

Different types of lay ministry can thrive

We're reshaping lay ministry across our diocese, with three distinct types now on offer. Do you feel called to any of them?

OYIN Alonge was a little suspicious of church leadership – which is why he delayed responding to God's call to be a Reader.

But the experience of being part of St Simon's Church in Southsea taught him that the role of a Christian leader is actually to serve others. He signed up to train as a Reader two years ago and will be licensed by our bishop in June.

"Culturally there was this gap, which wasn't filled until I got to St Simon's," he said. "I had a relationship with God and experienced him at church, but couldn't see how that translated into how people actually lived their lives, Monday to Saturday.

"But at St Simon's, everyone served everyone else, including the leaders. We served the community, feeding the homeless and disadvantaged, and everyone got involved in cleaning the church, doing the IT, and leading groups for families or asylum seekers. It's a unique place with a focus on caring for 'the other'."

He will become a Reader, which is one kind of **Licensed Lay Minister (LLM)**. He'll be licensed on June 20 alongside not just other Readers but also a lay pioneer minister. These roles involve two years of academic training, and they are licensed to serve across the diocese. The LLM role is different from the



Oyin Alonge

two other types of lay ministry now being offered by our diocese, and supported by our Lay Ministry Discipleship Officer the Rev Matt Grove.

We're launching a new one-year diocesan course for **Authorised Lay Ministers** in September, who will be able to serve in their parish or benefice. Their training will include a specific specialism. And the third type of lay minister explored on these pages is those who are **Locally-Recognised** – they are

LICENSINGS 2026

Lay ministers (June 20, 11am):

Oyin Alonge (to serve as a Reader at St Simon's, Southsea); **Elizabeth Alford** (as a Reader at Bramshott and Liphook); **Clive Ellam** (as a Reader at Holy Trinity and St Columba, Fareham); **Elena Aghasi** (as a Reader at St Luke's, Southsea); and **Steven Smart** (as a lay pioneer minister at Bridgemary and Elson).

Peter Smith (Crofton parish) will also be licensed as a Reader separately.

recruited, trained and serve in their own parish.

Born in Norwich from Nigerian heritage, Oyin Alonge went to school in Nigeria between the ages of four and 10, and spent a year in Zimbabwe before returning to Nigeria. He was then back in the UK to study A-levels from the age of 17. He trained as an accountant, and his job now involves training others to be accountants. He and his wife Ugo have two girls, Tia, aged 13, and Zara, 9.

He was working in Aldershot and attending a large church in Guildford. It was the latest of several churches where the weekly sermon seemed to be the highlight of the service, and the focus seemed to be on the pastor to rally the



Top: Steven Smart leading Bubble Church at St Matthew's, Bridgemary; below: Elena Aghasi (centre) acting as a server in our cathedral

faithful. Oyin and his family moved to Portsmouth and initially got involved with a similar church here.

But his daughter Tia hadn't settled in that church, so Ugo took her to St Simon's. They fitted right into the toddler group and Sunday activities for children. After six months, Oyin joined them and discovered things he had been missing. He joined the PCC and is now its treasurer.

"The vicar, Jackie Twine, approached me three years ago about becoming a Reader," he said. "I didn't know about the concept, but my experience had taught me to be suspicious of church leadership. I deferred for a year, but then I read a book I'd been given about how everyone is called."

The 49-year-old studied for two years at Sarum College in Salisbury, enjoying residential weekends as

well as studying at home. He also tried his hand at preaching and leading services at St Simon's.

"It's a fantastic course and I enjoyed the fact that people can agree or disagree on certain issues, and yet everyone is heard and everyone can thrive," he said. "The theological reflections allowed us time to think more deeply about Bible passages.

"And the first module – about the arrangement of worship – helped me to understand the liturgical elements of services. It has given me an understanding that there is a broader 'diet' than just preaching.

"However, I am now on the preaching rota at St Simon's. I have no interest in being the kind of church leader where the focus is all on me. But it is humbling to be able to share something of what God

LICENSED

eg. Readers and lay pioneers

- Two-year academic/formational training
- Licensed to serve across the diocese
- Accountable to the bishop
- Support and training from the diocese

AUTHORISED

eg. pastoral assistants, worship leaders, preachers and youth/children's ministers

- One-year diocesan training course
- Authorised to serve within parish/benefice
- Accountable to the bishop, supervised by the incumbent
- Support and training from the diocese

LOCALLY-RECOGNISED

eg. Anna Chaplains, home group leaders, those assisting with children/youth groups, those in prayer/listening ministry, and occasional worship leaders

- Local training course
- Commissioned locally to serve within single parish/benefice
- Accountable to the incumbent
- Support and training provided locally

has been teaching me."

And when Elena Aghasi is licensed as a Reader in our cathedral, it will also be a significant milestone – for several reasons.

She originally came from Iran, from a family of Assyrian Christians, and was active in her local church. But tradition there dictates that