

# Authorised Worship Assistants

an important new venture in ministry



## Foreword by the Bishop of Norwich

The introduction of Authorised Worship Assistants (AWA) significantly broadens the scope for lay ministry in the diocese of Norwich.

Sometimes we can feel hampered by the inherent structures and constraints that define our current patterns of ministry. This initiative encourages clergy and lay people to work together more flexibly and creatively in ministry and mission. A great deal of responsibility is placed at the local parish level where gifts and aptitudes can be prayerfully discerned, nurtured and encouraged. Someone with a natural capacity to communicate the gospel or whom others believe to have an ability to lead them in worship and prayer can be given the encouragement and authorisation they need to extend their ministry in Christ's name.

I hope that AWA may create an achievable route into ministry for a whole range of lay people, including our younger church members for whom its provisions may prove to be especially suitable.

Christians have always believed God provides all the resources that are needed to fulfil his mission in the world. We are more blessed with human resources than we sometimes recognise. This initiative aims to unlock the gifts latent in our congregations so that the local church may be strengthened in its worship and witness.

I hope and pray that many will respond to the challenge and the opportunities set out in this booklet. I commend the introduction of authorised worship assistants in this diocese to your prayers and ask you to give this initiative your warm support.

May 2013

+  Norwich

# Introduction

An Authorised Worship Assistant will, within his or her own benefice, be able to assist the incumbent with the Ministry of the Word and in conducting worship. This might involve planning and delivering a Service of the Word, an act of All Age Worship, Morning or Evening Prayer, or assisting at some other service. This may be in the context of traditional church or a Fresh Expression. Authorisation will allow taking the lead in an act of worship and/or delivering the Ministry of the Word through a talk or address.

Authorisation will be by letter from the appropriate Bishop, for a period of three years and on the joint recommendation of the incumbent and PCC.

There will be no requirement for formal training before authorisation is given, but as part of the support provided, there will be an expectation of study and learning before the renewal of authorisation is sought after three years.

Such ministry will be exercised under the authority of the incumbent and with appropriate supervision.

# Background

There is a widely recognised need to re-imagine and reshape the Church's patterns of ministry for the challenges we face in the twenty-first century. This is to ensure there is a sustainable and growing Christian presence and witness in every parish across the Diocese. This desire is motivated by both vision and realism: a faithful response to God's call and a practical response to the needs of our parishes.

Ministry belongs to all God's people: all Christians are called to grow in their discipleship and faithfulness to Christ and to play their part in God's mission in the world. For many, this will focus on living out and witnessing to their faith at school, work, leisure or through the life of the wider community. For others, there will be a call to take on particular ministerial roles and responsibilities within the life of the church. Some will explore their vocation to Ordained or Reader ministry, or the Religious Life. Others will respond to God's call, at the local level, to various forms of lay ministry.

Some forms of lay ministry can be commissioned at the local level in accordance with the vision set out in the Bishop of Norwich's note to the clergy on *'Developing Lay Ministry in the Parish'*. However, the Ministry of the Word and the conduct of worship have traditionally been reserved solely for those who hold the Bishop's licence.

The conviction has grown, however, that many congregations will have people (even if it is only one or two) with the potential and calling to assist with preaching and conducting worship. Up until now, the choice was to ignore the formal systems for recognising such ministry, or to offer to become a Reader or be ordained.

Whilst the path towards licensed ministry will remain right for some people, this scheme for Authorised Worship Assistants introduces significant changes. Every parish in the diocese will now be better able to develop its ministry team and include within it men and women who can share in the Ministry of the Word and in the conduct of worship, alongside licensed ministers, under the leadership and oversight of the incumbent and PCC and with proper authorisation from the Bishop.

## Why?

God gives many gifts to his church, and part of our responsibility is to recognise and release the gifts given to his people. Over the last few decades many have written and spoken about the need to see ministry as something that is shared by clergy and laity alike: this initiative aims to make that sharing of ministry more achievable.

Whatever future we envisage for the church in Norwich Diocese, all seem to agree that there will be a need for further developing the collaboration between clergy and lay people. Whilst wanting all Christians to grow more confident in their faith, and to recognise the importance of mission to a society which seems to have moved on from former patterns of church attendance, there is a widely recognised need to strengthen the ministry of the church.

We have to address the need, particularly in rural, multi-parish benefices for more ministerial support, particularly in the conduct of worship. In many such situations, it has seemed in recent years that relatively few are able to train for licensed ministry, either through age or work commitments.

One of the reasons for this new initiative is to encourage younger people into ministry. Such people may not be able to commit to two or three years of training at this point in their life, but they may already have gifts and potential recognised in the life of their local church.

There are also many experienced older Christians who could make a contribution through this initiative. These might include people who have exercised lay ministry outside the Church of England, and others who have spent many years reading and learning about their faith through study groups and courses. Their experience and wisdom, along with the depth of their spirituality, would be recognised by others within the life of the local church.

It is also hoped that by opening up a limited opportunity to share in the Ministry of the Word and conducting worship, many would find their desire for learning and a deeper understanding of their faith stimulated. They might then go on to the fuller training offered to those pursuing vocations to Reader or ordained ministry.

