



Guidelines for the professional conduct of Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers and volunteer Pastoral Assistants in the Parish of St John the Evangelist, Preston, Brighton¹

I. Introduction

I.1. A professional relationship between a Reader, Authorised Lay Minister or volunteer Pastoral Assistant and a member of the public is very different from that of friends or family members.² It can lead to misunderstanding and confusion if the Reader, Authorised Lay Minister or volunteer Pastoral Assistant and the other person are not clear as to their respective roles. This may be compounded by the fact that boundaries are less clear in church work than in some other settings.

I.2. If boundaries are not adhered to it leaves a Reader, Authorised Lay Minister or volunteer Pastoral Assistant open to allegations of inappropriate conduct and abuse. The object of this guidance is to protect church workers and members of the public and help them to feel more secure by making it clear what they can and cannot do as well as making it clear to those they minister to what standards they should expect.

I.3. No guidance on professional boundaries can cover every eventuality and there will always be an element of debate as to what behaviour is acceptable or unacceptable.

I.4. Where there is doubt as to the appropriateness of behaviour, a Reader, Authorised Lay Minister or volunteer Pastoral Assistant should always consult with their supervisor.

2. Positions of Trust³

2.1. All those who work with others on behalf of the Church are in positions of trust.

2.2. They will be seen as role models by those with whom they are in contact at all times, including when they are off duty.

¹ Adapted from 'Interim Guidelines for the professional conduct of Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers and volunteer Pastoral Assistants in the Diocese of Lincoln'

² Volunteer Pastoral Assistants are those who minister to vulnerable people by way of Home Visiting/Communion, those working with children or young people and those who are drivers in approved PCC transport schemes for vulnerable people

³ Adapted from Protecting all God's Children Edition 4 (paragraph 5.21) House of Bishops 2010

2.3. All Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers and volunteer Pastoral Assistants should, therefore, conduct themselves in accordance with the reasonable expectations of someone who represents the Church.

2.4. They should take care to observe appropriate boundaries between their work and their personal life. For example, they should ensure that all communications they may have with or about children, young people or vulnerable adults are appropriate in their tone.

2.5. They should seek advice immediately⁴ if they come across a vulnerable person who may have been harmed (including self-harm) or a colleague whose conduct appears inappropriate.

2.6. They should not deliberately/willingly expose themselves or others to material which is sexually explicit, profane, obscene, harassing, fraudulent, racially offensive, politically inflammatory, defamatory, or in violation of any British, European or international law.

3. Responsibilities

Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers and volunteer Pastoral Assistants have a number of responsibilities in relation to whom they minister: -

3.1. **A Duty of Care.** All Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers and volunteer Pastoral Assistants have a duty to keep children, young people and vulnerable adults safe and to protect them from sexual, physical and emotional harm. All people have a right to be treated with respect and dignity. It follows that Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers and volunteer Pastoral Assistants are expected to take reasonable steps to ensure the safety and well-being of those they minister to. Failure to do so may be regarded as neglect.

3.2. **Professional Judgment.** Guidance cannot provide a complete checklist of what is, or is not, appropriate behaviour for adults in all circumstances. However, Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers and volunteer Pastoral Assistants should always consider whether their actions are warranted, proportionate, safe, and applied equitably.

3.3. **Confidentiality.** Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers and volunteer Pastoral Assistants may have access to confidential information about the people to whom they minister. In some circumstances they may be given highly sensitive or private information. They should never use confidential or personal information about a person, or her/his family for their own, or others' advantage (including that of partners, friends, relatives or other organisations). People are entitled to respect and privacy. Information

⁴ If someone requires immediate assistance from the emergency service, dial 999. Otherwise seek guidance from your supervisor/Parish Priest/Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser/Police or Local Authority (children or adults services). Do not keep concerns to yourself. Share them in confidence with someone who can help.

must never be used to intimidate, humiliate, or embarrass. However, information can and must be shared in confidence, with someone who can help, if there is a safeguarding issue about a child or vulnerable adult.

4. Inappropriate conduct

The following behaviours are considered to be inappropriate conduct between Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers and volunteer Pastoral Assistants and those who they minister to (children, young people and adults): -

- 4.1. **Having a sexual relationship.** Any sexual behaviour by an adult towards a child or young person is both inappropriate and illegal.
- 4.2. **Initiating** or participating in **gratuitous talk about sex.**
- 4.3. **Making physical contact with sexual intent.**
- 4.4. **Rough handling.**
- 4.5. **Swearing and other inappropriate language.**
- 4.6. **Using power inappropriately.** Personal power needs to be used to sustain others and harness their strengths, and not to bully, manipulate or denigrate.
- 4.7. **Seeking personal advantage or financial gain** by virtue of their ministerial position.

5. Conduct that may cause concern

These situations and examples are listed as a prompt to those who minister to others to ask is this appropriate, acceptable or could my behaviour be misconstrued.

- 5.1. **Social contact** with those you minister to:
 - In a restaurant or pub.
 - In a person's home.
 - In your own home.

While there is risk in all pastoral work, the place of the meeting, the arrangement of furniture and lighting, and dress of the Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers and volunteer Pastoral Assistants are important considerations in pastoral care. The appropriateness of visiting, being visited alone, or giving lifts in cars especially at night, needs to be assessed with care. They should recognise the importance of knowing themselves and their own emotional needs. Inappropriate social contact may be misconstrued and can damage the ministerial relationship. Sometimes support can result in dependency.

Befriending those one ministers to online, electronically or by text can blur the lines between one's personal voice and professional ministry.

5.2. **Expressing anger** to someone to whom you minister.

5.3. **Touching, hugging and kissing.** When physical contact is made this should be in response to the other person's needs at the time and not your own. It should be of limited duration and appropriate to their age, stage of development, gender, ethnicity and background. The Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers and volunteer Pastoral Assistants should therefore, use their professional judgement at all times.

5.4. **Ministering to people in distress.** Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers and volunteer Pastoral Assistants may be involved in managing significant or regular occurrences of distress and emotional upset, for example in families where there is domestic violence, substance misuse, mental health problems or where people have gone into care etc. In these circumstances you must use professional judgement about when advice about your own practice should be sought and when outside appropriate professional help should be obtained.

6. Supervision

6.1. Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers and volunteer Pastoral Assistants should ensure that they have a supervisor⁵ to whom they can turn for advice and guidance.

6.2. It is recognised that not all who minister in the church have supervisors to whom they can turn for advice. It is suggested that Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers and volunteer Pastoral Assistants should ensure they are clear about who they report to and who they can turn for advice. However, in some circumstances it will be useful to seek the advice from the priest in charge or the Rural Dean.

6.3. If a serious matter arises the priest in charge must always be informed. Readers will need to consult their Area or Diocesan Warden. Authorised Lay Ministers will need to consult the Diocesan Lay Ministry Officer.

7. What to Do if You Have Concerns – taking action

7.1. Sometimes a Reader, Authorised Lay Minister or volunteer Pastoral Assistant may come across a situation that causes concern. The notes that follow give some guidance. They cannot cover all eventualities.

⁵ If a serious matter arises the priest in charge or Rural Dean must always be informed. Readers will need to consult their Area or Diocesan Warden. Authorised Lay Ministers will need to consult the Diocesan Lay Ministry Officer.

7.2. If a child or vulnerable adult is injured/needs treatment or a crime has been committed - dial 999

7.3. Do not keep concerns (about someone to whom you minister or a complaint about your conduct) to yourself always share them in confidence with the supervisor/the Parish Priest see 6.3 above

7.4. If the matter concerns Safeguarding speak to the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor. If the matter needs investigating or more advice needed speak to the police or adults/children's services. Investigations are a matter for the Police, Adults Services and Children's Services

8. Training and Development

8.1. All Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers and Pastoral Assistants should undertake Safeguarding Training appropriate to their work at least every three years as defined by diocesan policy.