
Authorised Lay Ministry



Handbook for Clergy and PCCS 2026

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What is an ALM?

General Information

What is an Authorised Lay Minister?

Authorised Lay Ministers (ALMs) are lay people active in church life, who have been identified by their parish as having a particular gifting, vocation or calling to lay leadership, i.e. those called to work collaboratively alongside their incumbent and wider ministry teams with a distinct focus on growing, nurturing and serving the wider parish community.

ALMs are nominated by their incumbent and PCC for training in line with their parish Mission Action Plan (MAP) and diocesan selection criteria. Once trained they are authorised by the Bishop of Manchester to carry out a mutually agreed ministry role back within their local parish context.

An ALM's authorisation lasts for 3 years after which time it can be reviewed, updated and renewed.

How are ALMs selected?

Authorised Lay Ministry is based on a collaborative model of ministry and is therefore not about any one person's desire to serve or minister. ALMs are authorised to work collaboratively as part of the wider ministry team, in a specific local context and with a mutually agreed ministerial role description. As such, any nominations for ALM must meet the diocesan selection criteria, align with the parish Mission Action Plan (MAP) and represent the expressed desire of the wider parish community as the incumbent, individual and PCC discern and respond to God's call together.

What's the difference between an ALM and a Licensed Lay Minister, e.g. Reader?

The Office of Reader is a lay ministry in the Church of England nationally accredited, episcopally licensed and governed by Canon Law. Readers have undergone more substantial theological training and are licensed by the Bishop to preach, teach and conduct funerals as key elements of their ministry. In this sense, Readers are more deployable and can work across parish boundaries with a higher degree of autonomy.

ALMs are different in that they are 'authorised' by the Bishop for an agreed collaborative ministry role within a specific parish context. An ALM's training is much shorter, has less theological depth and is generally more practical in its focus. In recognition of this, ALMs cannot work across parish boundaries without explicit permission and must have a higher level of supervision and support. ALMs must also apply to be re-authorised every 3 years.

Selecting an ALM

What are the steps?

The discernment and selection process

As ALM is collaborative form of ministry, this should be represented in the way that a parish goes about their discernment and selection process. The following steps are an example guide of how the selection process should work.

Step 1: Initial Enquiry or Approach

An individual can approach their incumbent or a member of the ministry team expressing their interest in ALM. Or, an individual can be identified as having a particular gifting, vocation or calling to lay leadership and be approached by their incumbent/member of the ministry team and asked to consider ALM.

Step 2: Prayer and Discernment

The individual is encouraged to meet with their incumbent or supporting minister to pray together and explore this sense of calling further. As part of this discernment process it is important to test which area of ALM ministry the individual feels called to and how this might align with the wider vision and mission goals of the parish as covered by the parishes Mission Action Plan (MAP). If further guidance or support is required with this process then contact can be made with the Local Ministry Officer.

Step 3: Guidelines and Selection Criteria

If it has been agreed by all involved in the discernment process that ALM feels like the right ministry route, then the next step before application is for the individual and supporting minister to get together and go through the ALM Selection Criteria. This can be found on page 6 and provides a helpful check list of application requirements.

Step 4: Application Form

If all involved in the discernment process feel that the individual and the parish meet the selection criteria then an ALM Application Form should be completed. This can be downloaded from the diocesan website and should be filled in initially by the individual applicant, supporting minister and Parish Safeguarding Officer.

It is very important on the application form to demonstrate how the applicant's role has been discerned and to present a draft ALM Ministry Role Description. This is important as it helps to provide a degree of clarity from the off. The application form also includes references and all the paperwork required to meet the diocesan safer recruitment guidelines.

Step 5: Final Approval and Sponsorship by PCC

Before the ALM Application Form can be submitted it must be approved and signed off by the PCC on behalf of the wider church community.

This is a very important step in the process because for a PCC to approve and sponsor a person to such a representative and public-facing ministry, they must be fully satisfied that this application meets the selection criteria, that the applicant will perform their duty appropriately and that the PCC will commit to supporting the individual during their training and in their future ministry role.

