

**Paul Wilson, Diocesan Reader, St John's Dumfries, writes;** I was excited to hear that a new book had been published on Reader ministry – quite a rare event, as there are few books on this topic. One of the authors, Paula Gooder, a Reader in Birmingham Diocese, also produced a Lent course that I led earlier this year: *Lentwise: spiritual essentials for real life* (based on readings from John's gospel); the other author, Cathy Rowling is ordained and has been training Readers for over 20 years in York, Durham and Newcastle Dioceses.

This is a well written and readable book: the authors have a good grasp of Reader ministry and I found much in it of interest. Inevitably, it is written from a Church of England perspective, but much of the material is relevant to the Scottish Episcopal Church. Although over a third of the book is aimed at those exploring a calling to Reader ministry, there is plenty to engage those already involved in this ministry, from quite a fundamental viewpoint: I found this both stimulating and challenging!

The first and shortest part of the book sets out the context for Reader ministry, including both the history of the office and how current practice is worked out in different situations. I found particularly helpful the discussion of ministry in general, what is meant by *public* ministry in the Church, and how Reader ministry fits into the range and variety of other ministries. Here and throughout the book, stories and scenarios from actual Readers are used to illustrate the points being made, and to formulate questions on the handling of different situations in Reader ministry. This initial 'setting of parameters' I found most helpful in placing my own ministry within the spectrum of ministries the Church offers.

Part 2 of the book, on calling, selection and training, contains chapters on discerning a call, formal study, practical skills, and spirituality and formation, and emphasises both the preaching and teaching, and the pastoral possibilities for Reader ministry. The chapter on discernment has helpful cameos on a range of different approaches, as does the study one. Particularly useful in the practical skills chapter is a section on being a reflective practitioner, something I find very helpful when developing new areas of ministry; and there is practical advice for a range of ministries, including leading funerals. The short section on preaching is also most helpful. This chapter concludes with a section: 'All ministers remain works in progress' - this is often forgotten! The spirituality and formation chapter is helpful for placing Reader ministry within both our own personal spirituality and in its wider context of our lives outside the Church. Indeed, throughout the book the strength of Reader ministry being rooted in 'normal' life is emphasised.

The final third of the book looks at the vast range of Reader ministry in the Church, again using many examples drawn from real situations. The diversity of these is quite exciting and includes ideas for 'fresh expressions' of Church. The concluding 'rules and regulations', although helpful, are specifically related to the Church of England.

I think Readers will find this book both stimulating and practical, and a resource for encouraging others to consider a calling to our ministry.