



CURRENT GUIDELINES & FAQs

General Guidelines

What is an Authorised Lay Minister?

Authorised Lay Ministers (ALMs) are lay people active in church life, who have been identified by their parish as having a particular gifting, vocation or calling to lay leadership, i.e. those called to work collaboratively alongside their incumbent and wider ministry teams with a distinct focus on growing, nurturing and serving the wider parish community.

ALMs are nominated by their incumbent and PCC for training in line with their parish Mission Action Plan (MAP) and diocesan selection criteria. Once trained they are authorised by the Bishop of Manchester to carry out a mutually agreed ministry role back within their local parish context. An ALM's authorisation lasts for 3 years after which time it can be reviewed, updated and renewed.

How are ALMs selected?

Authorised Lay Ministry is based on a collaborative model of ministry and is therefore not about any one person's desire to serve or minister. ALMs are authorised to work collaboratively as part of the wider ministry team, in a specific local context and with a mutually agreed ministerial role description. As such, any nominations for ALM must meet the diocesan selection criteria, align with the parish Mission Action Plan (MAP) and represent the expressed desire of the wider parish community as the incumbent, individual and PCC discern and respond to God's call together.

For more details on the application process and selection criteria please see the diocesan website or contact the Local Ministry Officer.

Do ALMs have to be confirmed?

Generally, confirmation has been understood to be the gateway to Anglican ministry. In recent years, the admission of children to Communion before Confirmation, and the receiving into membership of those who were baptised and brought up in another denomination has meant that there is less clarity on the place of confirmation in the Church of England. In this context, those being nominated for ALM should generally either be confirmed, or in the process

Is there an age limit for ALMs?

An ALM needs to be 18 or over at the time of authorisation, an “adult” in legal terms, or have special permission from the Bishop. However, there is no upper age-limit for ALM.

How are ALMs trained?

The ALM training course is broken down into 3 parts that run each year from January to September:

Part 1: Induction, Core Module & Study Days

Between January and Easter, candidates are inducted and then undertake an eight-week Core Leadership Module. During this time there are also 2 additional study days that cover safeguarding and collaborative ministry.

Part 2: Ministry Electives

From Easter to June, candidates will complete their chosen 12-week ministry elective. There are currently 10 ministry electives available:

- Mission & Evangelism
- Community Outreach & Social Action
- Ecology & Creation
- Youth & Mental Wellbeing
- Children & Families
- Parish Admin, Finance & Church Governance
- Pastoral Care
- Prayer & Spirituality
- Worship & Liturgy
- Digital Communication & Online Media

Part 3: Role Descriptions, Retreat Day & Authorisation

From July, candidates will work alongside their incumbent and PCC to finalise their ALM Ministry Role Description before their service of Authorisation in September. There is also a pre-authorisation retreat day to help candidates prepare.

How many ministry electives can an ALM do?

Each ALM must have an identified ‘base ministry’ that forms the core of their ALM Ministerial Role Description, e.g. Worship, pastoral, admin etc., but post initial training ALMs are free to train in any number of related elective ministry areas as part of ongoing training and development.

Further elective training for existing ALMs involves a light touch application process but still requires approval from the parish in relation to how the training relates to the ALMs Ministerial Role Description and the wider goals of the parish MAP.

Does the training involve any assignments, tests or exams?

There are no assignments, tests or exams on the ALM course. There is a limited amount of written work that is optional between sessions but the ethos of the course is more focused on group discussions, reflective practice and real life application. However, for those wanting to take things deeper there will always be suggestions for further reading, resources and ongoing development.

How much does the course cost?

All the costs of ALM training are met by the diocese but parishes are expected to support their candidates if help is required with basic costs such as travel expenses. Where finances are a barrier to participation, parishes are encouraged to contact the Local Ministry Officer for further advice and support.

Why do ALMs require an enhanced diocesan DBS check?

All ALMs require an enhanced diocesan DBS check. Even if an ALM holds a current parish DBS they will still need to complete an enhanced diocesan DBS check. This is in recognition that an ALM's authorisation comes from the Bishop and therefore their public facing ministry carries a greater level of responsibility. Currently an enhanced diocesan DBS lasts for 5 years.

Why do ALMs have to do a higher level of safeguarding training?

The leadership level of safeguarding training for ALM's goes in to greater depth than the basic awareness and foundation level safeguarding training. This is because ALMs are seen to hold responsibility for leading activities involving children, young people and/or vulnerable adults. For an ALM to be reauthorised, this training must be refreshed every 3 years by completing the same leadership level of training. E.g. for an ALM who has completed Basic Awareness, Foundation and Leadership training the refresher requirement would be to repeat Leadership training.

How long does ALM authorisation last for?

ALMs are authorised for a period of 3 years. After this time the parish must apply for the ALM to be re-authorised for a further 3 years. This then continues on a rolling cycle.

What support do ALMs get?

As part of forming their Ministry Role Description, all ALMs must have an identified mentor as well as completing an annual review with their incumbent. ALMs also get support from ALM Chaplains whose role is focused on spiritual and pastoral care and a remit for encouraging the formation of localised lay support networks such as chapters, small groups, buddy networks, online groups and peer mentoring. ALMs also get support from the Diocesan Local Ministry Officer.

Guidelines on Vacancies & Transfers

Can a parish nominate a candidate for ALM during a vacancy?

A parish in vacancy may nominate a candidate for ALM as long as it can be shown that the parish context is stable enough and that all involved will have a sufficient level of ministerial support and oversight. In such instances, the Churchwarden should complete the application process with the candidate and have this overseen by a Team Rector or Archdeacon before then being taken to the PCC for final approval.

What happens to ALMs during a vacancy?

In a vacancy the ministry of an ALM may continue as normal under the authority of the Churchwarden and PCC along with an appropriate level of ministerial oversight from a Team Rector, Local Reader or Area Dean.

What happens to ALMs when a new incumbent arrives?

On the arrival of a new incumbent it is good practice for ALMs to arrange a meeting as soon as possible to introduce themselves and to review their ALM Ministerial Role Description. It may be that the role description needs updating or amending. ALM Chaplains and the Local Ministry Officer are also able to support this process if required.

Can an ALM transfer to another parish?

If an ALM moves parish they can seek the support of their new incumbent and PCC to apply for a transfer of their authorisation. In such cases, the individual must first have become settled as a worshipping member of the new church for at least six months. The transfer must also involve the mutual creation of a new ALM Ministerial Role Description that aligns the ministry of the ALM with the wider mission and goals of the parish MAP.

What happens if an ALM is unable to continue in their ministry?

If it has been mutually agreed for any reason that an ALM is unable to continue in their ministry, then an ALM Notice of Ending Authorisation form must be completed with the incumbent and signed off by the PCC.

If the ALM is only unable to continue their ministry in the short term due to illness or personal circumstances, then an application may be put in for 'pending status' with an agreed review date. This should also be signed off by the PCC.

Specific Guidelines on Roles & Expectations

What is the difference between an Authorised Lay Minister and a Licensed Lay Minister, i.e. Reader?

The Office of Reader is a lay ministry in the Church of England nationally accredited, episcopally licensed and governed by Canon Law. Readers have undergone more substantial theological training and are licensed by the Bishop to preach, teach and conduct funerals as key elements of their ministry. In this sense, Readers are more deployable and can work across parish boundaries with a higher degree of autonomy.

ALMs are different in that they are 'authorised' by the Bishop for an agreed collaborative ministry role within a specific parish context. An ALM's training is much shorter, has less theological depth and is generally more practical in its focus. In recognition of this, ALMs cannot work across parish boundaries without explicit permission and must have a higher level of supervision and support. ALMs must also apply to be re-authorised every 3 years.

Can an ALM lead a whole service on their own?

We actively encourage Worship ALMs to contribute to the worshipping life of the church and their community by using their training, gifts and talents to both assist and lead services where appropriate. Not only does this increase the flexibility of worship within our churches but also improves the range and number of services, ensuring that people can worship regularly in their parish.

However, it is also important to remember that at its heart ALM is a collaborative ministry, so although a Worship ALM can lead Morning or Evening Prayer or an alternative non-Eucharistic form of worship, this should (whenever possible) be a responsibility that is shared as part of a wider ministry team and should always be done alongside the supervisory support, mentoring and guidance of their incumbent.

Where no licensed minister is present (whether because the parish is in vacancy or for other reasons), the Church Wardens are those responsible for ensuring that the service is held and conducted properly. In such cases it is also good practice that the responsibility for leading services should be shared amongst those present.

Can an ALM assist at Holy Communion?

An ALM may assist at Holy Communion as part of their agreed ALM Ministerial Role Description but must still be put forward as a Eucharistic Assistant in line with diocesan guidelines. The ALMs name should be recorded by the PCC and an updated certificate requested. Similarly, the names of any ALMs sharing in the wider ministry of taking Communion to the housebound and sick also need to be recorded by the PCC along with details of their training. The names of ALMs who are Eucharistic Assistants will appear on the certificate in the same way as any other person from the parish on the list.

Are ALM's allowed to preach / give sermons?

ALMs are able and encouraged to do many things but they are not authorised to preach sermons. Church of England rules are very clear that only licensed ministers such as clergy or Readers are able to preach; this means that parish clergy (or churchwardens in a vacancy) should not be inviting ALMs to preach at the main Sunday services.

All Christians should be encouraged to contribute to worship in church by sharing their faith journey or describing how their faith relates to daily life - but this is not the same as someone exercising the distinctive ministry of preaching and teaching which requires licensing and further theological training. ALMs who feel called to a preaching or teaching ministry are encouraged to take the new reader training pathway towards licensed lay ministry.

What about giving talks?

The distinction between talks and sermons in church is unclear and probably neither helpful or honest. An incumbent may, on an occasional basis, invite someone who is not licensed to speak e.g. a youth worker at a Youth service. Likewise, people may be interviewed or give a testimony as part of a service. Furthermore, an incumbent may give one or two opportunities to speak to those discerning a call to ordained or Reader ministry.

This kind of informal arrangement should not become normal practice and should be closely supervised to ensure that the content, structure and delivery of the address will all be of sufficient quality. ALMs are not licensed to preach, which means that if they are invited to speak, it should be on the same basis as other lay people who do not hold a Bishop's license.

Can ALM's wear robes when assisting in leading services?

There have been recent changes in Canon Law giving greater flexibility for clergy not to robe, but there has also been a growing variety of robing for lay roles: vergers, acolytes, sub-deacons, crucifers etc. This is an issue where there are strong views and variant views, and where, in practice, different churches do operate in different ways when it comes to what ministers wear.

Here are the current Guidelines for ALMs in the Diocese of Manchester

1. In most cases, ALMs do not wear robes when leading worship, just as those who read from the Bible, who assist administering the Eucharist, or who lead intercessions do not robe.
2. ALMs who are leading or helping lead non-Eucharistic services do not normally robe.
3. In some churches, where a number of people involved in the service robe – e.g. acolytes, crucifer, deacon – it may be appropriate for an ALM who is leading worship in the service to robe, either in a cassock or a cassock alb.
4. Where an ALM assists at a funeral it may well be helpful for the ALM to robe in a cassock or cassock alb, when the minister taking the service is also robed.
5. When an ALM does robe, they should also wear the ALM badge signifying their role.
6. It is for the incumbent to make any decision on whether s/he would expect or suggest that an ALM should robe, but this should then be agreed by the PCC also, and the agreement noted in the Minutes of that meeting.
7. It is for the incumbent to check before changing practice or patterns of worship in the parish and this includes questions of who robes.

Where can I get more information?

Further information and details are available on the diocesan website:

www.manchester.anglican.org/lay-ministries/ALM/

Or you can contact your Local Ministry Officer:

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