

# Lay Pastoral Assistants



**GUIDANCE ON BECOMING A COMMENDED LPA**  
For Incumbents and prospective Lay Pastoral Assistants

August 2019

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

"I was sick and you took care of me,  
I was in prison and you visited me." Mt 25

Pastoral care is a sign of the life of Christ in a church community. It is to be hoped that all disciples will care and support, not only each other, but the people they encounter day by day. The need for pastoral care in any community is, however, always greater than the church can address.

While all members of the church need to look out for and care for each other and their neighbours, some are called and gifted to undertake, more formally, pastoral care on behalf of the church. A Bishops' Commendation indicates that Lay Pastoral Assistants have had suitable training and demonstrated the gifts and experience needed to visit and care on behalf of the church. Commendation also entails accountability from the Lay Pastoral 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 care of the parish is the responsibility of the incumbent, granted by the Bishop at installation. A Lay Pastoral 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 Pastoral Assistant

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

- Visit newcomers to both our churches and our communities
- Visit people in their homes [not just the elderly and housebound]
- Take home communion (if registered as a communion assistant)
- Visit families before and after baptism
- Work with children and young people if appropriately safeguarded
- Be involved in Marriage preparation
- Undertake Hospital visiting
- Support the bereaved
- Be involved in Prayer and healing
- Offer hospitality
- Be involved in raising and nurture, including confirmation preparation & home groups
- Be involved in evangelism, e.g. Pilgrim Course; Alpha groups

A Lay Pastoral Assistant is commended for **5 years**, or 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 Pastoral Assistants

Lay Pastoral 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 LPA this means:

1. Potential LPAs should be involved in the life of the parish for at least six months before being considered.
2. Candidates should be interviewed, at least informally, 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 LPA 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 [helen.humphreys@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:helen.humphreys@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 the applicant has recently joined the parish or was an LPA in another parish, then a reference from the previous church should be obtained.
7. LPA's should complete the basic awareness in safeguarding course (C0) before commendation. This course can be accessed online by following the attached link - <https://safeguardingtraining.cofeportal.org/>. C1 should be undertaken in the first year of commendation.

## Training for Lay Pastoral Assistants

### Initial Training

Each applicant is required to complete suitable training for the role. The Diocesan 8 week course **Exploring Pastoral Care**, fully completed with a favourable report from the facilitators and undertaken within 5 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 Pastoral Care**. Approval should then be sought from the Lay Ministries Team, by outlining the training and experienced gained matched to the material in Exploring Pastoral Care.

### Safeguarding Training

LPA'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.

LPA's are required to complete C0 prior to commendation and the foundation level (C1) course within the first 12 months of receipt of their Letter of 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 LPA 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. In addition a ministry such as pastoral care should have ongoing supervision to prevent against burnout, dependency or inadvertent abuse. Firstly the Lay Pastoral Assistant is expected to maintain their own prayer life and walk with God, out of which they can offer God's love. Each year they should undertake some form of development for their ministry – e.g. relevant reading, attendance at related courses, participation in supervision etc. This should be a matter for discussion at the annual review. The Diocesan office will send out the annual training booklet which will include some appropriate sessions. Many deaneries also offer an annual gathering and training session for mutual support. If your church or deanery would like help in setting this up, please contact the Lay Ministry team who can put you in touch with good practice.

Many churches set up a pastoral care team that meets regularly for mutual support, or an individual supervisor may be appointed. It is the incumbent's responsibility to ensure support is in place but they may delegate it to an appropriately qualified person.

### Ministry Specification

It is vital that the Lay Pastoral 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, number of hours envisaged, and expenses. It should also name a supervisor and contact person who will meet regularly with the LPA(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 LPA will be accountable to the named person in their Ministry Specification. This will often be the incumbent but may be delegated to an appropriately qualified person. Please note that this means that the LPA works within the '*Guidelines in Good Practice*' within which clergy are also encouraged to work.

## Working Relationships breakdown

In an ideal world the pastoral team and incumbent will work well together and mutually support each other for the care of all in the parish. However, the reality is that none of us are perfect and therefore from time to time conflict may arise within the team or between the team and the church leadership (e.g. licenced clergy, Readers, churchwardens). This is always unfortunate but must be reckoned with. As the incumbent has the cure of souls for the parish, they ultimately take the decisions on what ministries are offered, to whom. The LPA is always their assistant and if the incumbent decides that a ministry is no longer needed in the parish, then the LPA must abide by this. Although painful, this can be an opportunity to seek what new ministry God may be calling you to do. Before this stage is reached, help can be sought from the Area or Lay Dean or from the Deanery Lay Ministries officer – if one exists.

## What happens during a Vacancy and new Incumbency?

As the role of Lay Pastoral Assistant is always to assist the incumbent, a Lay Pastoral 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 care change. While this may be difficult and sad, it is important that LPA'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 Pastoral 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 Pastoral Assistants can be an asset to help the parish/benefice continue to carry on the existing care of parishioners and community. The Churchwardens and any licenced ministers (clergy and readers) are the ones who carry the responsibility for the church in vacancy and Lay Pastoral Assistants should see themselves as assistants to these people in the absence of an Incumbent.

## Training and commendation during a Vacancy

Prospective Lay Pastoral Assistants may undertake the Exploring Pastoral Care 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 Visit

It is a privilege and responsibility to visit a person on behalf of the church and one that takes preparation, skill and sensitivity. It is important that LPAs have demonstrated an appropriate level of care and empathy and understanding for the role with the potential to develop further.

