



DIOCESE OF  
**Bath & Wells**

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# Lay Worship Assistants



**GUIDANCE ON BECOMING A COMMENDED LWA  
For Incumbents and Prospective LWAs**

February 2022

In response to God’s immense love for us, we seek to be God’s people living and telling the story of Jesus:

Dear God, supreme Storyteller,  
thank you that our lives gain meaning  
in the pages of your unfolding story.  
By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,  
help us to live the story of Jesus  
so that others can see it;  
to tell the story of Jesus  
so that others can grasp it;  
and be part of the new chapter that  
you are writing in your enduring  
love story to the world.  
Amen

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## Introduction

*“O come let us worship and bow down,  
let us kneel before our maker, for he is our God” Psalm 95:6-7*

In the biblical account of Israel, God appointed people to take care of the arrangements and leading of public worship. This ministry is still crucial to the practice of public worship today. Clergy and readers, under licence from the Bishop are given responsibility to lead people in public prayer. Worship itself, however, is the role of all God's people and all people are enriched by having the gifts of a variety of people leading worship.

While it is hoped that many people will be involved in any worship service, some are called to take more responsibility for public worship under the guidance of the incumbent and licenced ministers. A Bishops' Commendation indicates that Lay Worship Assistants have had suitable training and demonstrated the gifts and experience needed to construct and lead worshipful services. Commendation also entails accountability from the Lay Worship Assistant and the incumbent and PCC in the form of a ministry specification and ongoing training and support.

The key to this ministry, in the structure of the church, is that it is one of assistance. The ordering of worship in any church is the joint responsibility of the PCC and the incumbent. A Lay Worship Assistant exercises this ministry under the guidance and supervision of the incumbent and only so long as he or she has the goodwill of the incumbent and PCC.

## The Role of a Lay Worship Assistant

A Lay Worship Assistant may be involved in any appropriate lay leadership of worship in the parishes or benefice for which their incumbent is responsible and the PCC have accepted their ministry. For example, with permission of their incumbent they may:

- Lead Common Worship or BCP Morning and Evening Prayer
- Lead a Service of the Word and any informal services complying with that Service
- Lead or assist in the Gathering and Liturgy of the Word as part of the Eucharist
- Lead intercessions and read the lessons
- Lead a lay worship planning team
- Assist but not lead at occasional offices (Baptisms, Funerals and Weddings)

A Lay Worship Assistant will not normally

- Administer the consecrated elements unless the Bishop's authorisation has been received in the normal way. The Sacraments are the role of the ordained minister.
- Preach. Preaching requires a Bishop's licence (Readers and Clergy). However LWAs may help the congregation reflect on the scriptures for themselves. Guidance for this is given in **EW3 HO2 Reflecting on God's Word**.

A Lay Worship Assistant is commended for 3 years, until their DBS expires or until a new incumbent is appointed, whichever is shorter. At that point their appointment ceases unless it is renewed through the Diocesan procedures.

## Selection and Initial Appointment for Lay Worship Assistants

Lay Worship Assistants are discerned and selected locally through the incumbent and PCC. The incumbent, and the PCC of each church in which they are to minister, are required to approve the applicant.

Safer recruitment procedures need to be followed. For an LWA this means:

1. Potential LWAs should be involved in the life of the parish for at least six months before being considered.
2. Candidates should be interviewed to ensure that they are suitable for the tasks.
3. A ministry specification needs to be agreed which includes clearly stated tasks and responsibilities and determines which level of DBS is required.
4. Each LWA applicant is required to have a DBS check which will be processed electronically by the Diocese. If there is any question about the right level of clearance incumbents should email [dbs.safeguarding@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:dbs.safeguarding@bathwells.anglican.org).
5. Each applicant also needs to complete a Confidential Declaration form.
6. Two references should be obtained, one of which should comment on the candidate's suitability to work with vulnerable adults. One reference should be from outside the present congregation. If applicant has recently joined the parish or was an LWA in another parish, then a reference from the incumbent of any previous church should be obtained.
7. LWA's should complete Safeguarding Awareness (previously called C0), Safeguarding Foundation (previously C1) and Safeguarding Leadership (previously C2/C3) before commendation. C0 and C1 can be accessed online by following the below link - <https://safeguardingtraining.cofeportal.org/>.  
C2 is a taught course, for dates and details please see the link below – <https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/diocese/safeguarding/safeguarding-training/>

## Training for Lay Worship Assistants

### Initial Training

Each applicant is required to complete suitable training for the role. The Diocesan 8-week course **Exploring Worship** fully completed with a favourable report from the facilitators and undertaken within 3 years of the application is, normally, suitable training.

