**Lay Ministry in Rochester Diocese**

**– where we are in September 2021**

**Lay ministries are growing and proliferating within the Church of England as more people respond to God’s call in their lives and share their God-given gifts in a wide range of ministries**.

“GSMisc 1265 A Vision for Lay Ministries” ©Archbishop’s Council 2020

That was the opening line of “A Vision for Lay Ministries” - the paper produced in 2020 by the CofE’s National Ministry Team, but Rochester Diocese has long recognised the importance of Lay Ministry in the ministry and mission of our parishes, and after a rethink of how we did selection and training in 2012, we began training Licensed Lay Ministers with a variety of specialisms including (but not limited to) preaching, leading worship, community engagement, leading worship, evangelism, pastoral care, and chaplaincy.

The first cohort of these LLMs were licensed in 2015 and we now have almost 100 of them, who join the 300 or so men and women who has been licensed as Readers, authorised as Pastoral Assistants, or commissioned Evangelists before 2012. In parallel to the development of LLMs, Rochester Diocese was one of the first dioceses to develop Anna Chaplaincy – ministry to older people, and to those with dementia.

Towards the end of the C20th and into the beginning of the C21st we trained Readers who were licensed for ministry, alongside Pastoral Assistants and Evangelists who were respectively authorised and commissioned.

**Readers** are licensed to preach and to teach, to lead non-Eucharistic worship, to lead Ministry of the Word at the Eucharist and administer the sacraments, to carry out pastoral work, be involved in baptism visiting and preparation, and give Home Communion to the sick using reserved sacrament. Readers are also authorised to officiate at funerals, providing they have undertaken additional authorised training and had their licence appropriately endorsed by the Bishop.

**LLMs** are licensed for the same aspects of ministry as Readers, but have been selected to be

* Theologically articulate
* A reflective practitioner
* A leader alongside others in mission and ministry

The ministry of an LLM may cover a range of roles, responsibilities and duties which will vary according to the gifts and abilities of the individual, the needs of their parish or ministry setting, and the context of their ministry.

**Pastoral Assistants** are trained to be alongside everyone and to be as concerned about the care of the well as of the sick; to work with all age groups; to be involved in teaching, listening, enabling, nurture and prayer, as much as the more practical roles traditionally associated with care.

At the heart of PA ministry is the desire to help put God’s caring concern into practice, mainly in the context of the local parish and its community. Whilst no two PAs are the same, coming as they do with different spiritual gifts, skills and life experiences, so the focus of their ministry will also be very different, responding to local need and God’s calling.

**Evangelists** in the Diocese of Rochester work in a variety of ways. Some work specifically with children and young people in schools and clubs, most work across age ranges. In some areas there is a specific work with the elderly. Some run small enquiry groups for adults either in churches, homes, pubs or cafes. Others do estate visits especially to welcome newcomers to an area.

**Anna Chaplaincy** and Anna Friends were introduced to Parishes in Rochester Diocese through a project which began in 2015, through the work of Julia Burton-Jones, Diocesan Anna Chaplaincy Lead and Dementia Specialist. Anna Chaplaincy is an ecumenical initiative of The Bible Reading Fellowship to offer spiritual care to older people of strong, little or no faith.

Anna Chaplains are commissioned to work with older people, and some of them combine this role with being an LLM, Pastoral Assistant or Evangelist, but others are only involved in Anna Chaplaincy. The Diocese provides Anna Chaplaincy training on topics related to spiritual care for older people and those affected by dementia and has a project officer working to support the team. Anna Friends are commissioned locally in their parishes, and they meet with Anna Chaplains four times a year in local hubs for mutual support and theological reflection.

**Lay Funeral Ministers** are required by Canon Law to be licensed, so most lay funeral ministers are Readers or LLMs who have undergone extra training, but anyone called to this ministry who has completed the Bishop’s Certificate and the Bereavement and Funerals training module can (with their incumbent’s support) be licensed as a Lay Funeral Minister, and we have a small number of people who are specifically licensed for this role.

**Lay Ministry Support.**

In 2014 the Diocese appointed the first of Warden of Lay Ministry, to work 3 days a week as part of the Formation & Ministry Team. She has 2 volunteer Deputy Wardens for each Archdeaconry whose role includes supporting Lay Ministry in their area, presenting LLMs who are licensed to new parishes, facilitating 12 months post licensing reviews, meeting new incumbents, and being a listening ear for Lay Ministers, when needed.

Whilst the incumbent has cure of souls in the parish, the best parish ministry teams are the ones where collaboration between lay and ordained ministers has become a place of mutually supportive, trusting relationships. Many of the training cohorts remain in touch with each other after developing strong bonds in training, but we offer additional support to Lay Ministers in a range of ways. This is particularly important when an incumbent leaves the parish, so we now offer twice yearly events for Lay Ministers and their Churchwardens who are starting a parish vacancy.

Most Diocesan CMD on offer is open to lay and ordained ministers, and attending an event as a ministry team is a good way of thinking through an issue and putting it into practice. We have an annual Autumn day conference with the Bishop in attendance, and when licences are renewed every 5 years we have an Archdeaconry Celebration of Lay Ministry networking day.

Lay Ministers receive a quarterly newsletter – “Lay Ministry Matters”, and there is a **Lay Ministry in Rochester Diocese** Facebook page which is an open page for anyone interested. Two of Rochester’s Licensed Ministers are trustees of the Central Readers’ Council and have been encouraging the move for CRC to extend their support to a wider range of Lay Ministries, which is reflected in the content of the “transforming Ministry” magazine. <https://transformingministry.co.uk/>