

READER MINISTRY

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by Jane Quamby, Reader, Church of England

Readers come in all shapes and sizes, from all sorts of backgrounds and experiences and it was not something that had ever occurred to me that it was a path for me to follow. I was a “late-comer” to church, only attending regularly in my 30’s when I met my husband who had been going to church all his life. I was confirmed as an adult some years later at Peterborough Cathedral and so compared to many people I am a real beginner. In the early days I found it all very odd at times, this business of stand-up, sit down, flitting about the service sheet so I spent the first few services that I went to in a complete muddle. Gradually however it began to slot into place, and I was inveigled into reading the lesson from time to time, bullied into learning how to arrange the flowers and polish the brass, and helping to fundraise for the ever necessary repairs to something or other, or to help others. Then it was arranged that I should become a Eucharistic Assistant, helping with setting the altar and distributing the communion.



Out of the blue, I was asked why I wasn’t going forward for ordination by our forthright rector. As I couldn’t think of a less likely candidate for ordination I didn’t really think he was serious. But God clearly does take the most unlikely people regardless of what they think they can accomplish and several years later and in a different village, one Christmas Eve our rector phoned us at home to say that she was too ill with bronchitis to take the Christmas Day service so as my husband was the church warden he’d need to organise something at short notice – i.e. tell me to take the service. Panic set in but I found the relevant Morning Prayer service, and at 11 am on Christmas morning found myself in front of the whole village taking the service. Despite all my protestations, I had come home. I gave up the struggle which I was clearly not going to win and put myself forwards for reader ministry, and embarked on the 3 year’s training once approved. It wasn’t easy with a training business to run and family commitments but the training I received was excellent and very professional, answering many questions. I discovered that I wasn’t alone in wondering what I was doing on the course and learnt much from fellow students. We had weekly evening classes, and several residential weekends, and worked through modules on church history, bible study, preaching, theology, ethics, presentation skills, pastoral care and different styles of worship. I also spent a month on secondment to a different parish with a very evangelical style of worship. Sadly the course didn’t teach me to sing!

In England I was part of benefice team, which was really busy with regular services throughout the week in 5 churches so I had a very mixed bag of duties, from taking prayer services to visiting elderly people at home, taking funerals, and as it was an agricultural area, we “beat the bounds” and had real Harvest Festivals. Taking a 2 week old lamb to church to illustrate my sermon on “Jesus the lamb of God” proved the power of visual aids! I took home study groups and discussions, and hosted retreat days.



Now that we are in France, my ministry has changed again, as we live in a fairly remote area 60 miles from the nearest Anglican church. I am sure that God will show me what my ministry will be here too - and equally sure that it won’t be what I expect. And no - I didn’t go for ordination - as a reader I am still part of the congregation, but with a teaching and guiding role and to me, it’s a very special role in the church. But I do agree with Christine, it’s really difficult to explain what a reader is!