

THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF THE MURRAY

LICENSING OF LAY LEADERS

The ministry of living and sharing God’s mission is entrusted to all Christians and every baptised Christian is, potentially, a minister. Lay Ministry is distinguished from discipleship by ministry being commissioned, that is, publicly recognised and owned by a Christian community formally (through licensing by the Bishop). Licensed lay ministers exercise an essential responsibility today in assisting the clergy. It is a privilege to serve in this capacity – it is not a right.

The office of lay minister is based on scripture and Christian tradition. We can see this in Paul’s teachings about the Body of Christ [Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4:1-16]. All baptised Christians are called to ministry in the Church.

We all have different gifts which have an important role in church life – leading worship, pastoral care, chaplaincy, children and youth ministry, education/formation and administration.

Licensed Lay Ministers in our parishes have grown in number since the creation of the Diocese of the Murray. Due to the rural and regional spread of the Diocese, the lack of ordained clergy the importance of the role of Lay Leaders in various forms of ministry is paramount. Throughout the Diocese there are significant numbers of members of worshipping congregations performing meaningful and critical pastoral ministry roles. These people, in many cases, have been undertaking such roles for a number of years.

It is important that as a Christian community we acknowledge the important work of volunteers and of church leaders. It is also important to ensure that everyone who undertakes lay ministry is of good character and has appropriate training. Therefore, by the end of 2021, all people who assist with worship, pastoral care, ministry to children and young people, education or administration will need to be licensed.

**Types of lay ministers**

As Christians, worship is essential to our communal life. The Diocese of the Murray recognises the important role that lay people can in assisting or leading worship including the role of delivering sermons in church and preaching the Word.

Holy Communion or the Eucharist is central to our worship. It is a sacrament in which the people of the church come together and eat the body of Christ and drink his blood. Lay people who assist with Eucharist have been given different descriptions in the church – eucharistic assistants, sub-deacons and chalice bearers. Going forward, people who perform these functions will be called licensed lay ministers. The licence for a licensed lay minister shall state whether the Minister is a Category 1 or Category 2 Lay Minister.

A Category 1 Lay Minister may exercise, according to the Ministers Christian gifts, any of the following ministries:

(a) Lead and conduct services except those parts which may be offered by a Deacon if present, or are designated to a priest.

(b) Assist the priest in the ministration and distribution of the Holy Communion.

(c) Baptise only in cases of extreme emergency in the absence of a priest or deacon. Such baptisms must be reported to the Incumbent.

A Category 2 Lay Minister as well as exercising any of the ministries of a Category 1 Lay Minister, may exercise one or more of the following ministries:

(a) Preach sermons, subject to appropriate qualification approved by the Bishop.

(b) Conduct funerals under the direction of the Incumbent or in the absence of a priest or deacon. (c) Enable sacramental needs to be provided for, under the direction of the Bishop. A Licensed Lay Minister may exercise any duty or function of a pastoral nature as shall be considered appropriate by the Incumbent.

Pastoral care involves looking after parishioners in either their day-to-day life or acute situations, such as sickness and death. It includes biblical counselling and supporting members of the congregation through phone calls and meetings. It can involve the conduct of community outreach ministries such as the running of soup kitchens, pantries or op-shops. Pastoral carers also visit the sick and injured in hospitals. On occasions, lay people have also been authorised to take the consecrated elements to parishioners who cannot attend church and to visit people in hospitals. Going forward, people who perform these functions will be called licensed pastoral carers.

Ministry to children and young people is a service to the church family and the children and youth. It includes Sunday School, Kid’s Club, Youth Group, and Religious Education in Schools. It is a ministry which carries significant responsibilities for the wellbeing of the children and young people and to ensure an environment that is safe from any form of harm. Going forward, people who perform these functions will be called licensed family ministers.

The Diocese also needs educators who can guide parishioners and converts develop a personal faith with the help of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, a deeper sense of belonging to Body of Christ, a more active relationship with God through prayer; and become an effective disciple and visible sign of Christ’s love. It includes preparing candidates for communion. Going forward, people who perform these functions will be called licensed lay catechists.

Parishes and the Diocese will also from time to time have chaplains. Chaplaincy is a specialised ministry and chaplains will hold at least a Cert IV in Chaplancy or Pastoral Care. Chaplains endeavour to meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of parishioners and may be specialised in areas such as youth, mental health, loss and grief and counselling.

In exceptional cases, a lay minister may receive a stipend. This may include a situation where a person is effectively doing the ministry of a priest in a parish but has not (yet) been ordained or has another specialised form of ministry such as chaplaincy that is commonly paid.

**Interim Licensing**

It is important to recognize the experience of those individuals who currently perform various ministry roles throughout the Diocese. All people who currently perform the types of lay ministry described above and who have the support of their local priest will be issued with an Interim License on the basis that they agree to meet agreed compliance and accreditation standards from end 2023.

**New Licences**

All new candidates for lay ministry will need the support of their local parish priest, must be, or become, confirmed and regular communicant members of the Anglican Church, and will be asked to complete the Safe Ministry requirements of the Diocese. They will also need to demonstrate that they have the appropriate training to properly discharge the tasks for which they are licensed and be prepared to undertake further education. After consultation with the individual concerned the Parish Priest will seek references in respect of the person, ensure that all compliance requirements are met and reach and agreement with the prospective lay minister in respect to ongoing training. Part of the application process also involves giving a promise to obey parish leadership and an oath of canonical obedience to the Bishop.

An application form is available on the Diocese website.

At a Diocesan level lay minister licences will remain in force unless the lay minister resigns or the licence is cancelled. At a parish level, the parish priest is responsible for ensuring that all lay ministers under his supervision remains of good character, maintains appropriate compliance credentials, undertakes an annual training program in the area of their ministry and wishes to continue in the ministry undertaken.

**Safe ministry**

All people who perform any form of lay leadership throughout the Diocese must comply with current and changing compliance requirements. Presently this means that lay ministers:

a. must have a current Police check,

b. must have completed a current Child Safety program,

c. must have a Professional Standards Clearance, and,

d. must have a Working with Children clearance.

Information about these processes is available on the Diocesan website.

**Education**

The Diocese of the Murray places importance on education and training. Going forward all lay ministers will need to currently hold or be in the process of gaining one of the following:

i. A Certificate in Theological studies

ii. A Diploma in Theological studies

iii. A degree in theology.

A Diocesan certificate course is being prepared. It will include and (a minimum requirement in the interim period) will be completion of the following subjects:

i. Handling the Bible

ii. Pastoral Care

iii. Training in sacramental ministry

iv. Training in Homiletics and Evangelism.

Information about this education program is being prepared and will be placed on the Diocesan website.

Of course, we recognise the need to be flexible. It may be that you undertaking other training or a self-directing reading program which can be recognised as equivalent learning.

**Next steps**

The introduction of this new lay ministers’ program is not merely about risk management and reissuing licenses. It is an opportunity for the church community to say thank you. It provides an opportunity for the Diocese and parishes to identify the talent in the church community and lift up people to serve God and their church community. It also provides an opportunity for renewal and celebration as the new lay ministers are presented with their licences in commissioning services in their parishes.

We should also remember that there are also other volunteers who perform valuable services in the church – including flowers, the laundering of altar linen, cleaning and gardening and other tasks. crucifers, readers, choir members, organists, welcomers and others also perform valuable functions. All contributions, indeed perhaps particularly the most humble, are seen by God if not always by members of the church family.