



## 2017 Reader Survey Report

This survey originated from comments made by Readers at their annual 2016 service, and sets out to ascertain in some detail the views and feelings of the Reader community, a distinct and important ministry within Bath & Wells Diocese.

The following 3 comments were included in the responses:

- “I delight in my Readership. I am excited by “Setting God’s People Free’ and by the new Deanery Mission Planning document. Hopefully all people will be empowered in mission and ministry.” Reader, Bath Archdeaconry
- “I am immensely proud of the fact that I am a lay person with a ministry which is recognized by the church. I am not a vicar manqué, nor a failed ordinand, nor a second-class priest, nor a would-be permanent deacon.” Deanery Warden, Bath Archdeaconry
- “Readers have a wide pool of real experience and knowledge from their secular lives, which are also often vocational. This is mistakenly side-lined by a church which sadly quite often fails to recognise that the lack of ‘collar’ doesn’t necessarily mean a lack of relevant experience or ability. Clergy have a unique place, but Readers’ ministry is also a real calling and the differences of both need to be properly recognised, appreciated and understood.” Reader, Wells Archdeaconry

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on behalf of the Readers’ Council, Bath & Wells Diocese  
June 2017

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## Background & Objective

At the Diocesan Readers' 150<sup>th</sup> Celebration day on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2016, and following on from discussions led by Bishop Peter and Bishop Ruth, Readers were asked to comment on issues raised in the morning's discussions, and effectively to add AOB comments as well. The comments raised can be summarised as follows:

- Allowing Readers to be 'lead minister' in village churches that are part of a benefice would provide continuity.
- How do we distinguish between the different lay ministries, eg Reader, Lay Worship Assistants, Pastoral Assistants, etc?
- Is there more scope for worship with other parishes and should it be encouraged? Is there a role for Readers to bless?
- Ministers and their availability can be an issue .
- The name 'Reader' should be changed as it is confusing and doesn't reflect the role Readers undertake.
- The rules for Communion by Extension should be relaxed, a 'service' which could be made more available but for restrictions imposed
- There is a difference in how clergy use Readers – some are really happy to use them as much as possible, some do not want to give services to Readers and they are not used as much as they would like. The relationship between Priest and Readers is not as harmonious as it could be.
- Training clergy & lay people together can be difficult as Clergy are not always open to lay ministers being with them.

At the 5<sup>th</sup> November Readers' Council, it was reported that when the feedback was collated, the number of "extra-curricular" comments was striking . . . .

"e.g. about what Readers are called, and about relationships with incumbents. Council members said that some Readers are inhibited from writing honestly about their experience on their Annual Return because it is seen by (and in some cases posted by) their incumbent."

After discussion, it was agreed that an organising group will draft a questionnaire to go to all Readers to gain a wider response to issues raised in the feedback, but that it was important to get this right, so it should not be rushed.

This report summarises the responses to that questionnaire, with the specific objective of better understanding Readers' views, opinions and concerns.

At their meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2017 when this report was formally accepted, Readers' Council further agreed to establish a sub group to review these findings in detail and take whatever action was deemed appropriate; this group is in the process of being formed and will commence work as soon as possible, reporting as appropriate.

## Methodology

Following a number of points raised in October 2016, Readers Council took the decision to further investigate some of the views expressed to try and better understand Readers' views across the Diocese, so that Council might be better informed as to strategies adopted and decisions taken.

A survey was sent out to approximately 322 Readers, Readers with PTO and Readers in Training, predominantly by email, but Deanery Wardens were also asked to send the survey form to any who did not have electronic communications. Readers Emeritus were not included as they were assumed not be in regular active ministry.

The forms were sent out on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2017, a reminder was sent on 27<sup>th</sup> March, both requesting that all forms be returned no later than 9<sup>th</sup> April, ie a response time of almost 4-weeks. Replies received shortly afterwards were also included, however 3 were rejected, one being submitted by a Reader Emeritus, the other 2 being received once analysis was in advanced stages (one being received as late as 1<sup>st</sup> May).

Where possible, respondents were asked to respond numerically, eg "on a scale of 1 = very poor to 5 = excellent" which has allowed minimum and maximum levels of support to be identified, as well as averages across all respondents.

The report provides a narrative and, where possible, a numerical analysis.

## Broad data

The following broad analysis is available:

- 139 replies were received (43.2%), this included 17 which were printed and completed by hand, all others were received electronically
- Confidentiality was assured at the outset, so the names of respondents will not be revealed. However, the responses were received from the Archdeaonries and Deaneries as follows:

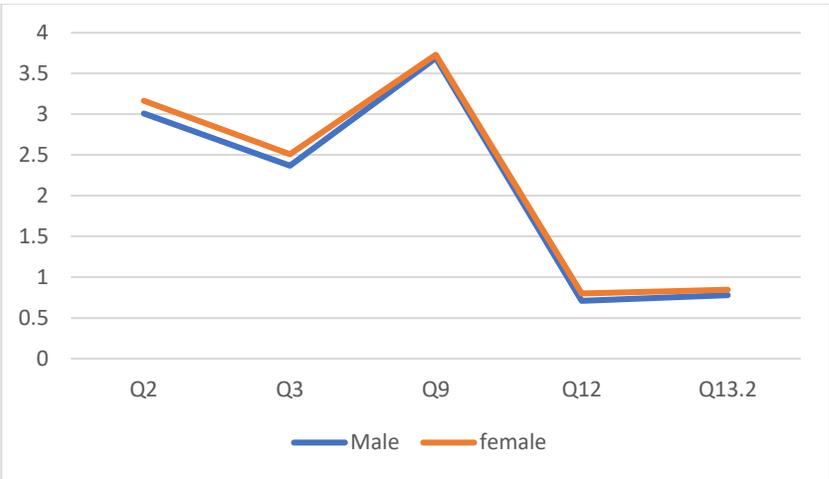
Table: Survey Responses by Archdeaconry and Deanery

Archdeaconry	Responses	Maximum as per Annual Reader Returns	Deanery	Responses
Bath	52	135	Axbridge	6
Taunton	46	88	Bath	16
Wells	41	104	Bruton and Cary	5
			Chew Magna	6
			Crewkerne	2
			Exmoor	6
			Frome	6

