

Mind the gap!

Licenced Lay Ministers (Readers!) and mission

By Charles Read

Patterns of life, leisure and work are changing and changing rapidly. Many have more choice, but others have more burdensome working hours. The Church (especially the Church of England) struggles to keep up and the old systems and structures do not seem to be effective in reaching people for Christ. People are asking hard questions about what life is all about and there are big questions in society about new and tricky ethical issues. The voice of Christian faith struggles to get a hearing in this.



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Duncan Pigg at Hethersett has just retired as a Reader, aged 90, after 60 years of ministry. He has been one of the longest-serving Readers in the diocese. Duncan has exercised ministry in Church through preaching and leading worship but also as choirmaster and churchwarden.

‘Every morning I thank my Creator, Saviour and Guide for giving me health and strength, enabling me to have the privilege of leading worship by preaching the Gospel and praising God in music which has given me much joy and happiness’.

However, Duncan has lived out his Christian faith in the local community too, where he has organised village pantomimes since 1970, served as a district and parish councillor, played for and supported the village cricket club, served as a school governor, and been involved in the current Active Village group that developed out of the London Olympics. In 2013 he was awarded the British Empire medal. He has bridged the gap brilliantly and brought God into the conversation in his village. Could you?

Do you recognise this all-too-common description of the world we live in? Well, I was describing Britain in the mid-19th century. Some things don't change much, do they? One way the Church of England responded way back then was to re-launch Reader ministry in 1866, to help the Church reach people and places it was not good at reaching. Readers were the original pioneer ministers!

Today there is still a gap between Church and society. Thankfully, we have made some efforts to bridge the gap by having ordained ministers who are in secular appointment, by having pioneer ministers (lay and ordained) and by making some effort to help Christian people connect their faith with their work.

The Church of England is especially good at being a Christian voice in our national life, and at regional level too.

There are many people who are still far from the reach of any Church though. Today we are looking again for Readers who will help bridge that gap and bring God into the conversation.

That might take many forms. At Heartsease Angela Stewart is pioneering parish nursing. She brings her Reader ministry and nursing background together to help the church there minister healing and wholeness. At Colegate Catherine Waddams has brought her economic expertise as a professor at UEA into discussions about the ethics involved in such things as government policy on energy supply. There are countless Readers who are helping people to relate their faith to work and leisure.