Step 6: Submission and Acceptance

Once the ALM Application Form has been submitted, along with all other necessary paperwork and references, the Local Ministry Officer and ALM Course Tutors will then go over all applications and in most cases have a short phone conversation with the applicant before communicating an offer of acceptance on to the course.

Step 7: Announcement, Prayer and Support

Once the application has been approved, it is good practice to celebrate and announce what's happening to the wider parish community so that they can both be aware of and support the individual. Where appropriate it would also be good to pray for the individual and, if required, tell the congregation more about ALM ministry. The Local Ministry Officer can offer support for this if required.

Step 8: Training Begins

For more details on what happens during the ALMs training period, please see later in the handbook.

ALM Selection Criteria

A copy of the current ALM selection criteria can be found below. The intention of the criteria is that it will sit alongside the wider processes of prayer and discernment in helping you to make sure that ALM is the right pathway for all involved.

- The applicant is a well-known, respected, and active member of the church community.
- The applicant exudes a deep love for God and for those they are being called to serve and minister to.
- The applicant has a solid and well-established foundation of prior Christian learning and exhibits a passion and enthusiasm for mission and discipleship.
- Key members of the parish community have identified that the applicant has a gifting, vocation and calling to lay leadership.
- There is a mutual understanding from all involved that ALM is built upon a collaborative model of ministry and that the applicant will be required to work alongside their incumbent and the wider parish ministry teams, i.e. ALM is not a solo or 'sit alone' ministry.
- The applicant has an identifiable ministry role that aligns with the diocesan vision statement, mission goals (growing, nurturing and serving) and the parishes' Mission Action Plan (MAP).
- All involved (including the wider parish) have a good understanding of the nature of ALM, how it functions and also how it differs from other forms of ministry e.g. Licensed Lay Ministry etc.
- All involved (including the wider parish) will take a proactive interest in the applicant's selection and training and will work together to actively support, develop and respond to the applicant's ministry.
- The current parish context is stable enough to be able to sufficiently support and oversee the applicant during their selection, training and ministry role back within the parish.
- There are no obvious or foreseeable concerns related to the applicant's ability to be able to engage fully with their training and subsequent ministry role back within the parish.

- There are no known reasons or concerns that the applicant would not meet all current diocesan safeguarding requirements and perform their duty appropriately.

Training an ALM

When sponsoring an ALM it is important to know what their training involves, what is expected of them and what they will be covering. Further details can be found in the ALM Course Prospectus but in principle, an ALM's training course is broken down into three parts that run from January to September:

Part 1: Induction, Core Module and Safeguarding Between January and Easter, candidates are inducted and undertake an eight-session Core Leadership Module.

During the Core Leadership Module ALMs will cover the following topics:

- The local and national context of lay ministry
- An introduction Christian leadership
- Church for a different world
- Being disciples and making disciples
- Sharing faith and inspiring mission
- Leading through times of change
- Collaborative ministry
- Sustaining and growing

Following this, ALMs will be asked to complete their online safeguarding training and will also be invited to attend the annual ALM Summer Conference.

Part 2: Ministry Electives from Easter to June, candidates will complete their chosen 12-session ministry elective. Current courses available include:

Courses on Offer for 2026

Ecology and Creation

Parish Administration, Finance and Governance

Prayer and Spirituality

Leading Small Groups

And as part of our Growing Younger Stream:

Ministry with Early Years

Children and Families Ministry

Mission and Evangelism

Worship and Liturgy



Youth Ministry

Part 3: Role Descriptions, Retreat Day and Authorisation

From July, candidates will work alongside their incumbent to finalise their ALM Ministry Role Description which must be agreed and approved by the PCC before their service of Authorisation at Manchester Cathedral in September. There is also a pre-authorisation retreat day to help the candidates prepare.