Applicants are therefore asked to undertake an Assessed Visit which is discussed with an appropriate supervisor before and after. The assessor will offer feedback and determine whether the applicant is ready to visit on their own.

The Assessed visit should be:

- To an appropriate member of the community that will provide an opportunity for the prospective LPA to exercise their listening skills. The church and LPA together should identify an appropriate situation, that will test the skills, but not over stretch the candidate.

The supervisor should meet with the prospective LPA to discuss the assessed visit and its purpose before the visit. The supervisor should see the completed risk assessment and be satisfied that the visit is purposeful and appropriate. Within a week of the visit the candidate should meet with the supervisor to debrief on the visit. The Supervisor should seek to assess, as far as possible, that appropriate empathetic reflective listening took place; that the candidate showed self awareness and appropriate pastoral care.

Written feedback should be provided and a sample feedback form is in Appendix 4. If the assessor discerns that the level of experience is not yet of the quality necessary for the role, then it shall be deemed a practice visit and another visit may be assessed.

### Commendation

For those who feel called to become LPAs, 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
- Undertaking an assessed visit

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 **5 years, 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 LPA and the incumbent.

The application forms along with supporting documents are available on the website:

<https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/ministry-for-mission/training/lay-training/lpa/>

It should be returned to:

**LPA registration**

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

**Old Deanery, St Andrews St**

**Wells BA5 2UG**

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

### Commissioning

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

The new Lay Pastoral 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 Pastoral Assistant Sample Ministry Specification

NB: This is a sample only. The latest version can be downloaded from the LPA page of the website and used as a template.

For: (Name)  
In the Parish/Benefice of: (Name)  
Incumbent: (Name)  
LPA Facilitator : (Name – Please adapt to local title for this role)  
Regularity of Contact: monthly/bi-monthly/quarterly. (please insert appropriate time)  
Date of Commendation (Date)

Lay Pastoral Assistants play an important part in their communities by visiting and caring for those in need. Many people will show that care for others informally, but Lay Pastoral Assistants have a specific ministry to do so on behalf of the church. You have a personalised ministry specification because your ministry is based on your gifts, skills and the local situation.

LPAs are commended by the Bishop for 5 years so that it is possible to review whether the role is still one that God is calling you to. At the end of 5 years the position will lapse unless a new commendation is obtained from the Bishop.

### Tasks

The focus of all LPA ministry is pastoral care which calls for a loving and compassionate heart, and a willingness to listen and support those in need.

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

- visiting people in their homes who may be unwell, lonely or have been referred to the parish for some reason. Decisions about who to visit will be agreed with the *facilitator (or insert the local equivalent)*.

*Please add other undertakings e.g. things like:*

- welcoming newcomers to our churches and communities
- visiting families before and after baptism
- marriage preparation
- hospital visiting
- supporting the bereaved

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

- working with other Lay Pastoral Assistants and members of the Leadership Team and attending monthly/bi-monthly/ quarterly meetings with the facilitator (and team)
- meeting with the whole Pastoral team at least once a year to review the ministry and undertake ongoing training

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 *LPA facilitator (insert the local equivalent)* will speak with you regularly, either individually or as part of the team meeting, to provide support and guidance. You will be exercising your role alongside other LPAs 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 *LPA facilitator (insert the local equivalent)* will regularly review with you what is best for you and the local context.

### **Expenses**

An LPA 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. It is not envisaged that there will be any expenses incurred, but if you anticipate any then please talk to your facilitator or 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 at any time, but because this is a significant and sensitive ministry please ensure that you hand over to the *LPA facilitator (insert the local equivalent)* in a way that enables those you have been visiting to be cared for.

The next review will be *(date)*.

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

LPA 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.*

Facilitator signature

Date:



## 4. Assessed Visit Feedback Form

Name:

Feedback from:

This Visit was a Pass/ or a Practice:

Details of the Visit  
undertaken:

### Listening and Empathy

Did the candidate appear to have listened appropriately and empathetically?

### Self Care and Awareness?

Was an appropriate risk assessment completed? Did the candidate appear to be self aware of the dangers and risks to themselves and those in their care? Were appropriate boundaries in place?  
Was the candidate aware of their own limitations?

### Commendations

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

### 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:**

## 5 Home Visit Risk Assessment

(adapted from Church of England Parish Safeguarding Handbook)

Name of adult to be visited .....

1.	Does the adult have a history of violence, or threatening behaviour? <i>If yes, please detail below</i>	Yes/No Not known
2.	Is the adult a risk to themselves?	Yes/No Not known
3.	Does anyone living in the house have a history of violence or threatening behaviour? <i>If yes, please detail below</i>	Yes/No Not known
4.	Does anyone who visits the adult have a history of violence or threatening behaviour? <i>If yes, please detail below</i>	Yes/No Not known
5.	Does the adult have any vulnerabilities that would make it inappropriate for him/ her to be visited alone (e.g. by a single male or female?)	Yes/No Not known
6.	Does the adult have any health problems that may cause unpredictable behaviour? <i>If yes, please detail below</i>	Yes/No Not known
7.	Are there any health risks associated with visiting the adult at home? (Examples might be infestation, smoking, intravenous drug use, infectious diseases, dangerous pets?) <i>If yes, please detail below</i>	Yes/No Not known
8.	Is the adult's home in a well-lit area? <i>Please detail below any difficulties you are aware of.</i>	Yes/No Not known

