

READER MINISTRY

1. Introduction

This paper is an attempt to summarise two recent developments at a national level within the national church:

- a) North Region Wardens of Readers meeting held in York
- b) A letter from Bishop Martyn Snow Chair of the CRC in which there is a notification for all dioceses to attend a regional meeting early next year to discuss the Bishop's consultation paper on the future of the CRC. Attached to this invitation was a detailed document written by Bishop Martyn which is the subject of the consultation. It is called 'The Central Readers Council – what is God calling us to do?'

2. North Region Wardens of Readers meeting July 2017

This was the first meeting of this group. The meeting discussed a number of issues and sought to compare practices and ideas from around the North Region dioceses. Topics covered included:

- Setting God's people free document and Serving Together
- Bishop Martyn's consultation paper
- The distinctiveness of Reader Ministry in a climate of change especially how dioceses are considering how they encourage Reader Ministry.
- Recruitment and Selection processes
- CMD
- Sabbaticals for Readers
- Educating clergy to understand what Reader ministry is and isn't.

Outcome

- **It was agreed to divided the North Region Group into a North West and North East groups for future meetings**
- **Liverpool led the way on a number of these topics and shared their practices to enhance what other diocese did not have in place**
- **Isle of Man and Cumbria have indicated their willingness to attend Liverpool Diocese AGM/Licensing day as well as the conference. In addition Liverpool have and are sharing their work on a practical level with these dioceses.**

3. The CRC consultation letter and invite from Bishop Martyn Snow

- a) The diocese is invited to a regional consultation meeting 7th March 2018 in Manchester. The diocese can send 5 representatives to this meeting. The agenda is to review the future work of the CRC. To support this meeting a consultation paper has been prepared by Bishop Martyn: 'The Central Readers Council – what is God calling us to be and to do' was attached to the invite. Bishop Martyn in his covering letter states that 'lay ministry has changed rapidly in recent years, not the least in terms of diversity' and as a result 'a serious question has arisen over the future of Reader Ministry'.
- b) The following is a summary of the Consultation Paper 'The CRC what is God calling us to be and to do? :

1. Mission and Ministry in a changing context

- The context in which CRC is working is changing rapidly
- We are now in a new kind of mission context leading to the need to shape our common life
- Recognition of the recovery of the theology of baptism
- The themes of mission, baptism and discipleship are now finding expression in the increase of recognised and authorised lay ministries

2. Celebrating diversity

- The report 'Setting God's people free' demonstrated this diversity of lay ministry
- Resulting in the increase of recognised and authorised lay ministries.

- Readers are now in the minority, still significant but relatively small against other lay ministries e.g. Pioneers, Pastoral Workers, Evangelists, Home Group Leaders etc.
- Readers have undertaken diverse ministries which have been hidden under the title of Reader. This diversity has surfaced and is officially 'recognised' by dioceses
- However some Readers could see this increase in diversity as a threat
- What now is the role of Readers? What is it that sets Reader ministry apart from other ministries? Especially when other lay ministers are preaching, leading, taking funerals.
- Readers are viewed as the 'third age' ministry

3. The urgent task facing the CRC

- A review of Reader ministry and its place within the plethora of other lay ministries will be complex
- Dioceses will be consulted but there is no need to wait for a consensus before proposing changes
- There is a need to clarify CRC work, understanding the future focus of Reader ministry, test this with dioceses, offering support to what it happening in dioceses already
- This support must be clearly defined

4 Three pressing needs in church and society

- **Bishop Martyn's 3 points in identifying the particular needs of society and church**

4.1 Re-imagining the church's engagement with wider society

- We need to reshape our common life and ministry as a movement of people in mission
- Rural areas have found Readers 'filling the gaps' left by reducing clergy numbers. This presents Readers with a great opportunity to respond to the mission calling in these areas. Celebrating seasons, festivals, in a new imaginative way
- Readers in urban areas can help churches reflect theologically on mission. E.g. Interfaith work, issues around poverty, deprivation, issues for older people/young people.
- Readers' liturgical and teaching ministry means they have many creative opportunities to enable other in mission.
- **Questions posed here: Is the CRC being called to focus work on equipping Readers to be enablers in mission? How can Readers be equipped to enable all God's people to be witnesses wherever they are? Can Readers be equipped to play a part in helping churches re-imagine their engagement with local communities? Implications for Reader Training? How can every Reader be an encouraging enabler of mission?**

4.2 Teaching the faith

- Pressing need in churches for Christians to be encouraged to go deeper in prayer, study and service.
- Readers becoming catechists, Teachers of the faith, preparing people for baptism and confirmation. Readers with their formal training as lay theologians are ideally placed to renew this ministry
- **Questions posed here: Is the CRC being called to focus work on equipping Readers to be inspirational teachers of the faith? How can Readers be equipped for this role? Could the CRC provide specialist training for Readers?**

4.3 Mentoring and Coaching

- There is an urgent need for mature experienced Christians to model particular skills, nurture development of attitudes, values and vision for younger generations to respond to the challenges of mission and teaching.
- Mentoring and coaching are not the same thing
- Coaching focuses on developing particular skills, Mentoring on attitudes, character and values

- There is a need for skills of team working and collaboration, partnership working for the common good, skills for deep listening, teaching and adult education, attitudes of humility and service of others and an openness to and a desire of life-long learning
- **Questions posed here: Is the CRC being called to focus work on equipping Readers to be skilled mentors or coaches for others? How can Readers be equipped for this role? Could the CRC provide specialist training? Could CRC provide a mentoring and coaching service?**

5. Conclusion and Summary of Bishop Martyn's Consultation (11 page document)

- Consultation is on the questions posed in section 4 above
- Need to spend 2018 clarifying our purpose and priorities and communicate effectively to Readers and to dioceses
- Every Reader as an encouraging enabler of mission
- Every Reader an inspirational teacher of the faith
- Every Reader a skilled mentor or coach to others
- CRC has 4 key tasks for 2017/2018
- CRC has a process to follow 2017/18

Action for Liverpool diocese:

- ***Determine what response, if any, there should be to the consultation document***
- ***Determine, if required, who should represent the diocese at the regional consultation meeting in March 2018***
- ***Determine, if agreed, the lead person/group if the diocese is to be involved in this project***

***Report Author:
Spencer Webster
Warden of Readers
Liverpool Diocese***

August 2017