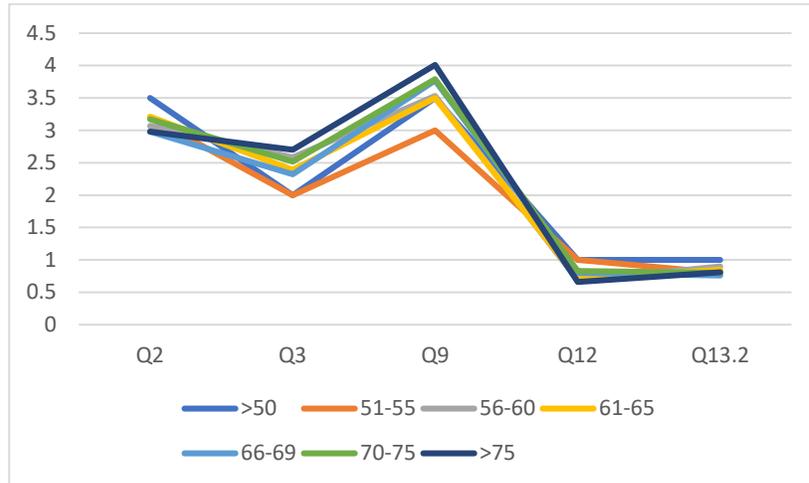
			Glastonbury	10
			Ilminster	7
			Ivelchester	7
			Locking	9
			Midsomer Norton	5
			Portishead	17
			Quantock	8
			Sedgemoor	5
			Shepton Mallet	6
			Taunton	12
			Tone	4
			Yeovil	2
	139	327		139

- Respondents had been licensed from a minimum of 6 months up to 54 years, with an average of 17.7 years
- 55% of respondents were female (62 male responses received, 77 female).
- From the spot checks conducted , neither gender nor age appear to cause material differences in the numerical analysis, although care does need to be taken that differing opinions have been expressed on some issues from the youngest to eldest groups, particularly those where there is a time or availability issue, eg work commitments or retired which can both increase / decrease time availability. Questions 2, 3, 9, 12 and 13.2 (covering workload in Parish, Deanery Fellowship Group, CMD, the title ‘Reader’ and views on ‘Communion by Extension’) were used to check demographic differences.

Graph: Responses to questions 2, 3, 9, 12 and 13.2 by Gender

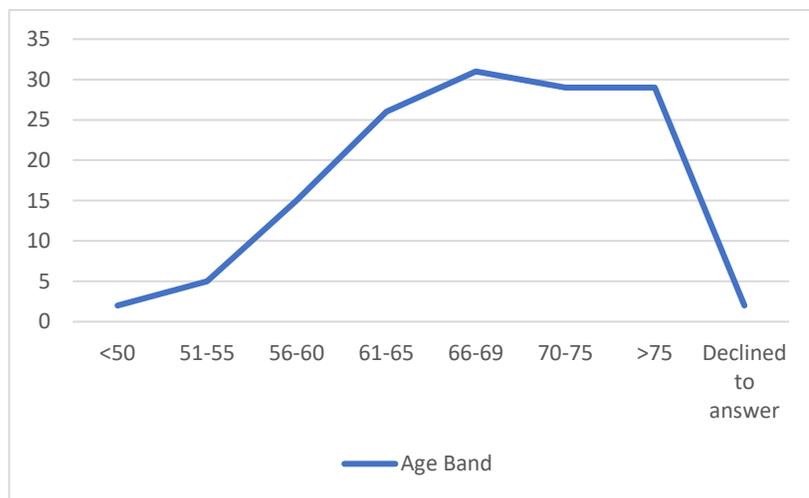


Graph: Responses to questions 2, 3, 9, 12 and 13.2 by Age Band



- However, 84% of respondents are known to be aged 61 or over. Assuming this is reasonably typical of the Reader / PTO / In Training population as a whole, then there is an obvious age issue which needs to be reviewed, a factor which is highlighted in many responses as their biggest barrier to ministry.
- 41.7% of respondents were Readers - PTO, broadly similar to those calculated by the Annual Reader Return which suggests 38.2% were PTO.

Graph: Respondents by Age Band



## Support Levels

The level of support offered to Readers by their Incumbent, Parish and Benefice was generally commendably high, but that offered by the Diocese and particularly by Deaneries was disappointing. Respondents were asked to comment and rate the support received on a level of 1 = very badly to 5 = very well. While some of this is predictable – one Reader considers their Incumbent to have been “suspended” while another is married to their Incumbent – some of the comments made are more troubling.

	<i>Lowest</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Highest</i>
<i>4.1 Support from the Incumbent?</i>	<i>0.00</i>	<i>4.17</i>	<i>5.00</i>
<i>4.2 Support from the Parish?</i>	<i>2.00</i>	<i>4.48</i>	<i>5.00</i>
<i>4.3 Support from the Benefice?</i>	<i>1.00</i>	<i>4.08</i>	<i>5.00</i>

While an overall satisfaction rating of 85% is resoundingly good, there are niggles which could be addressed and improve this even further; some of these are regarded as being firmly within the Reader’s own control, while some are possibly in the realm of ‘desirable but unlikely to happen’ due to the personalities involved.

- There is concern, however, that in a few cases a Reader's role is seen as “just to fill the gaps”, that they are “rarely given opportunities to take part in main services” and that Readers are “only good for sparsely attended Evensongs”. This was amplified by one respondent who commented that they “feel supported in my ‘traditional’ role within services. However, as soon as I move from that into the other areas of my ministry - mission, outreach, serving the community etc - I feel out on a limb with only limited support and engagement.”
- *In one case, the comment was made that “most support has to be given by the incumbent to the ordained men. eg Curate” which is something that needs to be addressed. Perception appears to be that some Incumbents see their Readers as 2<sup>nd</sup> class ministers within their team despite, potentially, Readers having greater flexibility and available time than some Curates or SSMS*
- A common theme was that more meetings would help build a team spirit, but I suspect that this is a minority view and that those involved could resolve the ‘problem’ themselves.
- *Worryingly, though, one Reader responded that they were always appreciated, but “would they be missed?”*
- It should be noted that some Readers do not appear to appreciate the difference between Parish and Benefice, which might be the cause of the marginally lower Benefice score, while others have clearly downgraded the support from the Incumbent rating if in a vacancy.