ALM Course Expectations

Below is a copy of the current ALM Course Expectations. **These are included in the ALM Course Handbook** and it is good for the supporting minister and sponsoring parish to be aware of these.

Attendance

To be considered for authorisation all participants must maintain a minimum attendance rate of 75%. This is required during both the Core Leadership Module and their Ministry Elective training. Attendance at the safeguarding training day is also compulsory.

Linkwork

To help participants get the most out of the Core Leadership Module they will be given linkwork to complete between each of the sessions. The linkwork will usually include a few simple questions to think about or some basic preparation work for the next session. Each linkwork is designed to take no longer than 20-30 minutes.

Learning Journal

During the course we encourage all participants to keep some form of learning record or reflective journal. This is intended to take no longer than 15-20 minutes after each session and is part of developing the skills of reflective practice. Participants will be given further support and guidance on this and will not be asked to share or submit what they have written.

Further Reading

There is no expectation for course participants to do a lot of extra reading. However, for those wanting to delve a little deeper there will be suggested resources and recommended reading lists provided on both the Core Leadership Module and Ministry Electives. Participants will also be given full access to the ALM borrowing library at Church House.

Parish Visitation(s)

As part of reflective practice and personal development, we ask that all participants arrange at least one parish visitation during their training period to a parish that is different from their own in terms of tradition and practices. Guidance and support on this will be provided.

Presentation / Book Review / Task

As part of the Ministry Elective training, all participants will be given the opportunity to complete a short presentation, book/ resource review or a similar task set by the Course Tutor. Guidance and support for this will be provided.

Group Worship

During both the Core Leadership Module and the Ministry Electives, participants will be invited to plan, prepare and participate in leading short reflective acts of worship before sessions. Guidance and support on this will be provided.

FAQs about training

Does the training involve any assignments, tests or exams?

There are no assignments, tests or exams on the ALM course. There is a limited amount of written work that is optional between sessions but the ethos of the course is more focused on group discussions, reflective practice and real-life application. However, for those wanting to take things deeper, there will always be suggestions for further reading, resources and ongoing development.

How much does the training cost?

All the costs of ALM training are met by the diocese but parishes are expected to support their candidates if help is required with basic costs such as travel expenses. Where finances are a barrier to participation, parishes are encouraged to contact the Local Ministry Officer for further advice and support.

Does the training have an age limit?

An ALM needs to be 18 or over at the time of authorisation, an “adult” in legal terms, or have special permission from the Bishop. However, there is no upper age limit for ALM.

How many ministry electives can an ALM do?

Post initial training, ALMs are free to train in any number of related ministry electives. Further elective training involves a light touch application process but still requires approval from the PCC and an updated Ministry Role Description if the ALM is to be authorised in a new or additional ministry area. If an ALM is not seeking to be authorised in a new ministry area and is doing the course as part of general ongoing training and development, then an updated Ministry Role Description is not required and a certificate of course attendance will be issued instead.

Once trained, how long does an ALM's authorisation last?

ALMs are authorised for a period of 3 years. After this time the parish must apply for the ALM to be re-authorised for a further 3 years. This then continues on a rolling cycle.

Supporting an ALM

What happens next?

Once an ALM has been authorised they will then begin their agreed ministry role back within the parish. It is important that this is not viewed as the end of the ALM's training but the start of their ongoing learning and development as they begin to put what they have learnt into practice. It is also important that the ALM continues to get the right support and care.

What support do ALMs get?

As part of forming an ALM's Ministry Role Description, it is very important to consider what ongoing care, support and oversight they will receive. Typically support can be found in the following areas:

Incumbent / Supporting Minister

The direct responsibility for an ALM will always fall under their incumbent or supporting minister and the Ministry Role Description should state how often they will meet and the nature of the meetings. The incumbent or supporting minister does not necessarily need to be the ALM's regular mentor but they should at the very least be involved in the ALM's Annual Health Check Review and in their 3 yearly reauthorisation process.

