoral background.
2. If the local church perceives a need for someone with the gifts for this kind of ministry and has discerned such a person in its midst, it needs to call that person out. On the other hand, maybe someone comes forward with thoughts about becoming a Reader. In that case, the person's sense of call would need to be examined by the local church and looked at in relation to the tasks of mission and ministry which it has set itself.
3. The incumbent and those whom he or she consults (churchwardens, leadership team, other Readers or whoever) will decide whether this should be pursued. If so, the first step is to get the backing of the full PCC, from whom a resolution will be required in due course. If then both the individual and the local church are agreed, the call needs to go forward for testing by the wider church.
4. The incumbent contacts the Archdeaconry Warden (details in the Diocesan Directory). The Warden will interview the candidate and if he (from the point of view of Reader ministry as a whole) supports the parish's nomination, he will arrange for the candidate to attend a selection conference. These are usually held four times each year and are the means whereby



WARREN WAS HAPPY IN THE PULPIT  
UNTIL HE LOOKED DOWN

the wider church in the diocese is able to contribute towards the discernment process. This conference is in the nature of a group of fellow Christians coming together to reflect with the candidate on what God might be saying to them about ministry and vocation.

- 5 The selection conference makes a recommendation with regard to training. Decisions about licensing are taken about two and a half years into the three-year training period. After the selection conference, the whole process, from its start in the parish, is reflected on by the Archdeaconry Warden. He or she then either accepts the recommendations, or reports the whole process to the Warden of Readers (the Archdeacon of Taunton) who will take appropriate further soundings before making a decision.
- 6 We recommend that if a candidate is not already engaged with the diocesan course, when the discernment process first begins, they apply forthwith. (Contact the Department of Ministry Development at the Old Deanery on 01749 670777 and ask for the literature.) However, it is stressed that being a student on the course does not in itself guarantee acceptability as a Reader trainee.

# A Week in the life of a Reader

Jo Vening reflects on her ministry in the Bath area

## Saturday

As I wake up I feel a sense of relief that it is Saturday and I can relax and not have to rush and get ready for work. However, as time ticks by I remember that next Sunday I am preaching and today I must start preparing, also tomorrow I am leading Morning Prayer and I must prepare for that too. Then there are the dogs to walk, the horse to do, the house to clean, ironing, mending, the list is endless. My tranquil state is rudely disturbed by this mental list of jobs, so I get up. The essential tasks complete I settle down and prepare an outline sermon. I find that writing a draft a week in advance makes the more detailed preparation easier the day before. Prior to reading the passages, prayer is crucial both in bringing myself before God and asking Him to guide me in the message. Having read through the passages several times, I turn to commentaries and Bible notes, then I begin making brief notes on what I believe God wants me to say. An hour or so later I finish this and prepare for tomorrow. In the afternoon I squeeze all my domestic tasks into a few hours! By supper time the phone is ringing 'Sorry I can't do the prayers tomorrow, will you do them instead?' 'I can't get hold of the preacher, what are the readings?' Once 'Casualty' starts I sit down, put on the answer phone and 'chill out' eating my supper - tomorrow will sort itself out!

## Sunday

Somehow, even when I am involved with a morning service I cannot bring myself to set the alarm as if a work day, consequently normal activities such as breakfast and doing my horse are left until later. I arrive with sufficient time to set the books out, check everyone knows what they are doing, robe up and then with the preacher, draw breath before committing the service and ourselves to the Lord. The service over, I return home and indulge in a big breakfast and relax relieved that everything went smoothly and I can now enjoy what is left of the day by going out for a walk and being with family and friends. In the

evening I'm leading the prayers, helping to administer communion and acting as sidesperson. I return home, put my feet up before the forthcoming week.