4.5	<i>Support from the Diocese?</i>	1.00	3.15	5.00
9	<i>How do you rate the CMD opportunities for Readers?</i>	1.0	3.71	5.0

A particularly ‘Marmite’ set of responses ranging from “Diocese only just getting to grips with Lay Ministry and not sure what to do with Readers” to “The Diocesan Reader Strategy is communicated very well”. The reality seems to be that apart from CMD events and the annual Reader service, most Diocesan contact appears to be information being sent out from the centre, eg Connect, the E-bulletin, or periodic contact with the Deanery and Archdeaconry Wardens.

Similarly, while there are relatively few negative comments on the CMD programme, they do exist, ranging from “CME is good and interesting” to “A poor range of CMD offerings. Little to help with biblical exegesis, exposition and communication. Too much fluffy stuff and not enough meat. Little on contemporary evangelism.”

*Another niggle of discontent is that “vocations should apply to lay and ordained, and they should be treated sympathetically if not equally. There is an assumption from the Diocese that Readers don’t matter, they’ll just carry on however badly they’re treated.”*

Of concern is one response: “What is CMD?”. Communications have cropped up on a number of occasions, with criticisms of the web site, complaints about awareness from non-internet users (who would value the CMD booklet) and so on; these are, however, very much in the minority.

A constant theme regarding both the Diocese as a whole and CMD in particular was geography, and the difficulty of some to travel to events (one person cited a 88 mile round trip to Wells, another a 2 hour drive); this was amplified by comments about age and not driving. Some wanted shorter sessions, many wanted them closer to where they lived, and some wanted weekend dates as they worked during the week.

In terms of requested CMD courses, these included training on:

- Funeral taking
- Bridge Builders
- Difficult pastoral situations
- More on practical lifestyle issues
- Practical teaching on mission & evangelism
- Matching the diocesan strategy priorities and their theological relevance

3	<i>How much do you value your Deanery Readers’ Group, assuming there is one? How could it be improved?</i>	0.00	2.45	5.00
	<i>Male respondents</i>		2.37	
	<i>Female respondents</i>		2.51	
4.4	<i>Support from the Deanery?</i>	0.00	2.63	5.00

The success of otherwise of Readers Groups could be described as a 'Curate's Egg', being typified by the first 3 comments received:

- I seem to be missed off their record recently as never know about meetings
- Good to meet other Readers
- Very much put off Readers Groups many years ago by Readers who postured as quasi Priests

So, when the content is right, ie what the local Readers want, then these meetings are appreciated (even if those attending would like more to attend), but it is equally very easy to get the approach wrong and for these groups to be criticised as a result.

While there are those who choose not to go - which is very much their right - and there are others who find it difficult to attend, it is clear that many appreciate the opportunity for fellowship and prayer. The issue appears to be that of agreeing a purpose and then of effectively communicating where and when to meet.

The question of effective communication is important. Many would sympathise with the Reader who when asked why they were meeting was politely told "because we haven't met for a long time" which is probably a very good reason *not* to attend. Similarly, if the meeting is centred around a Eucharist, and that is not what potential attendees want, then they won't attend. In one Deanery, there were responses praising the periodic meeting, while another Reader didn't know what / when the meetings were: *"There is one but I have not had any communication from them. Don't know what they do, who they are or when they meet. I'm wondering if they prefer to be a closed group if people have known each other a long time."*

In considering support from the wider Deanery, the comment from one Reader that "Deaneries were designed when people travelled by horse and are nowadays somewhat of an outdated concept" may be somewhat facetious, but may equally typify reactions of the Reader community to Deaneries. In general terms, it would appear that those who wish to involve themselves with the Deanery do so, those that don't, don't, so the majority of comments were ambivalent at best. Without wishing Readers to commit time to areas where they have no interest, the relationship between the Reader community and the Deanery Clergy outside of their own Benefice, whether on a person to person basis, involvement in Synod, or participating in Deanery Mission and Pastoral Groups / Deanery Chapter, may be a lost opportunity.

Equally, however, a greater degree on cross working, both at Chapter, Deanery Mission and Pastoral Group and other levels would represent an affirmation of Reader Ministry locally and would facilitate a greater sharing of Clergy and Reader skills - as Howard Worsley commented on 25<sup>th</sup> March at the bi-annual Reader Training Day "Readers know stuff and have skills clergy don't know / have - they should bring those skills into the church"; what better than through the Deaneries?

Not least, as Readers have a license to officiate across the Diocese reflecting Christ's command to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mk 16:15), there may well be opportunities from time to time for Readers to assist neighbouring Benefices, or those further afield, whether this be in preaching, teaching or leading worship, or some other activity.

What is very clear is that there is very limited *support* provided by Deaneries to individual Readers, but this may be acceptable as the Reader prime contacts will naturally be with their Incumbents, Parishes and Benefices.