PCC

Along with the incumbent or supporting minister, the PCC has a duty of care for the ALM's ongoing care, support and development. This involves meeting any agreed expenses related to the ALM's role and their ongoing development but also a responsibility for ensuring that the ALM carries out their role appropriately in line with their agreed role description and diocesan guidelines.

Ministry Team

As ALM is a collaborative ministry it is important that ALMs are made to feel part of the wider ministry team. Where appropriate they should be encouraged to attend or input into team meetings and when necessary should be kept in the loop in matters related to their area of ministry.

Mentor / Spiritual Director

As part of forming their Ministry Role Description, every ALM should have an agreed mentor or spiritual director. As stated above, this does not necessarily have to be the incumbent or supporting minister but does need to be someone that the ALM can meet with on a regular basis for support, guidance and care.

Congregation

As part of gaining wider support, it is really important that the church congregation has a good understanding of the ALM's role and what they do. This can be done by locally celebrating the ALM's initial commissioning and recommissioning but also by raising their profile in services through updates and prayer.

ALM Chaplains

The diocese has a number of ALM Chaplains who are there to offer ALMs spiritual support, pastoral care and advice. Their details can be found on the diocesan website and chaplains can be contacted directly at any point.

Wider ALM / Lay Community

The greatest support for ALMs invariably comes from the ALM community and other lay ministers. ALMs have their own private Facebook group for sharing information, support and advice but are strongly encouraged to form their own networks of support.

Local Ministry Officer

The Local Ministry Officer is the main point of contact at St John's House for any issues relating to ALM. They are also there to support an ALMs incumbent and parish.

Guidelines and FAQs

Do ALMs have to be confirmed?

Generally, confirmation has been understood to be the gateway to Anglican ministry. In recent years, the admission of children to Communion before Confirmation, and the receiving into membership of those who were baptised and brought up in another denomination has meant that there is less clarity on the place of confirmation in the Church of England. In this context, those being nominated for ALM should generally either be confirmed or in the process.

Who is responsible for ALMs DBS checks?

As for other unlicensed church officers, it is the responsibility of the ALM's parish and PCC to ensure that his or her DBS check is completed and kept up-to-date. The possession of an up-to-date DBS check (i.e. within the last 3 years) must be confirmed at the time of initial authorisation and subsequently at each 3-year reauthorisation. The required level for an ALM is enhanced child and adult workforce, adult barred list and child's barred list.

Who is responsible for ALMs safeguarding training?

ALMs are required to undertake safeguarding training to foundation level. This is available as an online course and all new ALMs must complete this as part of initial training. Following initial training, it is the responsibility of the ALM's parish and PCC to ensure that his or her safeguarding training is kept up-to-date. The possession of an up-to-date safeguarding certificate (i.e. within the last 3 years) must be confirmed at each 3-year reauthorisation.

Can a parish nominate a candidate for ALM during a vacancy?

A parish in vacancy may nominate a candidate for ALM as long as it can be shown that the parish context is stable enough and that all involved will have a sufficient level of ministerial support and oversight. In such instances, the Churchwarden should complete the application process with the candidate and have this overseen by a Team Rector or Archdeacon before then being taken to the PCC for approval.

Can an ALM transfer to another parish?

If an ALM moves parish they can seek the support of their new incumbent and PCC to apply for a transfer of their authorisation. In such cases, the individual must first have become settled as a worshipping member of the new church for at least six months. The transfer must also

involve the mutual creation of a new ALM Ministerial Role Description that aligns the ministry of the ALM with the wider mission and goals of the parish MAP.

What happens if an ALM is unable to continue in their ministry?

If it has been mutually agreed for any reason that an ALM is unable to continue in their ministry, then an ALM Notice of Ending Authorisation form must be completed with the incumbent and signed off by the PCC. However, If the ALM is only unable to continue their ministry in the short term due to illness or personal circumstances, then an application may be put in for 'pending status' with an agreed review date. This should also be signed off by the PCC.

Can an ALM lead a whole service on their own?