# Who?

What gifts and qualities should the incumbent and PCC be seeking in those who are called to take on this form of ministry? What sort of person should be called to be an Authorised Worship Assistant?

We are looking for people:

- whose faith is rooted in an understanding of their need of God's grace, and is sustained by prayer and regular participation in Holy Communion.
- who have a good basic understanding of Christian faith and a willingness to go on learning.
- who recognise that speaking or preaching in church is about articulating not simply what they think but what Christians believe. People who are able to be the bearer of more than their own convictions.
- who are willing and able to work under the authority of the incumbent.
- who are respected by members of the congregation and community they serve.
- whose life and faith are stable.
- who demonstrate humility and pastoral sensitivity, and understand that ministry is about serving others.

A request to the Bishop to authorise a candidate for this ministry would need to be supported by a clear majority of the PCC as well as the incumbent, and be accompanied by an up-to-date DBS clearance.

## How?

The call or invitation to be considered for this ministry will normally come from the incumbent and there will be opportunity for the PCC to consider this proposal prayerfully.

If the incumbent and a clear majority of the PCC support the candidate, then the incumbent should write to the appropriate Bishop with details and an explanation of their support. The Incumbent will then be sent two forms to complete – a Confidential Declaration Form for the candidate to complete (for DBS clearance purposes) and a Ministry Agreement form, which both the Incumbent and the candidate should complete.

On receipt of up-to-date DBS clearance the Bishop will then issue a letter of authorisation (copied to the PCC Secretary and Rural Dean), which should be read out at the service where the candidate is commissioned with suitable prayer for their ministry as an Authorised Worship Assistant. It will not be necessary for the Bishop to be present for this service.

It will be expected that this ministry is exercised under the supervision of the incumbent, and that the AWA will engage in appropriate study and learning. A brief working agreement should be drawn up by the incumbent and AWA, and a copy should be sent to the appropriate Bishop and the Rural Dean.

Authorisation will need to be renewed by the Bishop after three years. The request for renewal should be accompanied by:

- a written reflection on the previous three years of ministry from both the AWA and the incumbent
- evidence of study and learning since authorisation
- details of the ongoing support of the PCC

# Learning, Study and Support

In the event of a vacancy in the benefice, review and renewal of authorisation will be necessary within the first year of the new incumbency.

We all need to learn more about the things we do and the diocese is committed to helping those offering for this ministry. In seeking authorisation the AWA commits to undertaking appropriate study and learning. This should take place during the period of authorisation and will normally include some of the following:

- Studying to deepen biblical, theological and pastoral understanding.
- Opportunities for shared learning across a Deanery or group of Deaneries.
- Attending courses specifically designed to support the work undertaken by AWAs, details will be made available through the Diocesan website and through regular mailings.
- Attending existing courses offered by the Lay Development and Training Coordinator, the Diocesan Liturgical Committee, Norwich Centre for Christian Learning (Cathedral) which will often be of benefit to AWAs.
- Courses and study material available through distance learning or as online resources from a variety of providers.
- Reflection on the study and training with a local mentor. This may be the incumbent, another member of the clergy or an experienced Reader.

There will be variety in the level of study required, depending on prior learning, but all of those in ministry should be committed to ongoing learning and training.

# Supervision

It is important to keep a record of training undertaken, as this will form part of the renewal of authorisation every three years.

Normally the Incumbent will take on the responsibility of supervising those engaged in this ministry, but some of this work may be delegated to another licensed minister (clergy or Reader).

There should be regular opportunities for Incumbent and AWA to meet for supervision: this should take place at least once every two months. Supervision may sometimes be with other members of a ministry team and sometimes individually.

Supervision has three elements:

- It should be **supportive**, offering encouragement and an opportunity to share concerns. Part of this will involve praying together and for each other. Supervision will also provide a safe and confidential place to talk through the challenges and difficulties of the role.
- It should be **educative**. Whilst study opportunities will be available in other ways, it is crucial that the incumbent meets regularly with those exercising this ministry to study the Scriptures together; to reflect on issues of pastoral care and the mission of the church; to address the challenge of proclaiming the faith afresh; to share resources and develop liturgical skills; to encourage a deeper self-knowledge and spiritual maturity among those engaged in ministry.
- It should be **normative**. This refers to the Incumbent's responsibility for the care and cure of souls, and hence to have regard for issues of safeguarding and good practice in the exercise of ministry.

## How does this relate to Reader ministry?

It is important that a record is kept of supervision sessions, as this will be part of the review of authorisation every three years.

Readers exercise a very valuable ministry in the Diocese, which is nationally recognised, accredited, licensed, transferable and governed by Canon Law. Preaching and leading worship is only part of the wide scope of ministry offered by the Reader.

By contrast, the AWA's ministry is locally focused under the auspices of a sponsoring incumbent. This ministry is not transferrable to another parish. This ministry is not permanent, being subject to regular renewal.