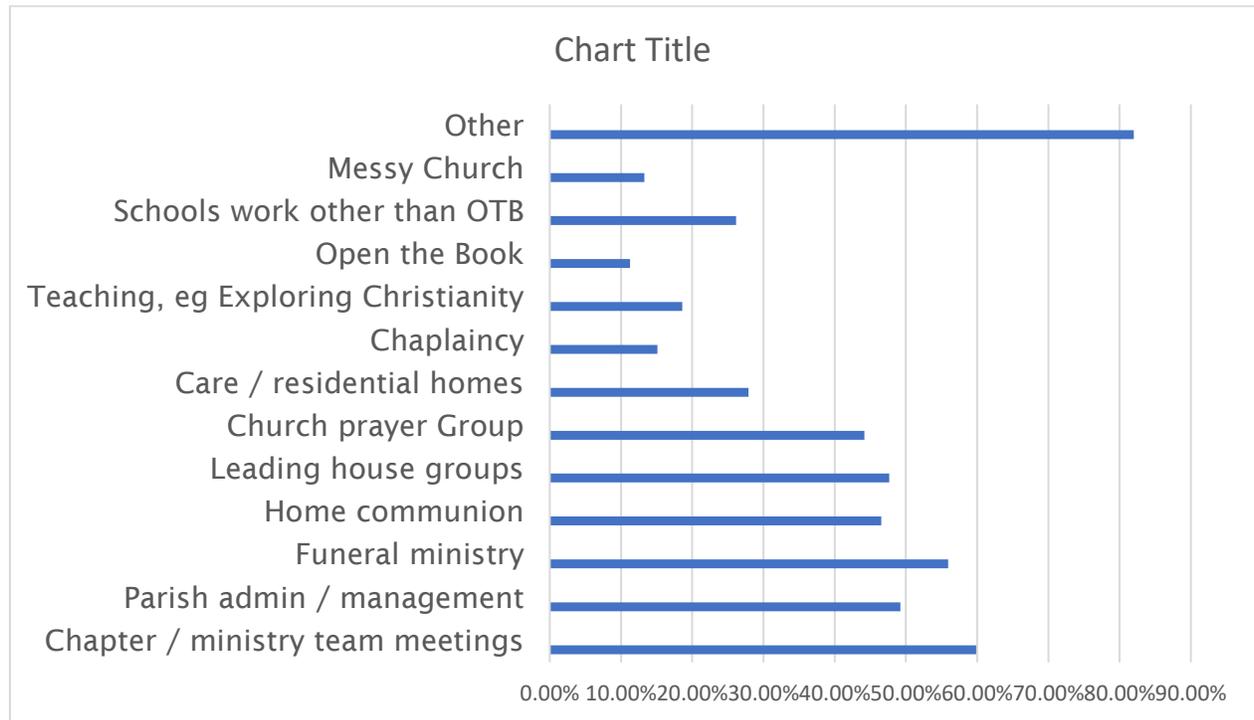
The opportunities for Readers to assist others, including Parishes across or outside their Deaneries, however, appears to be under exercised. *There may well be benefits in discussions taking place to see how Readers could best benefit their Deaneries and vice versa.*

## Forms of Ministry undertaken

5. *What forms of ministry (other than leading worship and preaching) are you currently involved in?* -

While there is much here to be applauded, and the breadth of activities pursued by Readers is exciting, there has to be concern that half are involved in parish administration, and often as Churchwarden, Secretary or Treasurer of either the Parish or Benefice. Clearly there are occasions when such involvement is both justified and necessary, at least on a short-term basis, however whether these activities are naturally those of Readers, who are broadly trained to preach / teach / lead worship, or whether it is possible to fulfil 2 such demanding and differing roles, has to be questionable. While the margin is relatively small, it is further worth noting that those who are involved in Parish Administration also have a slightly higher workload rating (3.17) to those who aren't (3.01).

## Graph: Other Forms of Ministry Undertaken



*5.1 Chapter / ministry team meetings 59.8% responded positively*

The involvement in team / chapter meetings appears somewhat confused, partially as the question was so broadly worded, with many Readers, but not all, involved in Ministry Team meetings. Some were also involved in Chapter, invariably ‘Greater Chapter’, but as one person remarked “Joint Clergy & Reader Chapter twice a year, usually poorly attended”.

*5.2 Parish admin / management 49.2%*

See above

*5.3 Funeral ministry 56.0%*

Understandably, this ministry is not open to everyone, whether due to work commitments of personal choice; what is clear, however, is that those that are engaged find it a privilege to do so, eg “I enjoy taking funerals perhaps more than any other service”.

Worryingly, however, and with the exception of one person who commented that “I conduct all the funerals”, there appear to be too many instances where Readers are only involved “when the vicar or curate are unavailable”, or in one case, have only become involved “after retired clergy become unable to run it”.

While understandably the Incumbent will wish to take funerals for those with whom a close church contact has been developed, and one has to acknowledge the increasing trend towards secular funerals, *this is a real opportunity for Readers to fully engage with their local communities, as part of those communities, relieving pressure from Incumbents and providing a local Christian alternative to the non-religious alternative.*

5.4 *Home communion* 46.5%

Taking into account work commitments and age restrictions, almost half of Readers being involved in such work is probably a fair involvement. One has to be concerned, however, and although in very much the minority, that in one parish “the LPAs do these, if incumbent not available” and that the “Vicar sees this as a job for priests only”

5.5 *Leading house groups* 47.6%

Good to note that there is a good base of theological knowledge outside of the Reader community, in that over half of all house groups in the Diocese are *not* led by Readers. One has to hope, however, that there is some form of oversight being provided to ensure a valid message is being expounded, whether from retired clergy, stipendiary clergy or Readers.

5.6 *Church prayer Group* 44.2%

These groups appear to take a variety of forms from monthly meditations to mothers prayer groups, prayer breakfasts, Julian meetings, missionary groups and so on.

5.7 *Care / residential homes* 27.9%

While this would appear to be a predominantly priestly function, it is clear that Readers are still involved offering pastoral care, whether visiting individuals or collectively. This involvement extends to leading communion services with one respondent taking “a monthly communion service in 2 residential homes giving communion to an average of 20 per month.”

5.8 *Chaplaincy* 15.1%

Clearly an area of pride and enjoyment for some, involving chaplaincy to (amongst others):

**Table: Chaplaincy Provision**

2 Masonic Lodges	Air Training Corps	Bath Abbey
Deaf Chaplaincy	Infantry and Light Infantry Assoc	National Veteran's Assoc
Old Deanery	Royal United Hospital	Schools (unspecified)
Somerset Avon Vergers' Guild	Wells Cathedral	Weston Hospice
Yeovil District Hospital	YMCA	

*5.9 Teaching, eg Exploring Christianity 18.6%*

Possibly less teaching than one might have expected in a preaching / teaching / leading worship ministry, but good work none-the-less with Exploring Christianity a recurring theme. Also, LWAs course, Lent Groups and Pilgrim Course

*5.10 Open The Book 11.3%*

While one respondent commented “No, I don’t like OTB”, another commented that it is “One of the most enjoyable and worthwhile aspects of my ministry”

*5.11 Schools work other than Open The Book 26.2%*

There doesn’t appear to be any pattern to Reader / school involvement, but those that are engaged do so at various levels from periodic school assemblies or other services to after school clubs to various governorships. Sadly, there were also “Vicar does it all” or “Vicar’s province” comments raised.

