

Getting to know our Faith and our Church

A question posed recently: "I would love to see members of the congregation preaching from the pulpit. What would you say to that suggestion?"

Before any reader takes my response as being too negative let me first note that there is a clear distinction made in church rules between preaching, teaching, speaking, giving testimony, etc. I therefore preface the longer part of the answer with the affirmation that it is good on suitable occasions for lay members of the church to speak about their faith, their journey to faith and or the way they try to live out their faith in day to day life.

The role of preaching within the church is reserved, under Canon B18, to those who are ordained and those lay members of the church who have the permission of the Bishop to preach. The relevant Canon states that preachers "shall endeavour with care and sincerity to minister the word of truth, to the glory of God and to the edification of the people" – the expectation is that to do so involves a degree of theological training and formation. Those trained as Readers hold licence to lead worship and to preach whilst other lay members of the church may be given permission, reflecting the different level of training and formation involved.

Some Dioceses, e.g. Guildford, have a specific training course to prepare lay members of the church to become authorised Occasional Preachers.

All Dioceses require any person who takes a role of leadership in the worship and teaching of the church to undergo safeguarding training and be subject to appropriate DBS checks. On occasions when any minister from another diocese is to be invited to assist in leading a service we are required to check, through our Bishops' Office, that the individual concerned has been DBS checked and is up to date with safeguarding training.

And so back to a more positive comment: I welcome the thought that some of our church members have things to say that it would be good to include by way of interview, conversation or other speaking within our services ... but not to preach without due permission, training and safeguarding clearance.