



READERS' ASSOCIATION DIOCESE OF BIRMINGHAM NEWSLETTER August 2003

FAREWELL TO A FRIEND OF READERS ...

Most of you will be aware by now that our Dean, Revd Canon Alan Priestley, has resigned his office after nine years service. We all have good reason to be very grateful to Alan for his strong advocacy of Reader ministry within the diocese and many of you have been grateful for his sympathetic ear and good sound advice when there has been a pastoral need. In over three years as secretary of Readers I have been amazed at the nuggets of information that he has about each of us and this reflects the time and effort he made to meet each of us in our deaneries in the early years of his office. Those who have been selected, trained and licensed during this period have had even more opportunity to get to know Alan and he to know you.

You will see in the letter that comes with this newsletter that we are inviting our Readers to contribute to a farewell gift to present to him as a token of our appreciation at a buffet evening at the Diocesan offices on Thursday evening 2nd October from 6.30pm. It will also be an opportunity for Readers to thank Alan personally for his work on our behalf.

He will have little opportunity to relax for the builders have finally completed a huge project in his own parish that has been in the planning, fund raising and construction for five years. Their community building, "The Hub" at Hazelwell, is now operational. It will be officially opened by the Bishop for Birmingham and the Chief Executive of Birmingham City Council on 15th November, when the church building has been refurbished to match the new community building.

Alan, we thank you for all you have done for us and wish you God's blessing on all that you do in His name in your future ministry.

We reproduce below extracts from Alan's last address to Readers at the AGM in May

"This will be my last report to the Readers' AGM as I shall be stepping down from the role of Dean

immediately after this meeting. So I would like to take this opportunity to say goodbye to you all and in

particular to some very good friends who have taught me a great deal about the meaning of vocation and the distinctive character of lay vocation. It has been a privilege to see candidates for selection safely through to Admission and Licensing and to note “my how they have grown”. It is the nature of Reader ministry that it is an insecure and vulnerable job. Quite how vulnerable it is, I had not realised, until as Dean of Readers I began to get requests for Readers’ Licenses to be transferred to the Area Dean at interregna. Clergy with whom Readers have served – many of whom had encouraged their original application for the office of Reader – suddenly disappear over the horizon, and the Readers, who already felt vulnerable enough, suddenly find themselves in limbo as they await the arrival of a new and unknown incumbent. Not until the new occupant of the vicarage asks for their licence to be returned, are they assured of having a role to play in the parish where they have served for many years. Thereafter it remains the case that a Reader who falls out with his/her incumbent falls out of ministry. Part of the Dean’s responsibility has been to try and retrieve such situations, to prevent useful skills and energy (and sometimes souls) being lost.

The loss of a Reader is more than a personal tragedy. Readers “in limbo” often lose their Christian calling too. I am now ready to admit 2

that it has been one of my chief aims to find positions in other parishes for those who find it impossible to work with their new incumbent. In the last few days I have handled a rash of transfers so that as I leave this post there are no Readers currently languishing in limbo. I think Jesus has something to say about the Father not losing those in his charge. It is also a waste of valuable training time when a Reader is lost – more than 31 days – a month of working days for the student and a considerable waste of the tutor’s time too.

Readers are a Diocesan resource, which we can ill afford to lose, particularly in view of the demands of the New Kingdom review. It is my hope that my successor may have more time than I have been able to devote to the imaginative deployment of Readers in the New Kingdom. She/He will of course only be able to do that if more time is made available for Readers – something I have been unable to secure and the reason for my resignation. However I am grateful for the 48 offers to serve for a short time in another parish and I hope that this will be addressed as soon as possible.

But there is merit in readers being vulnerable. A healthy detachment from the world and its values is necessary for any kind of Christian ministry and service. But lack of material security and a disregard for

personal safety have always been the anvil on which authentic prophecy is forged, from the days of Elijah to the days of John the Baptist and it remains so today. Vulnerability was a mark of the Lord's ministry too. "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20 JB). Much of Jesus's teaching about power and powerlessness centred on the need to be open to other people and of remaining capable of hurt by them. Our natural tendency is to avoid situations where we are exposed to being hurt and to surround ourselves with protection to defend ourselves from other people's demands. That is a luxury not available to Readers.

Prophecy and preaching are inseparable. Perhaps that is why one hears so few good sermons today – when so much of the church is part of comfortable Britain! But for those whose primary task is preaching, a measure of insecurity helps to keep the wellsprings of prophecy in today's church bubbling up; and concentrates the mind on the issues rather than on the distractions which preoccupy many ministers.

Enabling vulnerability to be creative rather than negative is an important task for those responsible for Reader ministry. Parochial clergy need to be sensitive to it. So does the Readers Association. I salute you all who accept this as a mark of vocation and shall watch with

interest to see how clergy learn to accept for themselves in the New Kingdom what for you has long been a reality.