*5.12 Messy Church 13.3%*

The various comments made on ‘Messy Church’ suggest that Reader involvement is possibly a reflection on the availability of ‘Messy Church’ rather than a reaction against it, however one would have to question whether a group of individuals predominantly aged over 60 is best placed to involve themselves in an activity aimed at children – it

is, of course, recognised that ‘Messy Church’ is marketed as an all age activity, but the ability to relate to the younger age groups remains a concern.

### 5.13 Other

82.0%

The high percentage of Readers involved in ‘Other’ forms of ministry demonstrates the imagination with which Readers fulfil their vocation. While many of the ‘other’ activities mentioned should properly fit into other categories, there remain some interesting and inspiring ideas such as

**Table: Other Forms of Ministry**

Baptismal and Confirmation preparation	Café church	Carol singing in various places
Community projects	Deanery Mission & Pastoral Groups.	Foodbank
Healing ministry and laying on of hands	Hospital services	Marriage preparation
Music	Parish magazines and other writing activities	Pastoral, especially bereavement, care and counselling
Readers council cropped up on a number of responses!	Village fete	

## Reader activity levels

Readers were asked to consider their workload in their parishes? (on a scale of 1 = much too little to 5 = much too much), and to explore whether there are any possible reasons for this, and what changes could be made. Also at what times, and in which places they were prepared to minister.

		<i>Lowest</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Highest</i>
2	<i>What do you consider your workload to be in your parishes?</i>	2.00	3.09	5.00
.	<i>Male respondents</i>		3.01	
	<i>Female respondents</i>		3.16	

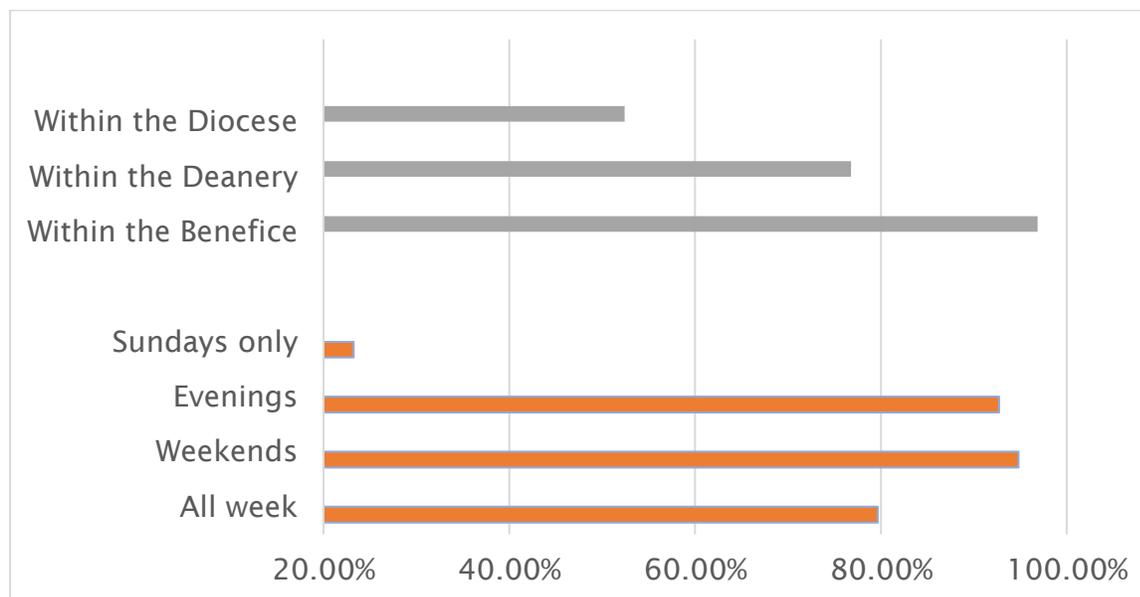
One respondent commented that “I see a need and can’t say no! With an ageing congregation, there are few volunteers for some things that don’t necessarily need a Reader” which is probably a typical reaction of many Readers across the Diocese; commendable as it is, however, care needs to be taken that in filling those needs, it is not at the detriment of either the Reader themselves, or the local community.

Generally, the situation seems reasonable across the board, but the extremes inevitably do exist. At one end, thankfully probably a reasonably short term position, we have: “In our benefice of 3 churches there was 1 ordained person, 1 priest who gave 1 Sunday a month and myself. That was quite busy. We are now in a vacancy and so I am busier”. At the other extreme, “Our Incumbent feels he should do most of the preaching and, although he does, from time to time allow a Reader to read the Gospel or Deacon when he is preaching/presiding, the other retired or part-time Assistant clergy do not.”

One very interesting suggestion was that of tithing time – “Decades ago, I made a commitment to tithe my time. To spend 10% of my waking hours on faith related activity. My Reader Ministry is part of this.” Of course, the amount of time that should be made available in this way is a matter of personal circumstance, but the idea has some merit in maintaining a healthy and level balance, even if it does overlook the integrity of one’s faith in every part of our lives and that in any activity there are peaks and troughs.

Accepting that vacancies / interregnums do cause extra pressure and ‘work’, it does appear that most can achieve a reasonable ‘life / work’ balance; how easy it has been to undertake enough work is, though, an interesting debate with one raging that “it is far easier to relinquish duties than to get new duties in Reader Ministry”.

### Graphs: Preparedness to Travel & Minister, Availability throughout the week



6	<i>When are you available to minister as a Reader?</i>	
6.1	<i>All week</i>	<i>79.7% responded positively</i>
6.2	<i>Weekends</i>	<i>94.8%</i>
6.3	<i>Evenings</i>	<i>92.7%</i>
6.4	<i>Sundays only</i>	<i>23.2%</i>
7	<i>Geographically, where are you prepared to minister as a Reader?</i>	
7.1	<i>Within the Benefice</i>	<i>96.9% responded positively</i>
7.2	<i>Within the Deanery</i>	<i>76.8%</i>
7.3	<i>Within the Diocese</i>	<i>52.4%</i>

The response to ‘availability for work’ and ‘willingness to travel’ secured broadly similar responses highly influenced by work and age constraints, with those in work simply not available for many hours, whilst those of advanced years were less willing to drive distances and / or had ongoing family commitments. These 2 considerations were considerably more important than factors such as local workloads.

