

## Renewal of the Bishop's licence as 'Licensed Lay Minister'

Hitherto the system in the Diocese of Exeter has been that 'Readers' would be licensed by the Bishop until they reached the age of 70, and thereafter it would be a matter of 'PTO', i.e. 'permission to officiate'. The Bishop has decided to change the system and, in the process, to abolish 'PTO' with effect from 7 October 2023, replacing the term 'Reader' with the arguably more appropriate term 'Licensed Lay Minister'.

The terms of reference will be in future that licensed lay ministers will need

- To hold the consent of their incumbent and their PCCs to exercise their ministry
- To undertake safeguarding training and domestic abuse training every three years
- To renew a DBS check every three years
- To have a working agreement, discussed with their incumbent and renewed annually
- To formally review the future of their ministry with their incumbents

It is a privilege to be entrusted with this role, and I have particularly enjoyed the partnership over the years with Pam Cornwell: our gifts and skills are different but we dare to believe complementary. Although I am now at the elderly end of the age spectrum I would very much like to continue if this is acceptable at the united benefice of St Peter's and St Thomas' Chevithorne with Cove. I have never in the many decades since I was first licensed in the Diocese of Blackburn felt that it was some kind of right but have rather said to every incumbent for and with whom I have worked that I was available to help in every way possible but would not complain at all if this was thought to be unnecessary. I would, if allowed to continue say the same to our new incumbent after he has joined us.

In practice my being a reader has involved offering a sermon from time to time at St Peter's (which has, very happily, proved unnecessary during the period of the vacancy/interregnum when visiting clergy have served us so well with thoughtful and careful preaching) and leading Morning Prayer with sermon once a month at Chevithorne (where I hope that my sharing in the life of St Thomas' has helped, especially during the last two years, to strengthen the very real bond between our two churches).

As PCC secretary at St Thomas', Lady Louise Amory took soundings among the PCC members and was kind enough to write in the following terms: 'I am writing on behalf of Chevithorne PCC to say that we very much hope that you will continue to take services at St Thomas's', adding with probably excessive generosity: 'Your sermons inspire us all and you are a tremendous help in our worship and spiritual development. We should be extremely sad if you ceased to be with us.'

I have to fill in the predictable forms (one of which would need to be signed by the incumbent or presumably an equivalent person) to formalize my application for a new licence, which can be initiated either in Barnstaple on 11 June (my personal preference) or in the Cathedral on 7 October. It would be not just for the Diocese a necessity but also for me a privilege if the St Peter's PCC felt able to support such an application. I can assure you all that I would continue to the best of my ability to fulfil that role and to support and help the leadership of our very special Church community.

David Catchpole  
2 March 2023