**A survey report on the work of Lay Ministers in the Leicester Diocese**



**By Paul Chung, Mike Alexander and Liz Rawlings**

**March 2023**

**Executive Summary**

The Lay Ministry Council produced a survey to understand the current experience of lay ministers in the Diocese of Leicester. A separate survey was sent to all incumbents to gain a clergy perspective. The results indicated the wide-ranging contribution lay ministers make to the life of the diocese and the positive experience of lay and ordained ministers working together in effective teams.

The responses also highlighted some of the barriers to flourishing that slightly over half of lay ministers are encountering. These can be summarised as

* Roles being poorly defined with ineffective or absent supervision
* Working in isolation without a sense of being part of ministry team
* Lack of opportunities for on-going support, resourcing and training
* Lay ministry being undervalued or not sufficiently understood

The following recommendations have emerged:

* Training of both lay and ordained ministers in effective team ministry
* Provision of ministry support both in local contexts and centrally
* Opportunities for on-going ministerial formation

This paper is to be presented and discussed at Bishop’s Council in March 2023 and will inform the aims and objectives of the forming Lay Ministry Council.

1. **Background to the Survey**

After the Lay Ministry Gathering in April 2022, a group was drawn together to develop the terms of reference and objectives of a Lay Ministry Council. These are to be approved by Bishop’s Council in March 2023 and members commissioned at the Called Together Service in May 2023.

To identify the Council’s priorities, it was necessary to gain a picture of the current reality for lay ministers in the Diocese. Two online questionnaires were created, one for lay ministers and one for incumbents (see appendix 1 and appendix 2 respectively).

After a small pilot, the links to the on-line questionnaires were sent out in January 2023 to all licensed lay ministers and incumbents registered on CMS. We received 79 responses from a total of 253 lay ministers (31%) and 65 responses from 102 incumbents (64%).

Below is a summary of the results with some conclusions and recommendations.

1. **The contribution of Lay Ministers**

Ordained ministers who completed the survey mentioned that their lay colleagues ‘make huge contributions’ in ‘keeping things running smoothly’ – ‘both up front and behind the scenes’. Those who do not have lay ministry colleagues report that this places them under greater pressure.

Lay ministers are engaged in varied roles which include:

* Preaching
* Leading services
* Arranging/conducting funerals
* Leading small groups/courses
* Leading and supporting outreach/community projects
* Encouraging and enabling others
* Pastoral care and pastoral visiting
* Delivering home communion
* Preparing candidates for baptism/marriage
* Leading/supporting children, families and schools work

From the list, preaching and leading services are the most frequently mentioned. Additional roles that lay ministers take on are PCC members and Safeguarding Coordinators, administration and publicity, producing rotas, compiling newsletters and preparing venues for worship.

Quite a few lay ministers have substantial roles outside of their local setting such as General Synod, Diocesan Synod, Deanery Synod, Liturgical Commission, Bishop’s Council, Bishop’s Youth Council, Churches Together, Mothers’ Union, hospital chaplaincy, Air Cadet Chaplaincy, Leicester Theological Society and vocations advisors.

1. **What brings joy in ministry?**

Lay ministers responded that they are most energised by the core elements of their vocation such as:

* Leading and preaching
* Discipleship
* Engaging with those beyond the church community

Other factors were more intrinsic, the feeling that what they do is worthwhile. External factors repeatedly mentioned were:

* Being appreciated and receiving positive affirmation
* Support from leaders
* Working as a team.
1. **Working as a team**

The majority of ordained respondents operate with ministry teams of at least three members, with some leading much larger teams. Lay ministers reported the importance of feeling accepted as a ministry team member on an equal basis. Pleasingly, for many this is the case. However, others reported:

* they are only used on an ad hoc basis to fill a gap when needed
* there is no proper recognition of their roles
* a lack of delegated authority
* incumbents not interested in what they do
* lack of support
* the role not recognised or identified within the church
1. **Is Lay Ministry Valued?**

Incumbents and lay ministers were asked the question ‘Do you feel lay ministry is valued by the congregation? The responses are shown in figure 1. Incumbents responded with 89% in categories 4 and 5, and lay ministers responded with 83%. Although both results are high, there is a difference of 6%.

Lay ministers were asked the additional question ‘Do you feel your ministry is valued by clergy? The results are shown in figure 2, with 72% in categories 4 and 5. It indicates that lay ministers feel that clergy do not value them as much as the congregation by 11%.