It should be noted that those who were not willing to minister within the Benefice were all over the age of 75, and some raised mobility issues by way of an explanation, whether they will minister within the Parish has not been ascertained.

It is clear that some are happy to preach / lead worship outside of their immediate environment, and enjoy doing so. It was even suggested that it would be good for Readers to “preach outside of their comfort zone . . . happy to travel up to 20 miles to help”.

## Other Ministries

8.1	<i>Are there Lay Worship Assistants in your Parish / Benefice?</i>	<i>46.8% responded positively</i>
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As multiple respondents may have been received for a single Parish / Benefice, the number of Parishes / Benefices with both LWAs and Readers is likely to be lower than 46.8%.

Understandably, there is considerable support for other lay ministries, however concern is also raised in that LWAs can effectively be trained and licensed to do a similar role to Readers but with a fraction of the time and other commitments that Readers are expected to go through. It is probably not surprising that the role and very existence of LWAs, not those who help out informally, are considered as a threat to Readers. One comment received was that although the Reader and LWAs worked well

together, it was “a shock to realise to learn that they can do almost as much as me pastorally on 6 weeks training – I had 5 years!”

What is striking is the acknowledgement, possibly stating the obvious, that some “have members of the congregation who will read the lessons and a few who will do prayers of intercession”, people who are not licensed or formally hold the role of LWA but who are worship assistants. Thinking beyond the scope of this survey, it is possibly ironic that the annual Reader return asks “How many times have you shared in the leadership of services? [i.e. leading any part of a service, read a lesson, led intercessions, administered communion]”, yet these are mostly activities that be undertaken by anyone, not even requiring the person to be a formally recognised LWA.

Where LWAs are deployed, however, they seem well accepted eg “They do a great job”. *One respondent suggested that the LWA “role needs further development”; it would probably be worth defining and comparing the various roles within the church so that everybody has a better idea of which roles are best suited to which people.*

**8.2 Are there Lay Pastoral Assistants in your Parish / Benefice? 53.6% responded positively**

It should be noted that multiple respondents may have responded for a single Parish / Benefice, so the number of Parishes / Benefices with both LPAs and Readers is likely to be lower than 53.6%.

The biggest concerns raised over LPAs was *inadequate knowledge of their role*, and that they weren’t “better used”. Furthermore, there were reassuring indications that where LPAs were not in place, pastoral care was being undertaken through more informal arrangements.

**8.3 How do you work collaboratively with these and other lay ministries?**

A very mixed picture seems to exist ranging from the depressing “I don’t need to” collaborate or “there is no liaising” to the encouraging “strong ministry team meets regularly” and “good team work”. Part of this maybe due to the type of lay ministry involved in that one would expect a degree of joint service planning and implementation with LWAs but pastoral concerns may be better treated in strict confidence and not ‘broadcast’.

Reassuringly, and affirmatively, one respondent commented that “we are all part of the ministry team” while another advised that they worked collaboratively “with prayer and love”.

## Ministerial Opportunities and Threats

*10 Where are the biggest opportunities in your ministry?*

If the number of opportunities identified by Readers can be capitalised upon, then the church within Bath & Wells Diocese is in a very strong position indeed. Particularly encouraging were the willingness to work across the Deanery and to follow up opportunities “As God allows”.

**Table: Perceived Ministerial Opportunities**

Being a bridge – as per the Bishop’s charge to Readers	Being a witness
Being available locally, community and workplace	Bereavements and funerals
Chaplaincy	Elderly
Home Communion	Leading worship
Liturgy for one off services to reach out to the rarely churched	Messy church
Mission and outreach	New forms of worship
One-to-one visiting	Pastoral work with the elderly
Preaching	Social contact
Teaching	Young families

While these may not be necessarily innovative – and there is no indication as to how these objectives should be achieved - they are indicative of the enthusiasm and determination of Readers to identify opportunities and develop the spread of God’s word.

*11 What do you consider the biggest threats to your ministry?*

If the identified Opportunities were exciting and encouraging, the Threats identified were probably predictable:

**Table: Perceived Ministerial Threats**

Demotivation / lack of recognition / being taken for granted by Incumbent, Deanery & Diocese	Devaluation with greater emphasis on Self Supporting Ministers & Lay Worship Assistants
Increasing age and health concerns	Lack of activity – sometimes only preaching once every 5 months
Lack of delegation by Incumbent	Lay Worship Assistants & retired Clergy
Liberalism within the CofE	Mobility – ie non-drivers
Repetition	Secularism
Time constraints both generally and in ministry	Tiredness
Uncertainty about Reader Ministry within the CofE	

While there is clearly little that can be done to halt advancing years, the concern raised over

- ‘competition’ from Lay Worship Assistants and the retired Clergy,
- a lack of delegation by Incumbents
- feeling under appreciated

appear to be causing uncertainty amongst the population, typified by the suggestion that there was “Uncertainty around Reader Ministry as a whole within the CofE”.

*There’s probably no single ‘magic wand’ that can be waived to reverse this perception, but it will undoubtedly have an impact on future Reader recruitment.*

## Opinion Issues

*12 Do you think the title Reader should be changed, and if so, to what? 75.4% responded positively*

Clearly and expectedly a contentious issue. While some views were worrying about their understanding of the role – “It’s accurate – I read the Service” – others took a more perception based approach – “The Reader title is not understood by the general population”, and some going as far as to offer that “I introduce myself as a lay minister”.

At over 75%, there is a clear desire for change. Of the 89 who suggested a preferred title, 59.6% favoured Lay Minister, 29.2 Licensed Lay Minister, with 11.2% preferring Deacon, Lay Deacon, Lay Preacher, Licensed Minister, Lay Reader, Ministry Assistant or Lay Clergy.

