

# 'Taster' Session

Is God  
calling me  
to be  
an LPA?



## What is an LPA?

You could have some fun providing different explanations for the acronym!

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| L | • Lay       |
| P | • Pastoral  |
| A | • Assistant |

At the heart of the definition of an LPA is the word 'pastoral.' The area of **pastoral ministry** covers a wide range of activities and understandings but at its heart is offering the love of God to people as they travel through the joys and challenges of life's journey.

We will consider this element first and then return to the outer words.

## God's call and God's gifts

We believe in God who is love; a God whose very being is relationship revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We believe that this God of love calls all people to respond in loving relationship to him. In Christ, God chose to be with his people in the joys and sorrows of human life.

God calls particular people (at different times and places) to offer love and relationship in his name to those in need. These people are now Christ's hands and feet in the world, walking alongside people and offering his love and his healing. To those who are called, God gives the gifts of a compassionate heart, and the willingness to listen to others in love. Lay Pastoral Assistants are among those who are called to offer this ministry.

Teresa of Avila writes movingly of our call to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, continuing his work of love in our world. Her words have been adapted to form the LPA prayer.

**Lord Jesus, teach us that you have no body now on earth but ours;**

**No hands but ours;**

**No feet but ours;**

**Ours are the eyes through which your compassion**

**Must look out upon the world;**

**Ours are the feet with which you**

**Must go about doing good;**

**Ours are the hands with which you**

**Must bless men and women now;**

**For your name's sake. Amen.**

We will use this prayer to explore what pastoral ministry means for us, using Jesus and his teachings as our model.

- How did Jesus look with compassion?
- What does it mean to 'go about doing good' in his name?
- How can we share in bringing God's blessings to the people in our parishes?

## Look with compassion

### Acts 3.1-8



One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us.' And he

fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, 'I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

- What difference does it make that Peter looks 'intently' at the lame man? How can we look at those we meet in this way?
- How do you think the man might have felt being looked at in this way?
- What was it that Peter could offer to the man?
- What do you feel you have to offer to those you meet?

## Beautiful feet

### Isaiah 52.7

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'

Matthew 9.35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.

### Luke 10.33-34



But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

- **How did Jesus go about doing good?**
- **Is pastoral care about bringing 'good news'?**
- **What can we learn from the Samaritan about walking with Jesus' feet?**

## Hands of blessing

Matthew 8.1-3

When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; and there was a leper who came to him and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.' He stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I do choose. Be made clean!' Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Mark 7.31-35

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.' And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

- **Jesus often had a very 'hands on' approach to his healing and pastoral ministry. What other examples can you find?**
- **What does it mean to you to offer the hands of Jesus to those you meet?**
- **How can we reflect Jesus' response to people in our encounters?**
- **What are the dangers here?**

## The Church's ministry

Lay Pastoral Assistant ministry is one of a number of different ministries which make up the whole pattern of the Church's ministry. Some of these are common to the wider Church, not just the Church of England. Some are common to the Church of England but take different forms from one Diocese to another. Some are specific to the Diocese of Salisbury.

### **The ministry of the whole people of God**

In any discussion about ministry, baptism is our starting point. All baptised people are members of Christ's body. As Christ's disciples we are called to share in God's mission to his world, by using our God given gifts, skills, experience and resources in his service. Lay Christians offer ministry in many different ways – in a variety of authorised roles and also as Churchwardens and foundation governors, as active members of churches, as volunteers in the community or simply as good neighbours.

### Ordained Ministry

At the heart of the Church's ministry is the threefold ministry of Bishop, Priest and Deacon. These orders of ministry originated in the life of the early church and are shared with both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. Our understanding of what these ministries are and what they are for can be found in the Ordinal – the services for ordaining people.

### Licensed Lay Ministry

Readers, known in some Dioceses including our own as Licensed Lay Ministers, are the form of licensed lay ministry that people in this country are most likely to be familiar with. They exercise a ministry of preaching and teaching in a pastoral context. Reader/ LLM ministry is a nationally recognised ministry – people are discerned and trained in accordance with national guidelines and can be licensed to exercise their ministry anywhere in the country. Other forms of licensed lay ministry that you may come across are deaconesses, lay workers, evangelists and Church Army Officers.

