

**ATTENTION**

Rectors

SUBJECT

Authorisation of Lay Ministry

DATE

18 December 2015

SDS CONTACT

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KEY POINTS

- In October 2015, the Synod passed the [Authorisation of Lay Ministry Ordinance 2015](#) which provides for new requirements for authorising lay ministry in parishes
- Under the new Ordinance, a lay person must generally hold an authority from the Archbishop to exercise the office of lay minister, or to deliver sermons on a regular basis, administer baptisms or conduct funerals in a church

ACTION ITEMS

- Rectors should ensure that any lay minister appointed on or after 21 October 2015 holds an authority under the Ordinance to exercise the office of lay minister and, as required, to deliver sermons on a regular basis, administer baptisms and conduct funerals in a church
- Rectors should ensure that by 31 December 2016 any lay minister appointed on a voluntary basis before 21 October 2015 holds an authority under the Ordinance to exercise the office of lay minister and, as required, to deliver sermons on a regular basis, administer baptisms and conduct funerals in a church
- Rectors should ensure that any other lay person (not being a lay minister) who delivers sermons on a regular basis, administers baptisms or conducts funerals in a church holds an authority from the Archbishop to do so

DETAIL**Purpose**

1. The purpose of this circular is to inform rectors about the new requirements for authorising lay ministry in parishes.

Background

2. Until recently, most requirements for authorising lay ministry in parishes were set out in the *Deaconesses, Readers and Other Lay Persons Ordinance 1981* (the “1981 Ordinance”).
3. At its session in 2015, the Synod passed the [Authorisation of Lay Ministry Ordinance 2015](#) (the “Ordinance”). The Ordinance replaces the 1981 Ordinance. The Ordinance seeks to simplify the requirements for authorising lay ministry and better reflect the way lay ministry is now undertaken.
4. The Ordinance came into effect on 21 October 2015.

Lay ministers require an authority

5. The Ordinance provides that a rector must not permit a person to exercise the office of lay minister in the parish or a church of the parish unless the person has been authorised to do so pursuant to the Ordinance.
6. For this purpose, a lay minister is a lay person appointed as a staff member to assist the rector undertake ministry in a parish or church, whether full-time or part-time or as an employee or volunteer.
7. The intention is that all lay persons who are on a parish staff ministry team must hold an authority from the Archbishop. This is because they are exercising a role of ministry leadership in the parish similar to and, in some cases, effectively indistinguishable from clergy licensed by the Archbishop.
8. It is important to note that a person who is authorised to exercise the office of lay minister may also need to be authorised to undertake certain ministries as part of that office. See below.

What about existing lay ministers?

9. A lay minister appointed on or after 21 October 2015 must hold an authority under the Ordinance (or an equivalent authority issued under the 1981 Ordinance) to exercise the office of lay minister.
10. However a lay minister appointed as an employee before 21 October 2015 may continue to exercise that office (and any ministries undertaken as part of that office) without an authority until the end of his or her term of appointment. If the lay minister is not an employee, that person may continue to exercise that office (and any ministries undertaken as part of that office) without an authority until 31 December 2016.

Certain lay ministries require an authority

11. The Ordinance provides that the rector must not permit a lay person (including a lay minister) to undertake the following ministries in a church unless the person has been authorised to do so pursuant to the Ordinance –
 - deliver sermons on a regular basis
 - administer baptisms
 - conduct funerals
12. The types of lay ministry which require the authority of the Archbishop are considerably fewer than those which require an authority under the 1981 Ordinance. In particular an authority is no longer required for a lay person to deliver sermons on an occasional basis. Further, an authority is no longer required for a lay person to read morning or evening prayer. However, as outlined below, there may be good reason to obtain an authority for such ministries even if not required by the Ordinance.

What about authorities issued under the 1981 Ordinance?

13. A person who holds an equivalent authority issued under the 1981 Ordinance may rely on this authority for the purposes of the Ordinance. So, for example, a person who has been authorised under the 1981 Ordinance to “conduct the office of the burial of the dead in any church at the request of the minister thereof” may continue to rely on this authority for the purposes of conducting funerals in any church at the request of the rector under the Ordinance.

Lay ministries which may be authorised by the Archbishop

14. Although certain lay ministries must be authorised by the Archbishop under the Ordinance, the Archbishop may authorise a broader range of lay ministries than those required to be authorised.
15. The following ministries may be authorised by the Archbishop –
 - conducting services of public worship
 - administering baptisms
 - conducting funerals
 - delivering sermons

- giving expositions on the aims, functions and needs of an organisation (ie. deputations)
 - performing pastoral duties
16. In each case, such ministries are to be exercised at the request or under the pastoral oversight of the rector.
 17. The Archbishop may authorise a lay ministry even when not required by the Ordinance where, for example, the rector requires such an authority or an authority is otherwise helpful for the purposes of undertaking the ministry in the context of a particular parish.

Further information

18. If you require information about how to apply for an authority under the Ordinance or the status of any existing authority under the 1981 Ordinance, please contact the Deputy Registrar, Mrs Catherine Rich, on 9265 1526 or at cal@sydney.anglican.asn.au.
19. For enquiries about the operation of the Ordinance itself, please contact the SDS Legal Counsel, Mr Steve Lucas, on 9265 1647 or at szl@sydney.anglican.asn.au.

ROBERT WICKS
Diocesan Secretary