## **Monday to Friday**

After a busy Sunday it is hard to heave myself out of bed on Monday morning. From 9.00 - 5.00 I am involved in guiding people through starting up and running their own businesses at Bath Enterprise/Business Link West. This too is what God has called me to and although I don't wear my scarf, I am still a Reader. Even at work I am tracked down by the parish secretary, 'Can you preach on ...?', 'Our reader of the lesson can't manage this Sunday morning, could you read instead?' Although church related calls are kept to a minimum I always feel guilty when they do occur. But why should I? My colleagues regularly receive private calls. Monday evening is spent at Ministry Support Team meetings, a relaxed yet achieving group. Tuesday evening I try and catch up on paperwork, doing it by the fire and falling asleep before making any progress. Wednesday evening I am at the theatre and by Thursday I am beginning to feel nervous about Sunday, wondering whether preparation will be sufficient, wondering if what God said to me when I made my notes earlier, is what he really wants me to preach. My Reader ministry is a seven days a week ministry. It is fulfilling, challenging but above all what I believe God has clearly called me to exercise.

## **Jo Vening**

(Reader at Wellow)

## Reflections on becoming a Reader

Annie Slipper, a recently licensed Reader was interviewed by Tim Hodge, a Reader in the Taunton area, for a presentation at the Diocesan Synod.

### What have been the high points of Reader Training?

Without exception the highest point was 5 and 6 October, the retreat and licensing. It was an experience that, for me, was the most exhilarating, the most moving, the most challenging and the most joyful and uplifting of my life.

During the actual training there have been many **high points**, from the sharing in a fellowship of a group of people all travelling together, the love and support has been quite amazing and a bond has grown very deep to each and every one

- ❖ to putting together **sketches** which made us laugh and cry
- ❖ to experiencing the fun of learning about our vocal ranges and how to throw one's voice from one side of the room to the other!
- ❖ to giving that first sermon from a pulpit, the most terrifying and daunting experience I've ever been through but also a great feeling of **Wowness!** did I really do that?
- ❖ to walking around the garden at Abbey House at daybreak on a frosty morning sipping a hot mug of tea and listening to the dawn chorus before going into communion
- ❖ to listening to people like Canon Melvyn Matthews teaching us about spirituality and Canon Russell Bowman-Eadie teaching us how to preach, masters indeed of their art. That was a great privilege just to be there

All have been **magic moments** amongst so many during the course of the first year of training.

## What do you think-if anything has been sacrificed?

To say sacrificed would imply to have given up. I don't think time would be an answer. My uncle, a great concert pianist told me when I was 12 years old (I was giving excuses not to have to learn the piano) that if you want to do something badly enough you will find the time, so it is with Readership.

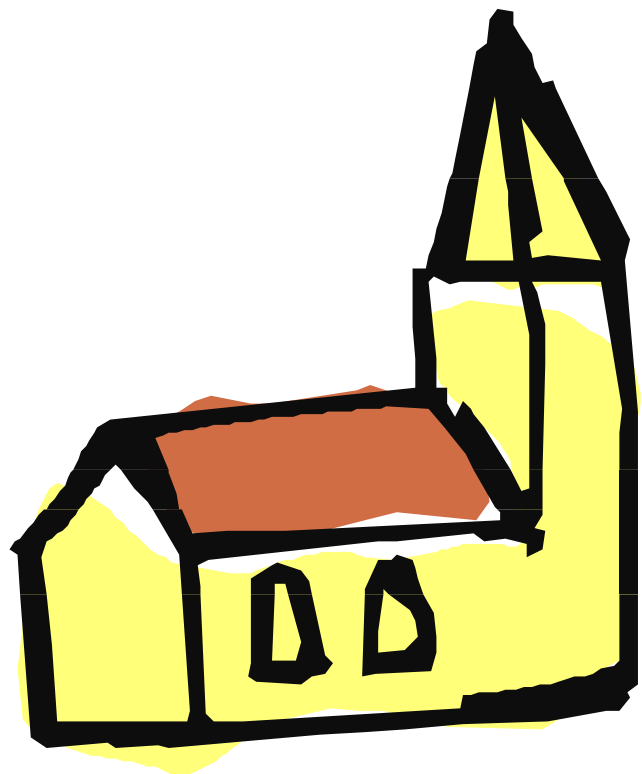
I feel that if there has been any sacrifice it has been the worship aspect of the services when being **up front**. The role of being a leader does mean that one has to be aware that the proceedings are going according to plan, the eyes are watching constantly for anything or anyone needing attention, having checked beforehand that everyone is doing the job they're supposed to be doing, ie reading the lesson, interceding, serving then making sure I'm doing my bit right, remembering to come in at the right time.