However, training undertaken in other Dioceses or through other programmes may also be acceptable. Similarly, a case can be made for the approval of significant experiential learning and practice. The Incumbent should first assess that the applicant has covered and understands all that is needed for the role to the equivalent level of Exploring Worship.

Approval should then be sought from the Lay Ministries Team, by outlining the training and experience gained matched to the material in Exploring Worship.

### **Safeguarding Training**

LWA's should ensure that they are aware of current good practice and procedure for keeping children, young people and vulnerable adults safe, and should therefore complete safeguarding awareness training.

LWA's should complete Safeguarding Awareness (previously called C0), Safeguarding Foundation (previously C1) and Safeguarding Leadership (previously C2/C3) before commendation. Information about available courses and how to book can be found on the safeguarding training pages of the Diocesan website.

It is the responsibility of the LWA to ensure that this training is refreshed every 3 years. Any questions about safeguarding training can be directed to the Diocesan Safeguarding Team.

### **Ongoing Ministerial Development**

All ministry needs to be sustained and developed, to prevent it becoming stale and lifeless. Firstly the Lay Worship Assistant is expected to maintain their own prayer life and walk with God, out of which they can lead worship. Each year they should undertake some form of development for their ministry – e.g. relevant reading, attendance at related courses, participation in new forms of worship etc. This should be a matter for discussion at the annual review. Many deaneries organise annual meetings for support and training for Lay Worship Assistants. The incumbent should be able to help the LWA access such meetings.

### **Ministry Specification**

It is vital that the Lay Worship Assistant and Incumbent have clear expectations of the role and commitment to be undertaken. To this end a Ministry Specification is expected to be drawn up before the beginning of the ministry. A recommended template is provided in the appendix to this document, although the church may use its own format. The Ministry Specification needs to state the aims of the role, parameters of work, accountability structures, amount of hours envisaged, and expenses. It should also name a supervisor and contact person who will meet regularly with the LWA(s)

When drawing up the ministry specification, it may be helpful to reflect on the questions given in the document below entitled *The Moral Contract*.

### **Accountability**

The LWA will be accountable to the named person in their Ministry Specification. This will usually be the incumbent but may be a delegated local licenced minister. Please note that

this means that the LWA works within the *'Guidelines in Good Practice'* within which clergy are also encouraged to work.

## What happens during a Vacancy and new Incumbency?

As the role of Lay Worship Assistant is always to assist the incumbent in leading worship, a Lay Worship Assistant cannot automatically expect to carry on their same ministry under a new incumbent. Their continued role will be a matter for discussion with the incoming incumbent when they are in post, and a new Ministry Specification will need to be drawn up. In some circumstances, the ministry may cease as patterns of worship change. While this may be difficult and sad, it is important that LWA's are aware that the role is an assistant one, and exists only as long as that assistance is needed. However, the training and experience gained will be recognised, and valued. Lay ministries are often only for a season, at which point there is an exciting journey to discover to which new ministries God may be calling you.

Lay Worship Assistants should take the initiative to ensure that the Parish Profile mentions accurately the ministry they are currently undertaking, so that prospective incumbents are aware of their roles.

During the vacancy, Lay Worship Assistants can be an asset to help the parish/benefice continue to carry on the existing pattern of services. The Churchwardens and any licenced ministers (clergy and readers) are the ones who carry the responsibility for the church in vacancy and Lay Worship Assistants should see themselves as assistants to these people in the absence of an Incumbent.

## Training and commendation during a Vacancy

Prospective Lay Worship Assistants may undertake the Exploring Worship Course during a vacancy and the church wardens or other church leaders should be notified. If at the completion of the course the arrival of a new minister is fairly imminent then commendation should wait for the new incumbent to be in place.

If no incumbent has been appointed then a new Lay Pastoral Assistant can receive an interim commendation. The approval of the PCC and church leadership will be needed. If there is no one suitable to undertake the Incumbent's vocation discernment (as in this booklet) then it should be carried out by the course facilitators or the Area Dean. If there are any queries the Area Dean should be consulted. When a new incumbent is appointed the ministry should be discussed with them and any appropriate amendments made to the ministry specification and a permanent commendation applied for (using the renewal form)

## Commendation and Commissioning

### Assessed Service

It is a privilege and responsibility to lead fellow disciples in worship and one that takes preparation, skill and sensitivity. It is important that LWAs, who may have sole responsibility for worship in a given church on any Sunday, have demonstrated an appropriate level of skill and understanding for the role.