The response by two individuals that:

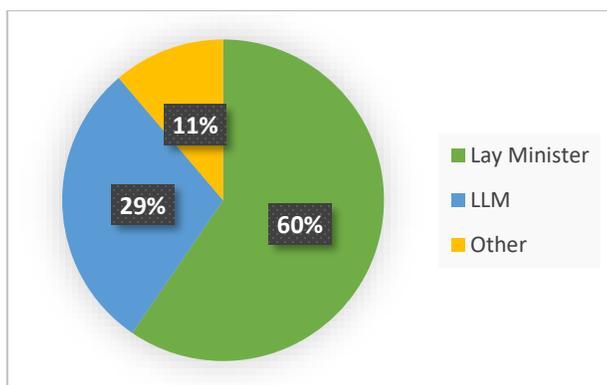
- “The Reader title is not understood by the general population – the title ‘Lay Minister’ would be more user friendly”

and

- “To most people, a Reader is someone who reads the lesson on Sunday, it is not understood properly and does not convey the breadth of ministry covered”

encapsulate the feeling for change.

Graph: Preferences of those favouring a title change from ‘Reader’



13.1 Do you lead Public Worship with Communion by Extension in your benefice, and if so, how often annually? *1.7 times pa*

13.2 Would it be beneficial to your worshipping community if you were to lead Public Worship with Communion by Extension, albeit on an exceptional basis? *83.2% responded positively*

While the average of those leading Communion by Extension services is apparently low, this is weighed down by those who never lead Communion by Extension; if those who never do so are taken out, then the average of those who do lead Communion by Extension do so raises to 3.7 occasions per year per person, including one who does so 36 times annually. Please note that there is some concern over the sustainability of these figures, but it is clear that the number of Readers currently leading Communion by Extension services is very low.

This is another contentious issue, with one person stating that they are “theologically opposed to the practice” while another commented that although their benefice is well served “so I think the answer should be ‘no’, I do recognise that some churches struggle and therefore I would say this would be a beneficial step”. While one response was positive: “Being in a parish where the Eucharist is central to our community life it

would be very helpful to be able to take such services if a priest is not available”, another wanted to lead such services but commented simply that “Incumbent against it.”

While there may be an inherent internal CofE opposition to Readers offering Communion by Extension, there also appears to be a strong demand to be able to *offer* the service when situations arise, whatever they may be. As one commented “I work in small parishes who might only see their incumbents once or twice per month. Communion by Extension, properly led by a Reader, is an excellent service to the community. I have always had very positive feedback from my services”.

The question of the theological validity of such a service is an interesting challenge as it begs the question, what is the difference between “a monthly communion service in 2 residential homes giving communion to an average of 20 per month” and a service of Communion by Extension within a parish church which may attract not dissimilar numbers, or potentially much less? Both use reserved host, which has been consecrated at a public Eucharist service.

## Vocations

*14.1 Have there been vocations to Reader ministry in your parish in the last five years?*

37.6%

-

the most common response to this question was “yes, me!” or a variation of it. The 37.6% response rate is regarded as highly suspect and not a true indication of where vocations to Reader training and ministry have taken place.

*14.2 What might be done to encourage Reader vocations in your parish?*

Many of the comments that were given here replicate answers from other sections of the survey, which is not to make them in the least any less valid, just to reiterate that the same concerns crop up time and again.

While there is an inevitable negativity from some – “The way things are, I am not sure I would encourage someone down this route” or “This is a matter for the Rector” – may be extreme, it is a reminder that without enthusiasm from the Reader community themselves, without existing Readers feeling valued and appreciated, new recruits are likely to be difficult to find.

Generally, however, it was felt that the following would help:

- Overcoming the age problem; if the congregation had a greater number under the age of 60, it might provide a better pool of potential trainees.
- Differentiating the role of Reader from other lay ministries and overcoming the perceived inequality of training v outcome; “In our church, there is little

distinction between Readers and other lay people in regard to what duties they are allowed to perform eg leading services and preaching. People can't see the need to put themselves through 5 years of training when it doesn't make much difference to what they can do." And "5 years training is a big ask when LPA's can do many of the same things for just 10 sessions eg Home communions etc"

- Exploring Christianity is regarded as an excellent vehicle for new Readers, however it does need to be accessible throughout the Diocese to be effective.
- It may appear a small point, but the title 'Reader' can be seen as a barrier.
- There needs to be greater publicity of Reader ministry throughout the church. While Readers are obviously visible in their own community, not everyone will be aware of their activities and opportunities.

### *15 Any other comments?*

Almost inevitably with any 'any other comments?' question, there will be a wide variety of responses; many of which will relate to personal circumstances, and there's relatively little that we can do about that.

However, 3 responses were particularly interesting and arguably summed up the general reaction, highlighting a concern about the future, the 'competition' / confusion with other lay ministries and the need for communication:

- As with everything at the moment the role is in flux, and we need to accept that and not be afraid. Challenge: How to care for and value people who were brought up in an earlier incarnation of 'Church' and how to let go of what is not necessary for the future. Recognise and embrace the pain of transition and how to deepen through uncertainty. It's OK not to have answers.
- I think that what prevents people from being attracted to Reader Ministry is the confusion that has arisen since the voluntary sector of ministry has been broadened: Worship Leadership/Pastoral Leadership. People seem confused as to why someone would undertake lengthy training for something which now seems fast-tracked. Whilst it is good to expand the ministry and leadership base I do think this has caused some confusion in the pews.
- I'm not sure what the Reader council is, who is on it and what function it serves. I believe there are Reader representatives but unaware who they are, so seems out of touch with my Reader life in the parish. If the function is administrative then maybe it doesn't matter. If the Reader council wants to be involved in mission on the ground then maybe it does.

## Summary

While there is considerable good news in the survey responses, it is inevitable that the negatives will stand out more. In particular, the generally excellent working relationship between Clergy and Readers is to be celebrated, especially as it is within

the Parish and Benefice that most of the 'work' is done. Inevitably the Deanery and Diocesan structures are that bit further removed, and the relationships are not, therefore, that highly regarded.