Finally I want to say thank you to all of you for the work you do in your parishes. I know that work is appreciated there but have the suspicion that you don't feel very valued by the church at large where bigger fish swim. I praise God every day for Readers and the work they do and I have been privileged to share some of your stories and to know what that service costs. Thank you!"

The Secretary writes ...

Diocesan Vocations Day

On July 5th the Readers Association had a stall at this very successful day at the Trinity Centre, Sutton Coldfield. There were more than 20 stalls representing a wide variety of ministries and over 120 people came to explore their future vocation. Some of our Readers were representing other ministries. One of the two key-note addresses was given by our own Jean McCubbin and Evadne Christian was one of three people interviewed. Our stall received many interested visitors and we ran out of leaflets before the end of the afternoon.

Reader Selection Conference

Our Reader Selection Conference on June 28th went well. For the first time I can recall all the candidates were selected for training and each of the selectors commented on the quality of the candidates. The following will begin their training in September:

Susan Ashton	Knowle Parish Church
Carole Christenson	St Paul, Blackheath
Robert Cutler	St James, Hill
Clive Fane De Salis	Christ Church, the Quinton
Fay Fearon	Kings Norton Team Ministry
Fiona Fowles	St Philip, Dorridge
Richard Huss	St Nicholas, Elmdon
Carole Jones	St Andrew, Handsworth
Giyanow Kaur	SS Peter & Paul, Aston
David Parker	SS Peter & Paul, Water Orton
Raymond Stinson	St Margaret, Short Heath
Alison Thorne	St Andrew, Handsworth

AGM

The Dean reported that the checks on existing Readers against the files of the Criminal Records Bureau had not yet been done due to time pressure on the Bureau staff. He suspects this will not happen for a further two years. All new candidates are now checked before their training commences.

Jean Denton retired from the committee and Jean Marriott was elected as her successor. The other officers were re-elected for a further term.

Fifty year service certificates were presented to Tom Ledger and David Reese. Emeritus Certificates were presented to Fred Andrews, Barbara Gibbons, Valerie Hamley, Gisela Hawes, Connie Jinks, Ivan Parish and Margaret Warner who on reaching the age of seven last year, all became Emeritus with Permission to Officiate.

Unfortunately Barbara Gibbons had her car broken into that evening which seemed hard as she had made a big effort to drive herself to an unfamiliar venue for the occasion.

Beryl Moppett finished the evening off by giving an illustrated talk on

her visit to Rwanda with Mid-Africa Ministries. The party were Readers drawn from all over the country.

The AGM of Central Readers Conference (CRC) at Westminster

Our Association was represented by your Secretary and Jacki Ledbrook (Garretts Green). This was the first occasion when our new National Chairman, Bishop Graham Dow, took the chair. William Fittall, the Secretary General of the Archbishops' Council and of the General Synod spoke of his work for the national church. William is himself a Reader.

At the informal meetings in the morning session we discussed the use of Communion by Extension for which there is provision in Common Worship. The liturgy is available in a booklet by this name which is available from Church House Bookshop at £1.65. This service is being conducted by Readers in a number of dioceses with large rural areas. The meetings also discussed recruitment of young Readers, upper age limit for trainees, CME, parish levies or license fees and our name (the title "Licensed Lay Minister" is used in the Oxford Diocese and "Reader Minister" in the Leicester Diocese).

Tapes and CDs

A number of Readers who were present at our CME Training Day in December noted that Bishop

Sentamu's keynote address had been taped. There was an enquiry whether it would be made available and we are pleased to report that copies have been made on tape and CD. These may be obtained from the secretary, by snail mail, at a cost of £1 or by email from Anne Pycock at: Anne@pycockbham.freeserve.co.uk

Obituaries

Sadly we report the deaths of two of our Readers Emeriti with very long service, **Samuel (Vic) Allton** and **Arthur Field**.

Vic died in the George Eliot Hospital, Nuneaton, just a few days short of his 87th birthday. He worked with his brother in the family building business founded by his father and was licensed to Dosthill in 1958. Before becoming a Reader he had been organist at the Resurrection, Hurley. He took many services in the Polesworth Deanery and had at one time been Lay Chairman of the Deanery Synod. Vic had a profound knowledge of local history and was widely read on many subjects.

Arthur died in his 80th year and was licensed to the Ascension, Hall Green in 1952. He served as a Reader in rural Leicestershire for ten years from 1974 before returning to the Ascension. He had spent a working lifetime in insurance but in retirement enjoyed his family, garden and cricket as a season ticket holder at Edgbaston. His sister

Molly Moody, a Reader in the York diocese, gave the address at his funeral. I wonder how many other sibling brothers and sisters we have within our Reader membership?

