

2018 Reader Activity Statistics

As Benjamin Disraeli said in October 1867 when Reader Ministry was just 1 year old, “Change is inevitable in a progressive country. Change is constant.”

And so it is in Church ministry as well.

Amongst others, 3 important documents have been recently been published which will each have an effect on Reader Ministry. The ‘Report of the Lay Ministries Working Group’, also referred to as the ‘Serving Together’ report was written in 2016, the year of the 150th anniversary of Reader ministry and published shortly afterwards, the ‘Resourcing Sunday to Saturday Faith’ was published by the Central Readers’ Council earlier this year, while the Diocese has also been busy with its ‘Aligning Resources for Mission’ programme in recent months. With all this activity, change is certainly inevitable and, indeed, is to be welcomed as we continue to celebrate the variety of gifts that God has given us all, and as we each continue to do what we can to promote the Gospel.

Inevitably Readers who are all volunteers are called to differing forms of ministry, echoing Paul’s letter to the Romans that “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. (Romans 12:4-5, NRSV)”

With that in mind, the statistics for activities conducted by Readers in the Diocese in 2018 have now been compiled and reveal that there are currently 261 Readers in the Diocese, including those with Permission to Officiate (a differentiation that is being phased out). There are a further 57 of ‘Emeritus’ status.

There are two big differences comparing this year’s statistics from previous, notably

- There has long been a suspicion that Reader numbers were inflated, but this has been difficult to substantiate. Over the last 12 months or so, Julia Grattan has done an enormous amount of work verifying all the data and there is now a high confidence level that the Reader counts are accurate, resulting in the apparent decrease from 315 Readers (incl those with PTO) in 2017 to 261 this year. We are most grateful to her for all her hard work.
- Also in previous years, the practice has been to publish extrapolated figures based on the returns that have been received, but using a complicated growth calculation. There is no reason to believe that the activity of Readers who did not submit their returns would be any different from those who did, or vice versa, but basing Reader activity on just those returns that were received would almost certainly undervalue the enormous contribution made by the Reader community. This year, the statistics show the extrapolated figures with the actual count of, those who submitted returns, shown in brackets.

Those 261 (187) active readers

- Preached on 4,003 (2,879) occasions
- Led 1,777 (1,278) bible study sessions
- Have led 327 (235) services in care homes, hospices, hospitals, etc
- Led 681 (490) services of collective worship, or other similar work, in schools and colleges. While 'only' 49 (35) were directly involved in schools work, this is probably due to work and other such commitments, as most CYP (Children and Young People) activities tend to be day-time.
- Led 2,265 (1,629) services of Morning or Evening Prayer
- Led 1,360 (978) Services of the Word
- Led 576 (414) funerals
- Took Communion to the housebound on 1,953 (1,405) occasions

Possibly not surprisingly, 73% regard intentional pastoral care as part of their ministry, with similar numbers also involved in church bodies such as PCC, Synod, Deanery Mission and Pastoral Groups, Reader Council, etc.

While it is difficult to directly compare the 2018 statistics with previous years due to the changes in reporting and analysis methodology referred to above, it would appear that Reader activity has been constant, and may have even increased, across all areas.

What does continue to amaze, however, is the wide variety of ways in which Readers exercise their ministry, a practical reflection of Paul's words that "not all the members have the same function ". This encompasses:

- Music in a wide variety of forms
- Work in schools whether as Chaplains or Governors
- Serving a plethora of church bodies ranging from PCCs to Diocesan Synod, or as Parish Officers including as Churchwardens, Parish Safeguarding Officers, and so on
- Chaplaincy both in Wells Cathedral, Bath Abbey and elsewhere including Royal British Legion
- Providing pastoral care to those in need
- Visiting Palestine and assisting with the Diocesan links with Zambia
- While not widespread, there are some who, on an exceptional basis, lead services of Communion by Extension
- Organising and leading prayer ministry teams
- Inputting info onto parish websites
- Leading house groups
- Helping set up a new monastic community
- Fund raising
- And so much more

It also appears that there has been an increase in activity surrounding drop in centres / cafes and assisting those less able than ourselves, whether that be people with dementia or a range of other physical afflictions.

But if there are 2 attributes which truly reflect the new world we're moving into, it is the apparent increase in Readers writing for local newspapers and other publications, and the willingness to share in the leading of worship, including ecumenically.

Readers within the Diocese appear to be well equipped and already engaged with both the Diocesan vision of "living and telling the story of Jesus" and with the CRC suggested Reader priorities of

1. Teaching the faith,
2. Enabling mission in the everyday,
3. and Leading in both church and society.

Readers continue to remain at the forefront of ministry within the Diocese.

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