

## **Authorised Worship Assistants (AWAs) in the Diocese of Norwich**

Authorised Worship Assistants were established in the diocese to enable clergy and lay people to work together more flexibly in ministry and mission. Traditionally, the leading of worship and the ministry of the Word has been reserved for those who are ordained, and for Licensed Lay Ministers (Readers). Through this initiative, AWAs can also respond to Gods call and the needs of the church by using their gifts in the leading of worship, or by giving an address or talk in the context of worship.

The Bishop requires that:

AWAs will be selected by clergy and lay people together. Before an application for authorisation is made, the support of the Incumbent is needed, and the approval of a clear majority of the PCC, noted in the Minutes.

AWAs will comply with diocesan and parish policies on safeguarding and complete the necessary training before authorisation. Enhanced DBS clearance is required which will be organised by the Diocese when an application is made.

AWAs will be accountable to their parish priest; and work with the supervision and support of their named Supervisor. This may be the parish priest, other clergy person, or experienced LLM who will meet with the AWA for regular supervision sessions;

AWAs will attend ongoing relevant training in the parish, diocese, or with appropriate training institutions.

A review will take place at the end of each three year period of authorisation. This gives the opportunity for laying down this ministry, seeking renewal of the authorisation, or following a call to a different ministry.

### **AWA Selection**

The AWA Candidate should:

- have a well established Christian faith and prayer life;
- show a clear commitment to discipleship, serving God through their work in the parish/benefice/deanery, as well as in their own daily life;
- be a person of good standing, respected by members of the church and the wider community;
- show evidence of their ability to lead worship, and the potential to develop their gifts and skills;

- be committed to working collaboratively as a member of a team under the authority of the incumbent;
- have an appetite for lifelong learning in a Christian context, and be enthusiastic about further training and courses;
- be eager to encourage the gifts of others;
- normally be a communicant member of the Church of England;
- comply with diocesan and parish policies on safeguarding.

### **Selection**

The primary responsibility for selecting and seeking authorisation for the AWA lies with the parish priest. Where there is a ministry team, the selection of potential AWAs should be discussed confidentially within the team. Where there is no team, the priest will ideally consult some wise churchwardens or other people who know the parish / benefice well, before taking those names to the PCC.

A conversation between the potential AWA and the parish priest is central. The area where they might exercise their ministry should be considered: a single congregation, a single parish, or the whole benefice. There should be discussion of the ministry that is initially being considered, for example, to lead a service of the Word or informal service, to give a talk, to lead services in residential homes, and to seek some agreement about how often this might happen.

Only when the incumbent, other appropriate team members, and the person being selected are in agreement, should the proposal be taken to the PCC.

The PCC should be able to have a confidential discussion of the appropriateness of each person without them being present. It will be sufficient that the minutes of the meeting simply record that the PCC affirms the selection of the person, with the name of each person selected, A clear majority is required. Specific content of the discussion need not be recorded.

A copy of this item of the minutes will be requested by the Bishop's Office when an application is made.

In exceptional circumstances (although the groundwork referred to above should make this unlikely) the minutes of the PCC may need to record that a person has not been supported towards AWA ministry. In this case a simple statement that the PCC was unable to agree to support the candidate's selection is all that needs to be recorded.

Where a parish is in vacancy, applications may be considered and supported by the Rural Dean in consultation with others in the parish(es). In such cases specific arrangements for the support, training, and supervision of candidates must be put in place. The application process may also be delegated to a person appointed by the

Rural Dean. In some cases, it may be preferable to wait until the appointment of a new incumbent.

### **Commissioning in the Parish**

The parish priest and AWA will receive a letter of authorisation from their area Bishop. Commissioning is carried out by the parish priest, ideally during a principal act of worship in the parish on a Sunday where the ministry will be carried out.

A set of prayers is provided either as text for incorporation into the parish's own service sheet, or as a separate and printable sheet.

The provided form of words is a template that may be adapted as appropriate for local use.

### **Supervision and Role descriptions**

Each AWA is required to have a named supervisor with whom they will meet for support, reflection, feedback, and to plan training. These meetings should be separate to any Team Ministry meeting.

A training session on supervision is run in the diocese once or twice a year.

Each AWA should have a simple role description setting out the mutual expectations of the AWA and the supervisor, including what ministry they will be carrying out and where. As the AWA increases in experience, or as life situations change, this can be adapted at one of the regular supervision meetings.

Authorisation allows an AWA to take the lead in an act of worship such as Morning Prayer or Compline, assist the priest with other services and with the administration of Communion, give a talk in the service, or lead a service at a fresh expression, residential home etc. The tasks included in the role description will vary according to the gifts of the AWA and the needs of the parish. It is generally best to start with a limited range of tasks, and to expand this as the person develops in their role.

### **Training**

Crucial to the success of the ministry of an AWA will be the support and guidance given by the parish priest/supervisor. Guidance in the planning of worship followed by discussion and feedback are highly useful for the development of skills and should be seen as an essential part of AWA training.

There are many other opportunities for study and training: some deaneries organise training for AWAs across parish boundaries, training in the diocese is advertised on the website and through the AWA mailing, and other training institutions and organisations can offer useful courses according to the previous experience and learning of the AWA.

Further information is available from the Diocesan Authorised Worship Assistants co-ordinator.

**Re-authorisation following a three year review**

AWAs are authorised by the Bishop for a period of three years.

This dovetails with the need for any relevant DBS and safeguarding training which also take place on this timescale. A few months before the authorisation lapses, the Bishop's office sends out a reminder including details of the review process. The completed review is returned to the diocesan AWA co-ordinator. If re-authorisation does not take place, the person's name is removed from the diocesan AWA database.