The scope of activities undertaken by Readers within the Diocese should be an inspiration to all; it certainly does seem that not only is the spirit willing, but the flesh is strong as well, the only threat being one of increasing age. However the range of activities undertaken also gives cause for concern in that there are a good number apparently involved in parish administration, sometimes as PCC Secretary, Treasurer of Churchwarden, and those that are so 'double called' suffer an increased load which could be problematic. The Diocese in its widest sense, including the local Incumbent, Benefice, Deanery and, indeed, Readers Council, need to be mindful of these pressures and provide effective pastoral care.

There is a substantial majority feeling that the title 'Reader' should be changed, and that being able to offer Communion by Extension would be beneficial.

Readers share the concern of Council and others that there are inadequate numbers coming through for training, and that those that do are 'of an age'. There is a real issue looming that with 84% of practicing Readers being aged 61 or over, half of whom are practicing under PTO (ie 70 or over), this very large proportion of the Reader community will find it much harder to relate to the young in church than those nearer their own age.

While there should be much joy at the good news of the survey, there are areas which need to be addressed for everyone's benefit.

## Appendix 1 – Statistical Analysis

All data received was entered into a consolidated spreadsheet – the following table is a recap of the questions asked and the resulting data. No attempt has been made to tidy it up or sanitise any of the results.

No	ANALYSIS	Min	1 = YES, 0 = NO	Max
	Question		Avg / % / count	
	Council member?	19	95.0%	20
1.1	Name (this will be kept confidential and will not be divulged, it is purely for use by the questionnaire administrator)	139	43.2%	322
1.2	Which Deanery are you in?	-	-	-
1.3	Which Archdeaconry are you in?	-	-	-
1.4	What is your age, as at 1st Jan 2017 - <50, 51-55, 56-60, 61-65, 66-69, 70-75, >75	-	-	-
1.5	Male (1) / Female (2)	-	1.55	-
1.6	Approximately how many years have you been Licensed as a Reader, irrespective of which Dioceses you have served in?	0.5	17.66	54.0
-	You as a Reader	-	-	-
2	What do you consider your workload to be in your parishes? (on a scale of 1 = much too little to 5 = much too much) Are there reasons for this, and what changes could be made?	2.0	3.09	5.0
3	How much do you value your Deanery Readers' Group, assuming there is one? (on a scale of 1 = very poor to 5 = excellent) How could it be improved?	0.0	2.44	5.0
4	Do you feel well supported by the following? Can you comment further, especially how these relationships could be improved?	-	-	-
4.1	Incumbent? (on a scale of 1 = very badly to 5 = very well)	0.0	4.17	5.0
4.2	Parish? (on a scale of 1 = very badly to 5 = very well)	2.0	4.48	5.0
4.3	Benefice? (on a scale of 1 = very badly to 5 = very well)	1.0	4.08	5.0
4.4	Deanery? (on a scale of 1 = very badly to 5 = very well)	0.0	2.63	5.0
4.5	Diocese? (on a scale of 1 = very badly to 5 = very well)	1.0	3.15	5.0
5	What forms of ministry (other than leading worship and preaching) are you currently involved in?	-	-	-
5.1	Chapter / ministry team meetings (yes / no)	-	59.84%	-
5.2	Parish admin / management (yes / no)	-	49.22%	-
5.3	Funeral ministry (yes / no)	-	55.95%	-
5.4	Home communion (yes / no)	-	46.54%	-

5.5	Leading house groups (yes / no)	-	47.64%	-
5.6	Church prayer Group (yes / no)	-	44.19%	-
5.7	Care / residential homes (yes / no)	-	27.91%	-
5.8	Chaplaincy (yes / no)	-	15.12%	-
5.9	Teaching, eg Exploring Christianity (yes / no)	-	18.60%	-
5.10	Open the Book (yes / no)	-	11.28%	-
5.11	Schools work other than Open The Book (yes / no)	-	26.15%	-
5.12	Messy Church (yes / no)	-	13.28%	-
5.13	Other (please specify)	-	82.00%	-
6	When are you available to minister as a Reader?		-	
6.1	All week (yes / no)	-	79.67%	-
6.2	Weekends (yes / no)	-	94.83%	-
6.3	Evenings (yes / no)	-	92.74%	-
6.4	Sundays only (yes / no)	-	23.23%	-
7	Geographically, where are you prepared to minister as a Reader?	-	-	-
7.1	Within the Benefice (yes / no)	-	96.88%	-
7.2	Within the Deanery (yes / no)	-	76.80%	-
7.3	Within the Diocese (yes / no)	-	52.42%	-
8	Work with other lay ministries	-	-	-
8.1	Are there Lay Worship Assistants in your Parish / Benefice? (yes / no)	-	46.80%	-
8.2	Are there Lay Pastoral Assistants in your Parish / Benefice? (yes / no)	-	53.60%	-
8.3	How do you work collaboratively with these and other lay ministries?	-	-	-
9	How do you rate the CMD opportunities for Readers? (on a scale of 1 = very poor to 5 = excellent) What changes would you like to see?	1.0	3.71	5.0
10	Where are the biggest opportunities in your ministry?	-	-	-
11	What do you consider the biggest threats to your ministry?	-	-	-
-	Other	-	-	-
12	Do you think the title Reader should be changed, and if so, to what?	-	75.00%	-
13	Public Worship with Communion by Extension	-	-	-
13.1	Do you lead Public Worship with Communion by Extension in your benefice, and if so, how often annually?	0.0	1.71	36.0
13.2	Would it be beneficial to your worshipping community if you were to lead Public Worship with Communion by Extension, albeit on an exceptional basis?	-	83.16%	-
14	Vocations	-	-	-
14.1	Have there been vocations to Reader ministry in your parish in the last five years?	-	37.60%	-
14.2	What might be done to encourage Reader vocations in your parish?	-	-	-
15	Any other comments?	-	-	-

## Appendix 2 - Extracted Comments

This separate document containing the verbatim comments submitted with the survey is available upon request from [chris\\_stock@outlook.com](mailto:chris_stock@outlook.com) in .pdf form.

## Appendix 3 – Detailed Responses

This document is not for release, thereby preserving the assured degree of confidentiality.