### Commissioned Lay Ministry

In the Diocese of Salisbury, we have two expressions of commissioned lay ministry, Lay Pastoral Assistant (LPA) and Lay Worship Leader (LWL). These ministries are resourced by the Diocese through training and ongoing support and are recognised by the giving, in the context of a public service, of the bishop's 'commission'. Commissioned ministries are exercised collaboratively in the context of a ministry team and under the supervision of the incumbent or another minister. They are locally discerned – it is for each church to decide whether these ministries are needed and to call out people for them.

## What is a Lay Pastoral Assistant (LPA)?

The word '**lay**' is too often used in a negative sense: in common usage to mean 'not professional' and in the church, 'not ordained.' But in fact, it means 'people of God' and includes all baptised Christians. At baptism we are named and called by God; having received the light of Christ, we now walk in that light. The role of the whole people of God in the life of the Church is being given renewed emphasis as church communities work together to reveal God's love among them.



Lay Pastoral **Assistants** are part of a team within the local church, the Deanery, and the Diocese; together we seek to share love of God with our communities. As Teresa of Avila writes, 'We are Christ's body now on earth.' It is significant that Teresa doesn't say, 'No hands but *mine*.' This is something we are all called to share. LPAs assist the local church and the ministry team in offering pastoral care to the communities in which they are set.

## What does an LPA look like?

Ask current LPAs among you to talk about:

- 'A day (or week) in the life of an LPA'
- 'My favourite part of being an LPA is...'
- 'What is important about being an LPA for me is...'

Be aware of your reactions as you listen to these reflections.

- **Can you see yourself in a similar role?**
- **Do the experiences described chime in with your sense of your gifts and skills?**

As the ministry of a Lay Pastoral Assistant can be so varied, people will bring with them many gifts some of which may be very specific.

However, everyone considering, or being considered for the ministry of a Lay Pastoral Assistant, will have the following: -

- **A love for other people and a commitment to their local church**
- **An ability to demonstrate pastoral sensitivity with good listening skills**
- **A commitment to work within the local team of clergy, other ministers and LPAs**
- **A willingness to minister prayerfully**

And will be: -

- **baptised and confirmed and a regular worshipper and communicant in their home church**
- **rooted and grounded in their local community (e.g. not very recently arrived or likely to move away in the foreseeable future)**
- **widely known and trusted by a range of local people and groups**
- **able to undertake an initial 10 week course of study plus Concluding Session**
- **willing to engage in appropriate continuing ministerial development**

## Is God calling you to be an LPA?

Discerning a vocation is a delicate task. It may take time and patience to understand what God is calling us to do and be. Our sense of vocation may change throughout our life as we grow and mature. We should always be open to the possibility that God is calling us in new ways.

There are three tried and tested indicators that can help us decide whether God is calling someone to a particular role at a particular time – is there a sense of **inner call**, is that sense of call **affirmed by others** and is there a **need for this ministry?**

### Inner call

The sense of inner call that an individual has is very important. It would be strange to embark on ministry without some personal feeling that this is what God wants for us. We may arrive at this sense through reading or study which broadens our understanding of the possibilities open to us, through reflecting on what we have learned, and of course through regular prayer.

Questions to ask might include:

- 'Does LPA ministry 'feel right' for me? Can I put into words why?'*
- 'When I think about LPA ministry do I feel positive and joyful, even if also a bit daunted?'*
- 'Is this something I want for myself or do I feel under pressure – if so from whom and why?'*
- 'How will this impact on my family and anyone else who depends on me?'*
- 'Have I got time to give – both for training and for the demands of ministry? What might I need to give up?'*
- 'Is there anything else that I need to be realistic about?'*



### **Affirmed by others**

Once we feel the stirrings of a sense of call we may well feel prompted to talk it over with others – our friends and families but also those who can be more objective about us. Your incumbent or another minister in your church should always be among those you talk to. The Diocesan Vocations Co-ordinator is always available to talk with anyone who wishes and there is also a network of vocations advisors around the Diocese. You can get this information from the Diocesan website or from Church House.

Questions to ask might include:

- 'Could you see me in this role?'*
- 'Do you think others would welcome me in this role?'*
- 'Do I have the right personal attributes (or could I develop them)?'*
- 'Do I have the right skills (or could I learn them)?'*



Be open to the possibility that others may NOT see you in the role – and that their intuition may be the right one. Listen carefully and indicate that you really do want an honest opinion – not everybody finds it easy to give feedback. And be of good cheer – you already know that you are called by God. The only question is, to what?