Applicants are therefore asked to undertake an Assessed Service at which a licenced minister (clergy or Reader) is present as assessor. The assessor will offer feedback and determine whether the applicant is ready to lead services on their own.

The Assessed Service should be:

- A type of service which the applicant will typically be expecting to lead
- Have been primarily planned by the applicant. If a team is involved, the applicant should have co-ordinated and led the team

The licenced minister should attend the service and afterwards discuss the planning and leading with the applicant, ensuring that the applicant has a good understanding of the service they have planned and delivered. Written feedback should be provided, and a sample feedback form is in Appendix 4. If the assessor discerns that the service is not yet of the quality necessary for the role, then it shall be deemed a practice service and another service may be assessed.

### Commendation

For those who feel called to become LWAs, commendation by the Bishop requires

- Completion of training with a positive recommendation by the course facilitator
- Approval by their incumbent and each PCC in whose church they will minister.
- Completion of safeguarding requirements
- Agreement of a ministry specification with the local church
- Leading an assessed service

The benefits of commendation include:

- Increased confidence and authority as a result of the commendation
- Recognition in the Diocese and inclusion in Diocesan events
- Enhanced responsibility, commitment and accountability as set out in the ministry specification

A letter of commendation will be issued on receipt of the completed application form confirming that the requirements have been fulfilled. This commendation is valid for a maximum of **3 years (previously 5), or until the DBS expires, or a new incumbent is appointed**. It is issued on behalf of the Bishop. At the end the commendation lapses and is

removed from the Diocesan database. It can be renewed at the request and initiation of the LWA and the incumbent.

The application forms along with supporting documents are available on the website:  
<https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/ministry/local-ministries/lay-worship-assistants/lwa-resources/>

It should be returned to:

**LWA registration**

**Lay Ministries Office, Diocese of Bath and Wells**

**Flourish House, Cathedral Park**

**Wells BA5 1FD**

Or emailed to [training@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:training@bathwells.anglican.org)

### **Commissioning**

After commendation has been received, LWAs can be commissioned in their local church or deanery. A sample commissioning service is available to download from the website.

The new Lay Worship Assistant will also be invited to attend a Celebration of Lay Ministry in the summer, to celebrate their ministry and renew commitment with others, diocesan-wide.

## Appendices:

### 1. The Moral Contract

These questions refer to any licensed minister or volunteer within the church and are for use in the drawing up of a ministry specification. You may wish to discover the answers to these questions as 'raw' information before writing the specification.

1. What exactly do you want me to do?
2. What freedom to make decisions will I have?
3. Over what period?
4. How much of my time will it involve?
5. Where will I do it?
6. Who will I answer to and how?
7. What resources will be available to me?
8. What support will I receive and from whom?
9. How will any possible problems between us be handled?
10. Will I be able to talk through with someone how the job is going and when?
11. What will count as success?
12. What particular objectives do you want me to fulfil?
13. What preparations/training will I receive and from whom?
14. What opportunities for further training will there be?
15. Who will I work with?
16. How will I relate to others in the pastoral team?
17. Will there be other opportunities for ministry in the parish, which I might be able to undertake when I have done this?
18. Will I be able to give up the job gracefully at the end of this period, or if I find that it is too much for me?
19. Who will arrange for my replacement?
20. How will people know what I have been appointed to do?
21. Will the church reimburse me for expenses incurred in doing this appointment?

## 2. Lay Worship Assistant Sample Ministry Specification

NB: This is a sample only. Please download the latest version from the LWA website page.

For: (Name)  
In the Parish/Benefice of: (Name)  
Incumbent: (Name)  
Regularity of Contact: *monthly/bi-monthly/quarterly. (please insert appropriate time)*  
Date of Commendation (Date)

Lay Worship Assistants contribute to the life of the church and their community by leading services such as Morning and Evening Prayer and alternative non-Eucharistic forms of worship. They may also assist at a Eucharistic Service. This increases the flexibility of worship by improving the range and number of services that can be offered and helps to ensure that people can worship regularly in their own communities. LWAs fulfil this role under the guidance of the incumbent. That guidance gives LWAs confidence: enabling them to use their gifts, supported by their incumbent's experience and theological knowledge.

LWAs are commended by the Bishop for 3 years at which point you and your incumbent should review whether the role is still one relevant to church and your own calling. At the end of 3 years the position will lapse unless a new commendation is obtained from the Bishop.

### Tasks

The focus of all LWA ministry is assisting with worship under the guidance of the incumbent, to enable the people of God to pray, praise and encounter God.