In response to the question “Are you feeling underutilised or overstretched in your ministry? On a scale of 1 to 5 – 1 very underutilised, 3 about right, 5 very overstretched’. As shown in figure 3, 55% of the lay ministers responded with about right; 19% and 26% of the respondents feel that they are underutilised and overstretched respectively.

1. **Mutual flourishing**

In answering the question ‘are there any tensions and barriers that hinder mutual flourishing of ministry between ordained and lay ministers? 45% of the lay ministers (34 out of 76) indicated that there is no tension at all and described a culture of mutual respect, genuine sharing, and no clergy hierarchy.

However, the other 55% voiced concerns about their working relationship with their clergy colleagues. Comments include:

* Controlling
* Not being listened to
* Snobbery
* Lack of understanding of what a lay minister is called to do
* Can see competent lay ministers as a threat
* Poor or absent communication
* Lack of acceptance
* Use lay ministers as general dogsbodies without appreciation of their gifts and calling
* Assume lay ministers are always available
* Offer few opportunities for ministry, growth and development
* Resistance to change
* Not involved in decision making
1. **Support for Lay Ministers**

The support that lay ministers receive varies. While several mentioned that they feel alone and receive little or no support, the support that others receive locally include:

* Regular meeting with the incumbent
* Staff meetings
* Supervisor from line manager
* Easy access to vicar with any concerns
* Time off for retreats
* Support from the congregation

Support that comes from outside their local settings include:

* Formal supervision/mentoring
* Network of lay ministers
* Diocesan training days
* Archdeacon and Area Dean
* Spouse, family and good friends

When asked ‘What additional support would lay ministers hope for?’ The suggestions are:

* Opportunities to meet other lay ministers, at least annually
* Time for spiritual development/nourishment
* Visible Lay Ministry Council
* Access to resources such as theological library/training
* To be taken seriously and included in local ministry teams
* Critical praise, respect, recognition
* A designated person who would check in and take interest in the work
* Permission to try and fail
* Clearly defined roles
* Support network
1. **Conclusions**

The survey reveals that in general lay ministry is valued by congregations and clergy and there is evidence of good practice among ministry teams. However, over half of the lay ministers are experiencing significant barriers to their flourishing in ministry. The responses indicate the following priorities:

* A culture and practice of mutuality of ministry and functional multi-disciplinary teams
* Clearly defined roles that take account of gifts, calling and capacity
* Effective supervision
* Support for lay ministers both locally and centrally
* Opportunities for continuing ministerial formation
1. **Recommendations**

With the structural changes being implemented in the light of Shaped by God Together the role of lay ministry will be increasingly crucial to living out our shared vision to growing disciples, deepening discipleship and loving service to the world. The following recommendations are suggested as priorities in enabling lay ministry to grow and flourish.

* 1. Training for both lay and ordained ministers
		1. Theology and practice of mutuality of ministry
		2. How to form effective ministry teams
		3. Good supervision
	2. Ministry support
		1. Local – team formation, supervision and role clarity
		2. Central – advocacy, networking, pastoral support and mediation
	3. Continuing ministerial formation
		1. On-going training opportunities
		2. Provision of spiritual direction and retreat
		3. Vocational mentoring
		4. Books and resources

**Appendix 1**

Lay Ministry Council – Lay Minister Survey

1. Describe your role(s) as a lay minster, and the key elements of your ministry for the role(s).
2. What is bringing you joy or energising you from your ministry?
3. Where do you fit in the organisation of the ministry team in your parish or group of churches?
4. Is there any tensions and barriers that hinder mutual flourishing of ministry between ordained and lay ministers? If yes, what are they?
5. Do you feel your ministry is valued by clergy? On a scale of 5 - 1 not at all, 5 very much so.
6. Do you feel your ministry is valued by the congregation or those you serve? On a scale of 5 - 1 not at all, 5 very much so
7. What support do you currently get in your ministry?
8. What additional support would you like?
9. Are you feeling underutilised or overstretched in your ministry? On a scale of 1 to 5 - 1 very underutilised, 3 about right, 5 very overstretched.
10. What are the main challenges to your ministry and what one thing would make the biggest difference?

**Appendix 2**

Lay Ministry Council – Ordained Minister Survey

1. Please describe your ministry team
2. What contributions do your lay minister colleagues make?
3. What support do you give your lay minister colleague?
4. Do you feel lay ministry is valued by the congregation or those they serve? On the scale of 5 – 1 not at all, 5 very much so
5. What additional support do you think your lay minister colleagues need?