It is hoped that Readers will play a key role in encouraging and supporting AWAs in exercising their ministry. In some benefices, part of the responsibility for supervising AWAs may be delegated by the incumbent to a Reader colleague.

This new development will be of particular benefit in rural multi-parish benefices where ministerial resources (Reader or ordained) are not always readily available. It will also serve as a way of encouraging younger people

And finally...

to take their first steps on a journey that may lead to training for Reader ministry or offering for ordination.

All churches are encouraged to begin to think and pray about who might be called to this ministry. There may be some great gifts lying dormant and unused in your congregation. With encouragement, authorisation, training and support these voices could enrich the worship and life of your church, and help develop the mission and ministry of God's people in your community.

*God our Father, Lord of all the world,  
through your Son you have called us  
into the fellowship of your universal Church:  
hear our prayer for your faithful people  
that in their vocation and ministry  
each may be an instrument of your love,  
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

+ Alan Thetford

May 2013

# Appendix 1

## **AWA Working Agreement**

The role of an Authorised Worship Assistant will be shaped by opportunities of the church and gifts and time of the person, and so will vary from person to person, and from place to place, even within a multi-church team. It is therefore helpful if an understanding of the role is made clear in a form of working agreement. (This is an addition to the very simple Ministry Agreement form mentioned on page 7.)

The role might involve assisting, planning and delivering a Service of the Word, an act of All Age Worship, Morning or Evening Prayer, taking services in nursing homes, or assisting at some other services. This may be in the context of traditional church or in explorations of Fresh Expressions of church. Authorisation allows AWAs to talk or address, should the AWA feel called and able to do this, and the church[es] of the Benefice feel this to be appropriate.

It is likely that the role will evolve and change, as confidence grows or as circumstances change, and so it is helpful to review this regularly, at least once a year or as occasion demands.

A suggested format for the working agreement is given below, though this can be adapted.

- Benefice/Parishes:
- This agreement is the result of discussion between AWA:
- Incumbent (or Supervisor):
- Date:

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. What other significant responsibilities does the AWA have outside her/his ministry? In particular, mention any family or work commitments which may constrain the AWA's availability for ministry.

## PUBLIC WORSHIP (see page 3)

2. What are the main areas for ministry during the coming year? For example saying Morning Prayer once a month, leading All Age Worship as part of a team, Administering the chalice, leading intercessions (there should not be more than four areas).

## SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

3. Attendance at public worship and pattern of private worship and prayer. (Comment on the expected balance for the AWA between attending rather than leading services – i.e. the rhythm of receiving and giving. Also details of daily devotion and other aspects of prayer, quiet days, retreats etc.)

## SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT (see page 9)

4. How often, and at what times, will the AWA meet with the Incumbent to discuss the AWA's ministry and responsibilities? (This discussion should range wider than rotas, duties etc. Supervision should take place at least every two months and a record of the meetings should be kept as this will form part of the Authorisation every three years.)

## TRAINING RECORD (see page 8)

5. In seeking authorisation the AWA commits to undertaking appropriate study and learning. (Detail areas of training required & courses to be attended.) It is important to keep a record of training undertaken, as this will form part of the renewal of authorisation every three years.

## REVIEW

This working agreement will be reviewed annually by the Incumbent or Supervisor and the AWA. Both should sign and date the agreement.

# Appendix 2

## **What will the 3 year review include?**

At the end of each three year period, we ask for a three year review meeting with your incumbent, as noted on page 7. For this meeting, please assemble the following materials into a review file or folder.

### 1. Log

- List of services led (if not giving occasions with dates, then approximate regularity) and the range of styles of public worship
- List of meetings (number of personal supervision and/or group supervision. Again, if not with dates, then approximate regularity).
- List of other additional learning events that you have undertaken (courses, day conferences, deanery training events, etc.)
- Bibliography of books or articles you have read, and other resources used, either for your ministry or for your own faith development.

### 2. Examples of Learning

- Please give two or three instances of learning (training events and/or reading materials) that you have identified in supervision and have taken up. Please identify in a paragraph on each what was helpful for you or for your ministry.
- An alternative may be to reflect on a service you have led after which you reflected and learned from the experience.

### 3. Personal Review

- Please provide a short, reflective piece of writing, describing your own faith journey during the last three years. How has your faith

deepened and your discipleship developed, whether through leading worship, training events, mentoring or other events. How have you seen God walking with you in this journey?

- If there have been personal changes which affect your ministry, please advise the bishop within this. This may be a family or work situation or the discerning of a new stage in your vocational journey.
4. After your local review meeting, please include with your folder the following:
- A letter from the Incumbent: this is a letter of reference and commendation, following on from the discussion about your folder. This should be seen by the candidate before submission. If there is a change in pattern of services or staffing levels, in the benefice and the deployment of the AWA, please remind the bishop within this letter.
  - In addition, a letter from the mentor/supervisor if this is other than the incumbent.

The folder should have a cover sheet with your name, your benefice, and your episcopal area, and be sent (in the first instance) to

The Lay Development Officer  
Diocesan House  
109 Dereham Road  
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