You will be involved in the worship ministry of the parish in the following ways:

- *Please specify the services or parts of services with which you will be regularly involved*

*Please add other undertakings that may happen from time to time, e.g. things like:*

- Leading intercessions, in accordance with the benefice rota
- Assisting with care home services
- Reading the lessons, in accordance with the benefice rota etc.

Other responsibilities will include *(Please add or delete as appropriate):*

- working with other Lay Worship Assistants and members of the Leadership Team and attending monthly/bi-monthly /quarterly meetings

**Vacancy** (Only to be included if the parish is in vacancy):

This appointment is for the duration of the vacancy. Upon appointment of a new incumbent the ministry specification will be reviewed and renewed. This should take place within a year of the arrival of the incumbent after which point this specification will come to an end.

### **Support and Accountability**

It is important for you to be supported in your role and to be accountable, because your ministry is exercised on behalf of the Church. The Incumbent (*or insert Incumbent's delegate*) will be available to consult with about any concerns or issues and to look at draft services. You will be exercising your role alongside other LWAs and members of the leadership team and this collegiality offers support and accountability within the team. You are accountable to the Incumbent for the tasks and responsibilities agreed.

The time involved in the role will vary according to your personal circumstances and the local needs. The *Incumbent* will regularly review with you what is best for you and the local context.

### **Expenses**

An LWA should not be prevented from exercising their calling by concerns about expenses but parish resources need to be managed. The general resources of the parish/benefice will be available to you, e.g. use of the office equipment, photocopier etc. If services will incur expenses then these must be approved beforehand with the *Incumbent*.

*Please insert Parish policy for travel expenses.*

### **Review**

You will have an annual review of this specification and your ministry with the Incumbent. Circumstances inevitably change and you are free to step down from the role by giving *one* month's notice so that alternative arrangements can be made to cover services.

The next review will be (*date*).

*I am happy to exercise this voluntary role on the basis of this ministry specification.*

LWA signature:

*I support (name) in this role and will provide oversight.*

Incumbent signature:

*I support (name) in this role and will provide ongoing support and guidance.*

Incumbent's Delegate's signature (if applicable)

Date:

### 3. SAMPLE Application Form – Lay Worship Assistant

Please download the latest version from the website. SAMPLE ONLY. We are delighted that you would like to become an LWA. Please complete this form and return to the Lay Ministries Team. Details will be kept and used in accordance with our Data Privacy Policy.

<b>Name of Applicant:</b>	
<b>Address:</b>	
<b>Postcode:</b>	
<b>Telephone:</b>	
<b>E-mail address:</b>	
<b>Parish/Benefice &amp; Deanery</b>	

To be completed by Applicant:

<b>Approved Training completed</b>	Date:		
Training Details: Exploring Worship OR Other Course For Exploring Worship please indicate your specialist sections 6 & 7. If another course was attended please give details:			
<b>Assessed Service Approved</b>	Date:		
<b>Safeguarding Training Undertaken (enter date)</b>	<b>C0</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>
<b>Enhanced DBS obtained</b>	Children <input type="checkbox"/> Vulnerable Adults <input type="checkbox"/> Certificate Number: Issue Date:		
<b>PCC Approval of the Applicant</b>	Date Approved by each relevant PCC:		
<b>Signature of Applicant:</b>	Signature:		Date:

To be completed by Incumbent / Church Leader in Vacancy

<b>Safer Recruitment</b>	I confirm that safer recruitment (interview and references) has been satisfactorily completed and that I will support and facilitate the Applicant's ministry as LWA: Name in Print:  Signature: _____ Date: _____
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Please return form to: **Lay Ministries Administrator, Ministry for Mission, Flourish House, Cathedral Park, Wells, BA5 1FD** with:

- Copy of Assessed Service Feedback                       Signed Data Privacy Form  
 Copy of Ministry Specification

## 4. Assessed Service Feedback Form

Name:

Feedback from:

This Service was a Pass/ or a Practice:

Type of Service led:	
Brief description of content:	

### Service Content and Flow?

Did the overall Service meet the requirements of a Service of the Word? Any comments on the overall flow, elements and content of the service?

### Service planning and collaboration?

Any comments on the way the participant collaborated and worked together with others before and during the service?

### Service delivery?

Any comments on the way the service was delivered e.g. audibility, visibility, use of space

### Commendations

What was done particularly well and is a good model for future services?

### Areas for Development

What would be the area to work on for developing in future?

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Participants Response to the Feedback above: