

Diocese of Blackburn
Healthy Churches Transforming Communities

Guidelines for 'Occasional Preachers'

Preaching the gospel is a delight and a privilege, and is a key part of the Church's mission and ministry. It is also an important and responsible task requiring a depth of Christian experience and understanding. That is why we want to equip those who preach in public worship, and help them reflect on their preaching.

All Christians can and should be sharing faith by giving their testimony, describing their experience of coming to faith and their relationship with Jesus. This is an essential part of discipleship – but is not the same as preaching the gospel in church regularly as an authorised ordained or lay minister. That is why the Canons of the Church of England require that a lay person should have the permission of the bishop to preach as well as the invitation of the local minister and why the bishop requires those who preach regularly to undergo theological training. When St Paul writes about the church and its worship in 1 Corinthians 11-14 he emphasises that the whole body of Christ is involved in worship but within the body there are different gifts which need to be recognised and used for the building up of the whole body. These gifts need to be exercised 'decently and in order' and with the proper authority (1 Cor 14.40). Though in the Acts of the Apostles there appears to have been a distinction between preaching and teaching, both dimensions have always been required to be properly authorised in the Church of England as can be seen from the Act of Uniformity and the Book of Common Prayer.

It is because we have such a high regard for this ministry and wish to honour our scriptural roots that those who preach in this diocese should have permission from the bishop and proper authorisation for they speak not only for themselves but also as a representative of the church. They also need permission from the incumbent of the parish who is responsible for the leadership of the of the local church's worship.

In order to enable lay people to preach publicly within a framework which acknowledges the need for good order and appropriate recognition, the bishop wishes to encourage and support the ministry of preaching which he shares with you. We have therefore developed a new, short course which will enable someone to preach, but only in their own parish. We are describing this role as 'Occasional Preacher'; it is an authorised, but not a licensed role.

There are other occasions when it is right to invite visitors or other members of the congregation to preach or give an address who have not undertaken training. For instance (this is not an exhaustive list):

- If a visiting preacher is licensed to preach in another diocese, s/he may preach in this diocese on an occasional basis in accordance with Canon C8.
- A representative of an organisation supported by the parish (eg a mission agency or charity) may be invited by the incumbent to speak about their work on a single occasion or an author may come and speak about their latest book
- Particular interest or seasonal talks: a member of the congregation may speak in public worship because of their particular experience or knowledge (eg how their faith impacts their job, or what it's like to be an oblate of a religious order)

- As part of discerning vocations, a member of the congregation who is exploring a possible call to authorised ministry may preach on up to five occasions, either in their own parish or in a parish where the DDO has arranged a placement with appropriate supervision.

‘Occasional preachers’

Sometimes people are identified as potential preachers, but there is a good reason why it is not appropriate for them to train for licensed ministry. Such people should have:

- Potential or a gift for preaching
- Sufficient Christian experience
- Good standing in the parish
- Been a worshipping member of the congregation for at least six months.

In such cases the incumbent and PCC may apply to the bishop for permission for them to preach from time to time (but not more than five times a year). Before this permission is applied for, the person concerned must have undertaken suitable training (eg the course for Occasional Preachers delivered by the Department for Discipleship and Ministry), and, following this training, have preached at least once in the parish. Please note that, if lay people complete the course and preach in the parish, and the incumbent and PCC decide not to apply for permission, they may require pastoral support and help in discerning where their gifts lie.

This permission will remain in place until either: a) the bishop withdraws it; or b) the incumbent and the PCC notify the bishop or the bishop’s representative that they wish it to be withdrawn. However, we recommend that the person’s ministry should be reviewed with the incumbent at least every three years, and six months after the appointment of a new incumbent. One aspect of this review should be to consider whether the person authorised as an occasional preacher has a vocation to a public licensed ministry (e.g. Reader or ordination) which will involve further training. Those who preach occasionally are encouraged to continue to develop their ministry, including practical aspects as well as Biblical and theological studies.

Permission is given through the incumbent, rather than the person concerned, emphasising the trust placed in the incumbent to exercise the role of discerning, calling out and supervising those with gifts for this ministry. When there is a vacancy, the Area Dean is responsible, in consultation with the Church Wardens, for the supervision of those who preach.

Requests for permission should be routed through the Director of Ministry who will liaise with the bishop about training and authorisation.

Church-goers often place a great deal of trust in those who lead public worship. We strongly recommend that the parish require potential Occasional Preachers:

- to obtain Standard DBS Clearance (Enhanced DBS Clearance is not available);
- to complete a Confidential Self Declaration form 2016;
- to complete the online Diocesan C0 Basic Awareness safeguarding course and attend the Diocesan C1 Safeguarding Foundation training.

The permissions included in this document are covered by a general authorisation of the bishop in accordance with Canon B18.

4 September 2017