With regard to family life I feel, certainly in my case, the support from my husband, family and friends have enabled me to travel this journey. They too have made sacrifices of their time to do the jobs I would have been doing had I not been away on training days (I run a small B & B with my husband).

## Has what you've been doing in the parish linked in alongside training?

From the very start of the training I have had the greatest encouragement from all members of the church throughout. I have been given the opportunity to partake in a number of ways to cover the whole service.

From exclusively putting together and leading a family service, to leading the ministry of the Word,



to leading prayers, to regular sermonising bi-monthly.

The **in church** training has definitely linked in with the training at Wells and Glastonbury and even though we were in a vacancy, neither our **stand-in** vicar nor our other Reader could have given me greater encouragement or more opportunities than they did. I feel very lucky to be part of such a team.

### What have I learnt?

The teaching, of course, has been a revelation in so many ways. I have felt that through all the staff involved in all the aspects of the training, it has given me an insatiable appetite for wanting to know more.

But I think I have learnt more about me than anything else. I feel my world has been opened up and my journey of faith has been the most exciting journey I have ever been on. It has proved to me that nothing is impossible if you set your mind to it. Four years ago I would never have dreamed that I would be where I am now. I have also learnt a great deal about other people, about relationships, about the way Christ can work in people's lives, about the depth of His love.



I have learnt that the more I learn, the more I don't know and I just want to keep on learning and that the more open and willing we are the more He reveals to us.

I have learnt that one person can't do it all, and that all the gifts are there to make the whole. It can only be done by working together as a team, drawing on each of our gifts, especially being thankful for

receiving the gifts that we have and not wanting the gift that someone else has!

I have learnt that being oneself is important because that is how God has made us and that is why He wants to use us. We all have something to give to bring glory to Him and when all those gifts are brought together then wondrous things happen!

The comment made on the eve of licensing from Bishop Andrew I think sums it all up. Being a Reader is not something we do. It is something we are.

## The Route to Readership

There are essentially two elements to the training of a Reader - a concentration on theological studies, and the forming of practical skills such as preaching and leading worship.

The first element can be undertaken in a number of ways although most Readers in training opt for the first of the methods outlined below.

**Studying the diocesan course** - this is a modular course, which offers the candidate a learning experience in a group of people who have similar but varying views. The groups meet in a local area and are usually not too far away from each candidate's home. Many Readers in training speak of the great value and richness of learning in such a group. It broadens the experience and widens the mind. It offers friendship and is often great fun. The diocesan course is constantly being developed and updated. At the moment it is being transformed to facilitate the deepening and development of faith.

**Studying with another theological education provider** - we are fortunate to have Trinity College Bristol, Wesley College Bristol, Sarum College, Exeter University, all of whom provide excellent certificate courses and modules. There are a number of Colleges of Further Education in our diocesan area, some of which provide religious studies courses from time to time. Before embarking on such a course with a view to Reader training it will be important to weigh up all the advantages and disadvantages, finance, travel time, emphasis of the course, fellow students etc



**Studying a course by distance learning** - various colleges offer distance-learning materials and will provide a local tutor to help the student. Although distance learning sounds like a good idea, beware. It is important to note that there are several disadvantages to distance learning. Students can find themselves isolated and out of touch with others to discuss theology. They can get stuck with studies and find it very hard to keep going. Also these courses are often much more expensive than our local diocesan course (sometimes about 4 times as expensive!). For these reasons we only encourage distance learning



when there is little choice and the Reader in training's motivation is very high. For some people who work erratic hours, are working abroad or who live too far away from a diocesan course centre; distance learning may be the only solution.

**Studying with a personal tutor** - This kind of study is for those who have already completed their theological studies but may have done so quite

some time ago and want to refresh themselves. Alternatively some students came on the diocesan course and completed it without writing assignments. We have a record of all people who entered the course and how far they went with it.