Dean of Readers Executive Group

A number of members of this group are approaching Emeritus status and we are looking for their successors to replace Eric Dwyer as our **Treasurer** and David Browning as our **Appointments Secretary** at next year's AGM. If any Reader thinks they could fill either role would they please contact the Secretary, for further details.

Readers Returns of Service

Thank you to the 48 Readers who offered to consider helping for a period of time in another parish. Your offer is now in limbo until the Dean's successor is appointed and grasps the reigns. You will all be interested to learn that we have 27 Readers who are on their Deanery Synod of whom 9 are also on the Diocesan Synod. Almost half of you are now on Email and we hope to have you listed in the next Diocesan Directory.

Who in the pew?

I recently conducted a service at St Peter's, Bickenhill and was surprised to be introduced afterwards to a

student of theology at Birmingham University who had recorded the service for his M.Phil Project. The "student" was older than myself and was a retired lecturer in Classics from Oxford University! We discussed and subsequently completed a thought-provoking questionnaire on the preaching of the Christian Faith Today, which gave me food for thought on subject content. When did you last preach on any of these topics: State and Nation; Global Village; Music, literature, the arts; IT, mathematics, language, the media; philosophy, logic and natural history? You never know who is in the pew!

From the Bookshelf

Beyond the Good Samaritan: Community Ministry and Mission

Ann Morisy

Mobray, ISBN 0 264 67433 2
£10.99

This book was recommended by Fred Rattley who led the Readers CME training Day, with John Bleazard on "Glue in the Community". It is an excellent book for challenging traditional views of pastoral ministry and providing a structure which places pastoral and community ministry at the centre of the witness of a church. It provides simple insights into the value of working as Christians in groups with non Christians to provide pastoral care for the disadvantaged and describes how many Christians find

their faith deepened as a result. If you were not able to go to the CME training day then reading this book is an excellent second best option. It is a very easy and compelling read.

The Seven Story Mountain

Thomas Merton

SPCK, ISBN 0 281 04474 0 £20:00

Thomas Merton born in 1915 has become a spiritual mentor to many over the years. In this book he recounts his journey of faith with a refreshing honesty and no affectation and is able to write about issues of faith that most of us find difficult to articulate. There are vivid word pictures of his early life, where, in the main, he seems to have led a comfortable life, in financial terms, whilst having been profoundly unsettled. The spiritual journey is one of searching for a way to serve God only to discover that true service is an elusive and seemingly always just beyond reach. There are countless stories, tinged with humour and pathos as he apparently falls into then out of academic life. There is a very strong impression of a soul searching for the unknown. The autobiography ends with an account of his brother's death as a pilot in 1943. This clearly was a heavy blow for Thomas. Yet he went on, with a piercing vision that would put up with nothing false, to transform the life of contemplation and to show how the contemplative order was not an escape from life but a way to full

life. That, as they say, is another story and several more books. This is a book that to exercise the mind in the nature of personal faith and calling.

CME Training Opportunities

The next Readers' CME Training Day promises to stretch the imagination and vision. This day will be led by Dr Paula Gooder, a Reader at St. Francis, Bournville. Paula is a biblical scholar, who has been busy giving lectures on biblical studies around the diocese, in recent months. The details of the training day appear below. The CME committee is conscious of the need to give Readers more notice of training days. Having now incorporated an annual Funeral Training Day, the committee is working to a schedule that should make it possible to announce meetings for the following year each December.

Introduction to Theology

The new brochure is now available for this popular programme of lively and challenging short courses. This year there are courses at Sutton Coldfield and Minworth as well as Cotteridge and City Centre. Full details from Mrs Pam Rhodes at: Tel.: 0121 426 0400, Email: P.Rhodes@Birmingham.Anglican.org

Forthcoming Training Opportunities

Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land: Isaiah, the Exile and the Church Today

9:30 am, Saturday 15 Nov., 2003

The Cotteridge Church, St Agnes

Led by Dr Paula Gooder

All Age Worship Workshop

Thursday 2nd October, Holy Trinity, Smethwick

Saturday 4th October, Trinity Centre, Sutton Coldfield

With clergy and lay leaders

Key note address by Dr Rebecca Nye

Workshops on:

- Nurturing Faith
- Planning and leading All Age Worship
- Principles of Godly Play and All Age Worship
- Prayer in All Age Worship
- Involving Young Adults in All Sage Worship
- The Visual in All Age Worship

Growing Gifts Workshop

Tuesday 7th October, St John's, Longbridge or

Saturday 18th October, St Mark's, Stockland Green.

Workshops on:

- Myers Briggs
- Voice Skills for Leading Workshops
- Praying for Wholeness & Healing
- Understanding Grief & Loss

The full details are in a leaflet, which was recently distributed by the diocese to all Readers.

Further details on any of the above are available from Pam Rhodes:

Tel.: 0121 426 0400

Email: P.Rhodes@Birmingham.Anglican.org