### **A need for this ministry**

God does not call us to exercise a ministry if there is no need for it. It would be a pity to waste our energies when there are so many other important things that we might be able to do for God. So a key question to ask is: what does my church actually need at the present time? We are often inspired by the ministry we see someone else offering – is their ministry sufficient for now or will they soon be in need of a successor?



- **What ministry does your church need? Where are the gaps in ministerial provision in your church? Consider immediate needs but also potential longer term needs. Can you think of other people in your church with untapped gifts and what might each of you most helpfully offer? If time, the group may like to share and discuss these findings**

### What can I do next?

**Ask God in prayer ...** how you may become all that God intends you to be and how best you may serve him.

**Reflect on your gifts ...** are you able to engage with people?  
Are you someone with caring skills and a willingness to support others?

**Talk to your parish priest or chaplain ...** who will be able to advise you.

## The next step

Once you have decided that you would like to explore ministry as a Lay Pastoral Assistant by participating in a course, the next step is to talk to your incumbent. S/he should already have access to this Taster Session and may wish to discuss with you some of the vocational questions that we have just been exploring. S/he may also wish to consult others, including the PCC.

If you and your incumbent agree that it is appropriate for you to attend a course you need to complete the registration form available at this session. Please hand (or email) this to your course leader and [parishsupport@salisbury.anglican.org](mailto:parishsupport@salisbury.anglican.org) at the first session.

You will need to apply for an **enhanced Child and Adult Workforce DBS clearance with a check against the Child and Adult Barring Lists** and will also need to attend Safeguarding Training. This process will initiate when you complete and submit the registration form for the LPA course.

It is your responsibility to book onto the online **Basic awareness (C0), Foundation (C1), and Awareness of Domestic Abuse** courses (<https://safeguardingtraining.cofeportal.org/>) and remember **you cannot be commissioned without having completed the safeguarding training and have a valid DBS certificate.**

Initial training for Lay Pastoral Assistant ministry consists of at least ten sessions plus a Concluding Session, each about 2 hours long. Your course leader will advise on this as sometimes it is a mixture of evenings and Saturdays. The sessions are usually two weeks apart so that some tasks and activities can be completed in between. **Be aware that some of the sessions may touch on sensitive issues that might need working through with someone you trust.**

Remember that participation in the course is part of the discernment process and does not guarantee that people will be recommended for commissioning. We suggest that a written reflection '**Why I believe God is calling me to the ministry of a Lay Pastoral Assistant**' would be helpful. This needs to be *up* to 2 sides of A4 and if this feels difficult for any reason feel free to use other formats. The important thing is that you have reflected with your incumbent concerning this potential ministry, so that together you can decide whether it is now right for you to proceed. Commissioning takes place in Deaneries or in your own parish by arrangement and is conducted by either an archdeacon or suffragan bishop.



Once you have been commissioned as a Lay Pastoral Assistant you are expected to take part in the Diocesan CMD programme which offers a range of different ways of deepening your learning or developing specialisms. Your Commission will be renewed every three years following a review of your ministry which your incumbent will conduct.

## Closing Prayer

Spend some time in quiet reflecting on all you have heard and said, your thoughts and reactions.

**All highest and glorious God,  
cast your light into the darkness of my heart.  
Grant me right faith, firm hope, perfect charity, profound humility,  
with wisdom and perception, O Lord  
so that I may always and everywhere  
seek to know and do what is truly your holy will,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*St Francis of Assisi (1181–1226)*

## Appendix: Course Outline

- Session 1: Who are we?**
- Session 2: Who am I?**
- Session 3: Journey of life**
- Session 4: Learning to listen (or Developing listening Skills 4a)**
- Session 5: Engaging with families**
- Session 6: Coming alongside those with acute and chronic illness**
- Session 7: Valuing later life**
- Session 8: Why and when we visit**

CHOOSE AT LEAST 2 OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Session 3a: Our role at a time of loss**
- Session 4a: Developing listening skills**
- Session 5a: Nurturing the spirituality of children and young people**
- Session 8a: Knowing our limits**

**Concluding session**