**Exemptions** - If you already have a qualification in religious studies or theology, which is certificate (1<sup>st</sup> year degree) standard or higher there is every possibility you will be exempt from this element of the course. We now recognise APL (approved prior learning). You may have something which you have studied which was very related to theology, for example, a course in Bible Study, history related to the church, a project on, say, drama in the church. These can be assessed by the Director of Reader studies and in some cases may enable you to reduce the time spent on this element of training.

All of the above are examples of how the training to become a Reader might be approached. You may have other things you have done and have thought of other ways to complete the training. Whichever way you decide to go, if you are thinking of Readership it is essential to talk to the Director of Studies in the Dept of Ministry Development before you begin in order to clarify an intended route.

**Formation Years** - The second element of the course lasts two years. We call it Formation Years one and two. After the first year of this element of training, if recommendations are made by the incumbent, Archdeaconry Warden, Readers Council, Director of Studies and Warden of Readers, the candidate is licensed by the Bishop and becomes a Reader.

Both formation years are mandatory and take place centrally in the Old Deanery and Abbey House Glastonbury. They cover subjects such as preaching (in fact all the first year is designed to help with preaching), funeral ministry, leading worship, team roles, the Church of England, ecumenism, music in church, all age services and more.

We have produced a candidates guide **Becoming a Reader** which covers all the details of the Formation Years 1 to 3. Formation Year 3 is the bridge year. A detailed plan is sent to candidates before the course begins, and induction evenings help orientate the shape of the learning. The emphasis in these years is on the practice of preaching amongst the local congregation and the formation year group. Consequently there is little written work in this section.

As part of the first few years of Reader ministry all Readers are required to complete a placement in a parish different to their own. Details of this are sent to candidates shortly after licensing.

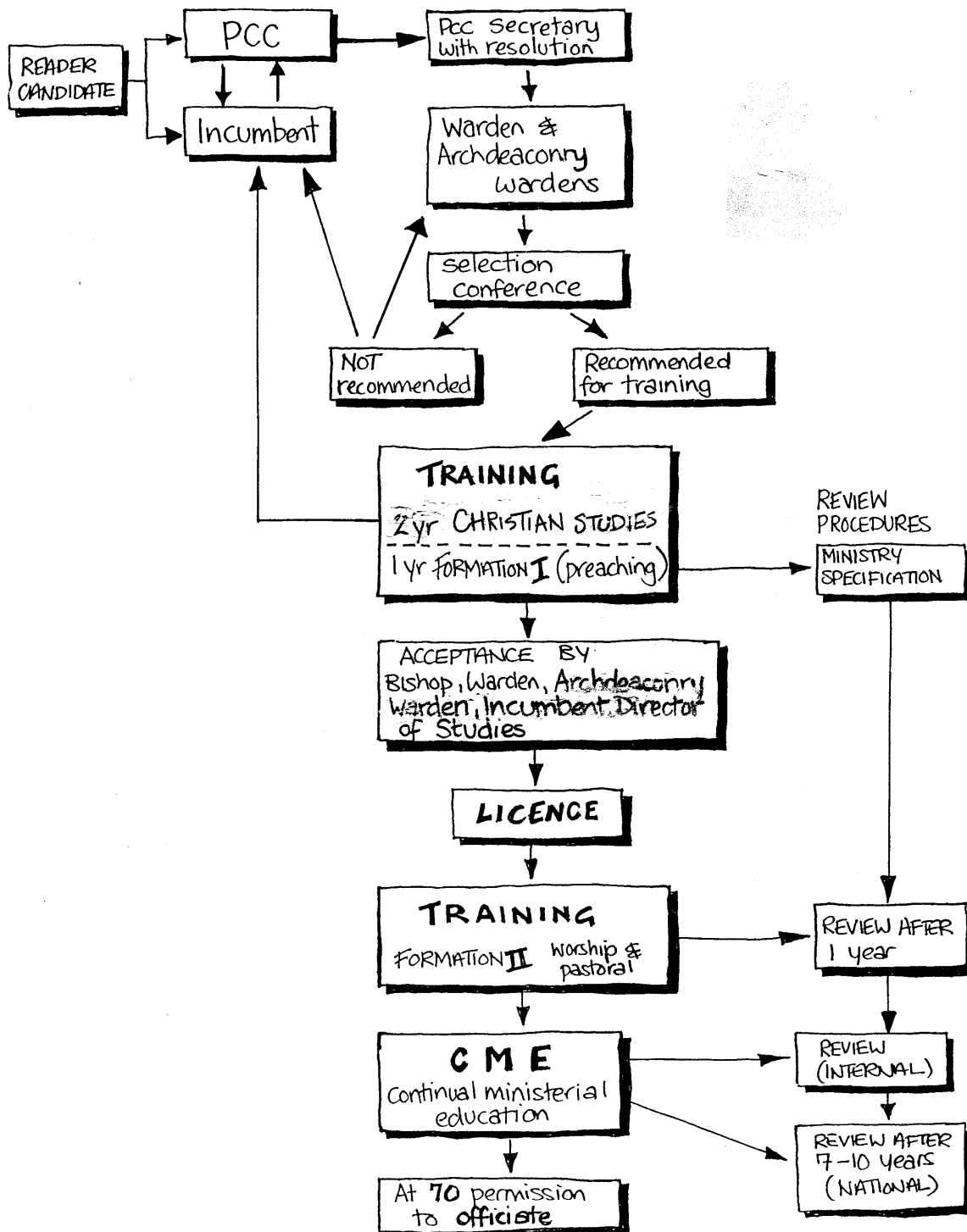
The route to becoming a Reader is sometimes seen as a long process, but it must be thorough, rigorous and challenging for we live in a world that owes no favours to Christianity. The modern minister must be able to witness to faith, speak up for the things of God, and be able to give account of the gospel. None of this comes quickly to anyone. St Paul took many years after conversion before he began his ministry. Jesus' public ministry did not take place until he was well experienced in the world. This does not mean that Readers in training will be sitting and waiting until they are licensed in order to begin ministry. Much is possible before that day.

Those who lead the course for Readers give of their best in teaching, and believe fervently that every candidate deserves, and must give of their very best for God.

### **So what next?**

If you want to take this further, then contact your vicar and discuss your feelings. After that if you want to take it to the next stage, contact your one of the Vocations advisors who will refer you to one the Archdeaconry Warden of Readers if this is where your calling is taking you.(names and addresses overleaf).

## Flow Chart for Admission to Reader Ministry



**Warden of Readers**

The Ven J P C Reed, 4 Westerkirk Gate, Staplegrove, Taunton, TA2 6BQ  
(01823) 323 838

**Archdeaconry Warden for Taunton**

The Revd Peter Martin, The Rectory, 27 Brook Street, Cannington,  
TA5 2HP (01278) 652953

**Archdeaconry Warden for Wells**

The Revd Rose Hoskins, Springfields, Weston Bampfylde,  
Yeovil, BA22 7HZ (01963) 440 026

**Archdeaconry Warden for Bath**

The Revd Paul Burden, The Vicarage, Bathampton Lane, Bathampton, Bath  
BS2 6SW (01225) 463 570

**Assistant Director of Reader Studies**

Mrs Jennifer Cole, The Old Deanery, Wells BA5 2UG  
(01749) 685 115 - direct line and voice mail

**Diocesan Office**

The Old Deanery, Wells BA5 2UG (01749) 670 777

**Selection Secretary:**

Mr Adam Green, The Vicarage, Pitminster, Taunton, TA3 7AZ  
(01823) 421232

**Vocations Adviser for Wells**

The Revd A Syer, The Vicarage, Vicarage Lane, Wookey. BA5 1JT

**Vocations Adviser for Bath**

The Revd C J Jennings, 12 Princes Road, Clevedon, BS21 7SZ  
The Revd Dr A J P Garrow, 48 Devonshire Buildings, Bath. BA2 4SV

**Vocations Adviser for Taunton**

The Revd S Stuckes, The Vicarage, Manor Road, Alcombe, Minehead, TA24  
6EJ

The Revd W H H Lane, The Vicarage, 7 Vicarage Road, Woolavington  
Bridgwater. TA7 8DX

**Produced by**

**The School of Formation  
Diocese of Bath and Wells  
The Old Deanery  
Wells  
BA5 2UG**

**February 2009**