

Hello, my name is Tim Griffiths and I have recently been appointed as Warden for Lay Ministers. I have been a reader for nine years and have a close association with reader ministry. My mother was a reader for many years, (now retired) and my spiritual director was also a reader for many years. I completed a foundation degree in Mission and Ministry whilst working full time as a teacher. I have also been a Local Missional Leader for almost three years leading a church in Wigan. I am currently training for ordination with All Saints and I have just started my final year.

My role is an interim one and my key responsibility is to create a transitional framework that supports the integration of all lay ministry within the diocese. I would like to share with you some words that I shared at last weeks Reader's Annual General Meeting.

As part of my ordination training I was reading a book entitled Presence and personhood. And I was taken by a quotation that appeared in the book. This was the quotation:

"There is nothing that Pastors do for their congregations that is more important than taking care of their own souls." (Barnes)

For me this brought to mind Jesus teaching to His disciples about the Vine and the branches. In this passage Jesus uses the phrases "Remain in me" and "remain in my love" no fewer than nine times. *Remain in me, remain in my love.* And then He says this: "If a person remains in me and I in them, they will bear much fruit." This I believe is such an important teaching to all Christian people and especially Christian leaders. If we are to be fruitful in our ministries, then Jesus has to be the foundation on which our lives are built upon. And this I believe is what the first part of Bishop Paul's rule of life is all about:

We are called to pray, to read and to learn; and in doing so we draw closer to God.

Within this teaching Jesus also says that "God trims every branch in us that does bear fruit so that it will be even more fruitful." So God prunes us and this pruning implies change. The Christian life is a journey, it is not static, and on that journey there are times when God calls us to make changes so that we can be more fruitful. And sometimes pruning can be painful but necessary. We must constantly seek to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to us and to seek out what new thing that God is doing.

For Lay Ministries within our diocese and across several other dioceses there are two key transitional changes that are taking place. First in relation to the redefinition of the role of the reader. The Bishop of Leicester speaks of readers as teachers of the faith, as enablers of mission and as leaders in church and society. So what may that look like in practical terms?

I know of readers who are involved in leading pastoral care teams offering communion and prayer within local care homes; I know of readers who are chairs of church school governing bodies and who are instrumental in advising the governors on establishing a Christian ethos and Christian values within the school. They support the school in the creation of parent/toddler groups and children's after school clubs. The readers also lead services in church and preach. Ministry within the church building but also ministry within the community. And such examples of course relate to the second part of the Bishop's rule of life:

Sent to tell, serve and give.

The second change that lay ministers face is working alongside and in communion with each other. We must accept that people are called by God to be leaders in a whole range of contexts. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians writes:

"It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up....."

Our Lay ministers bring a whole range of skills, gifts and leadership experience to our churches and communities that they offer to God in service. I believe passionately that our diversity is a real source of strength. I believe that the Heavens rejoice when people offer up to God their gifts in service. Our diversity should never be a source of division. We must remember that it is God's mission and we are His servants.

I am currently involved in various consultation meetings and discussions with various people within the diocese. I have also been in communication with the Central Reader's Council and also a fellow warden from Rochester whose diocese is also embracing lay ministry. Within the consultation process the things that we are focussing on and considering in relation to lay ministry are :

- structure
- training
- the supervision process

- Annual events
- Financial issues and budgets
- Recruitment

A life call event for lay ministry has been organised on Saturday 23rd February 2019 at St.Aidan's Centre. Reader Ministry, Local Missional Leadership and the Joshua Centre will be represented at this event. I would therefore very much like to encourage you to invite people who you think may be being called into some form of lay ministry to attend. Further details will appear on the diocesan bulletins.

Jesus final command in this scripture to the disciples was this:

Love one another as I have loved you.

I believe that if we work together as the Body of Christ, then we will see a bigger church making a bigger difference. I am really looking forward to working with you.

Tim Griffiths September 2018