It is important to remember that at its heart ALM is a collaborative ministry, so although a Worship ALM can lead Morning or Evening Prayer or an alternative non-Eucharistic form of worship, this should (whenever possible) be a responsibility that is shared as part of a wider ministry team and should always be done alongside the supervisory support, mentoring and guidance of their incumbent.

We actively encourage all ALMs to contribute to the worshipping life of the church and their community by using their particular training, gifts and talents to assist in services where appropriate.

Where no licensed minister is present (whether because the parish is in vacancy or for other reasons), the Churchwardens are those responsible for ensuring that the service is held and conducted properly. In such cases, it is also good practice that the responsibility for leading services should be shared amongst those present.

Can an ALM assist at Holy Communion?

An ALM may assist at Holy Communion as part of their agreed ALM Ministerial Role Description but must still be put forward as a Eucharistic Assistant in line with diocesan guidelines. The ALM's name should be recorded by the PCC and an updated certificate requested. Similarly, the names of any ALMs sharing in the wider ministry of taking Communion to the housebound and sick also need to be recorded by the PCC along with details of their training. The names of ALMs who are Eucharistic Assistants will appear on the certificate in the same way as any other person from the parish on the list.

Can an ALM work across multiple parishes?

Where it has been discerned to be appropriate to the local context, an ALM can work across multiple parishes in a benefice, team, partnership, mission community etc., so long as a clear ALM Ministry Role Description has been formed and signed off by all PCCs involved.

Are ALMs allowed to preach / give sermons?

ALMs are able and encouraged to do many things but they are not authorised to preach sermons. Church of England rules are very clear that only licensed ministers such as clergy or Readers are able to preach; this means that parish clergy (or churchwardens in a vacancy) should not be inviting ALMs to preach at the main Sunday services.

All Christians should be encouraged to contribute to worship in church by sharing their faith journey or describing how their faith relates to daily life - but this is not the same as someone exercising the distinctive ministry of preaching and teaching which requires licensing and further theological training. ALMs who feel called to a preaching or teaching ministry are encouraged to take the new reader training pathway towards licensed lay ministry.

What about giving talks?

The distinction between talks and sermons in church is unclear and probably neither helpful or honest. An incumbent may, on an occasional basis, invite someone who is not licensed to speak e.g. a youth worker at a Youth service. Likewise, people may be interviewed or give a testimony as part of a service. Furthermore, an incumbent may give one or two opportunities to speak to those discerning a call to ordained or Reader ministry.

This kind of informal arrangement should not become normal practice and should be closely supervised to ensure that the content, structure and delivery of the address will all be of sufficient quality. ALMs are not licensed to preach, which means that if they are invited to speak, it should be on the same basis as other lay people who do not hold a Bishop's license.

Can ALMs wear robes when assisting in leading services?

There have been recent changes in Canon Law giving greater flexibility for clergy not to robe, but there has also been a growing variety of robing for lay roles: vergers, acolytes, sub-deacons, crucifers etc. This is an issue where there are strong views and variant views, and where, in practice, different churches do operate in different ways when it comes to what minister's wear. Here are the current Guidelines for ALMs in the Diocese of Manchester:

- In most cases, ALMs do not wear robes when leading worship, just as those who read from the Bible, who assist administering the Eucharist, or who lead intercessions do not robe.

- ALMs who are leading or helping lead non-Eucharistic services do not normally robe.
- In some churches, where a number of people involved in the service robe – e.g. acolytes, crucifer, deacon – it may be appropriate for an ALM who is leading worship in the service to robe, either in a cassock or a cassock alb.

Where an ALM assists at a funeral it may well be helpful for the ALM to robe in a cassock or cassock Alb when the minister taking the service is also robed.

Further Information

Where can we find more information

Further information and course details are available on the diocesan website

Who can we contact?

You are welcome to contact **Beverley Angier** your Local Ministry Officer to discuss any matters related to the ALM programme.



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Our Vision

To be a worshipping, growing and transforming
Christian presence at the heart of every community.