



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
SUFFOLK

Lay Elders

Use your gifts to serve God and others in the name of Christ





Lay Elders began in our Diocese in the late 1960s as a pioneering experiment in lay ministry in our North Suffolk Deanery. Their ministry was developed and expanded so that by now there are over 500 Elders, spread throughout the whole Diocese.

An Elder's ministry is shaped by his/her gifts; availability and local needs. If a benefice has several Elders, each one's ministry may have a different focus. An Elder may do pastoral work, e.g. visiting people at home or in hospital, following up baptisms or funerals, visiting newcomers, working with young families or elderly people, visiting the local school.

Liturgically, an Elder may lead Morning and Evening Prayer and other forms of Service of the Word, read the Bible in worship, distribute bread or wine at Communion, and take Communion to people at home or in hospital. Although Elders are not authorised to preach, there are several alternatives to the sermon permitted that are open to Elders.

**Growing in God**

What are Lay Elders?

Elders are men and women chosen by the local Church and authorised by the Diocesan Bishop for ministry in the local Church and community.

They work mainly in the area of pastoral care and/or leading worship.

Their Commissioning takes place at any appropriate date in their parish Church. They serve initially for a maximum of three years, and may be re-commissioned for further periods of up to three years.

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I have always had a faith and I attended an Alpha course where we discussed God and faith and this launched my involvement in my local church and now my role as a Lay Elder.

As a Lay Elder my role is pastoral care involving going out supporting people in need in our community, that might be visiting those bereaved or ill. It is a huge honour as I know this is what God wants me to do.

Jacqui Studd
Lay Elder, St John's the Baptist, Saxmundham.

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Who may be an Elder?

Anyone who is baptised and confirmed, a regular communicant, in good standing in the local Church and community, and able to fulfil the tasks of an Elder, may be considered for this ministry. There is no lower or upper age limit.

Lay Elders are unique to Suffolk, so they are not named in Canon Law. However, their ministry falls within what Canon Law permits lay people to do. In effect the ministry of Lay Elder gathers into a coherent ministry, valid its own right, what Canon Law permits lay people to do occasionally.

Training

Elders' training is designed to be flexible enough to support people's diverse ministries, to build on their existing skills and experience, and increase their confidence.

The pattern of Elders' training across the Diocese is:

(1) Basic Training

A four-session course for groups which may be of interest to all, but which is necessary for all who are involved in, or considering, any kind of ministry, whether local (e.g. Lay Elder ministry) or national (e.g. Reader ministry or ordination).

(2) Further Training

One or both of the Enhancing Worship and Pastoral Care modules (according to the nature of the Elder's ministry) to be completed within 18 months of commissioning.

Training may be run by the Incumbent or other local ministers, or by another Diocesan Leader. The sessions are user-friendly and emphasise learning from experience of ministry. Training involves no formally assessed work though Elders may be asked to do some preparation between sessions.

Discernment

The first step which an Incumbent and PCC should take is to review ministry needs locally, and then to consider if Elder ministry might help to meet them. There should be thorough and well-informed discussion in ministry team and PCC.

The Incumbent and potential Elder need to talk together about what ministry could be offered, being realistic in the light of the Elder's circumstances. They need to consider how that ministry would be supported, and when and how Basic Training will be given.

After these discussions, an Incumbent may put before the PCC a proposal to request a specific person's appointment to Elder ministry. At least 75% of the PCC needs to vote in favour before you can proceed. If the Elder will work in more than one parish in the benefice, the PCCs of all the parishes in which the Elder will minister should discuss and vote.

A 'Request for Commissioning' form is then completed by Incumbent, Elder and PCC Secretary and returned to the Elders' Secretary.

The Incumbent arranges a Commissioning with the Diocesan or Suffragan Bishop, or Archdeacon. Usually, the 'Order of Service' for Commissioning is included in the main Sunday worship in the parish church. At Commissioning, Elders receive a Certificate signed by the Diocesan Bishop, signifying that they have the Bishop's authorisation to fulfil an Elder's ministry.

All candidates will need a DBS check and prior to Commissioning every Elder is required to complete a Declaration about their fitness to work with children and vulnerable adults and to attend a Safeguarding course, in line with Diocesan Policy on Safeguarding.

For more information

Please visit our website pages for exploring your Christian calling available [here](#), where we also have a list of [key dates](#). Resources specific to this role are also available on the diocesan website.

General enquiries about new Elders or their initial or ongoing training:

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THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

**Diocese of St Edmundsbury
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