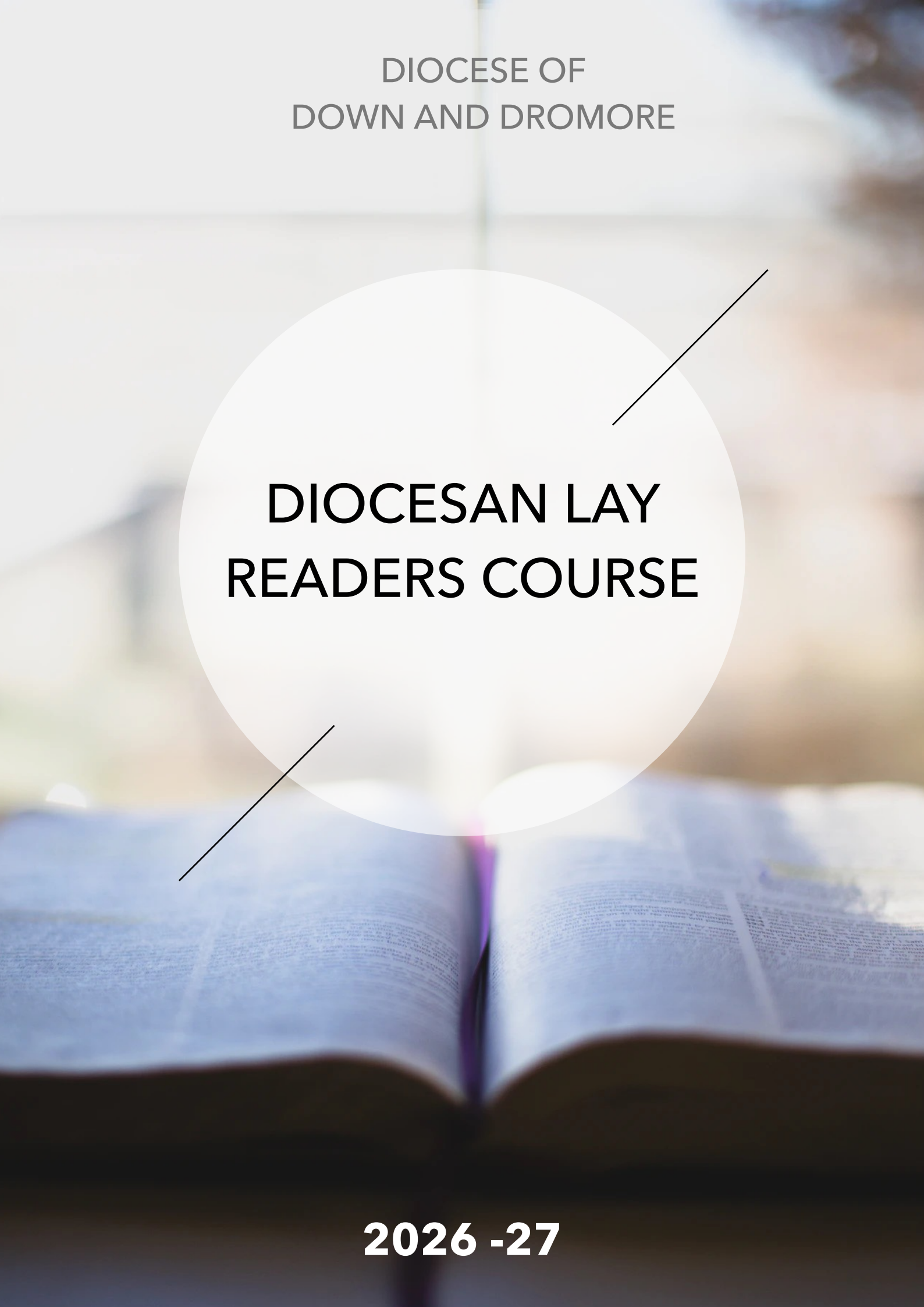
DIOCESE OF
DOWN AND DROMORE

DIOCESAN LAY READERS COURSE



2026 -27

DIOCESE of
Down & Dromore

…become part of the growing number of new leaders, of various ages and backgrounds, helping to lead in church ministry…

Diocesan Lay Readers are men or women, old or young, from a wide variety of backgrounds who have a significant voluntary role in assisting the ministry of the church. They are authorised by the Bishop to preach, teach, lead worship and engage in pastoral work. Most Readers will minister in their own parishes but they can also assist in other churches when needed.

As the role of a Reader in teaching and leading is significant, potential Readers are given training in biblical studies, theology, ministry and preaching over a 15 month period before they are commissioned.

Readers are a valuable support for parish ministry and we have been blessed with 65 new candidates in recent years. However more are needed!

If you think that God might be placing on you a calling to serve him more fully through a teaching and leadership role within the church, then a Diocesan Lay Reader role may be for you.

DO YOU FEEL A CALLING TO TEACH AND LEAD OTHERS IN CHURCH WORSHIP?

Vocation and Nomination

The vocation or call to become a Reader may be felt by an individual or may come from outside; from their minister, a fellow worshipper, or from someone else entirely. If you think that God might be calling you to Diocesan Lay Reader ministry you should consider if you:

- Have an active faith in prayer, study and ministry to others.
- Have a consistent involvement in ministry in your local church.
- Have a desire to teach, preach and communicate the faith biblically.
- Are prepared to commit your time and energy to this calling.
- Have the support of others around you in this calling.

As Diocesan Lay Readers minister to the local church it is necessary for all candidates to have the support of their church and a nomination from their Rector/church leader in order to proceed. Therefore it is important to talk to your minister who will advise you and prayerfully consider whether to recommend you for the course.

TRAINING PROGRAMME 2026 -2027

The training for Diocesan Lay Readers begins in late November 2026 and finishes in February 2028, with successful candidates being commissioned by the bishop in April/May 2028.

The training is designed to cover all the key aspects of Reader ministry and to equip you with the knowledge, skills and practical experience to effectively support the church.

The training course has 2 strands:

Certificate in Christian Theology and Practice.
This distance learning certificate is run by the Church or Ireland Theological Institute with Trinity College, Dublin. It aims to provide the tools for developing theological foundations, personal discipleship and a readiness to serve others. It comprises an introductory weekend and 6 modules taught at certificate and diploma level over six further weekends. The introductory 'Fit For Purpose' retreat weekend which inaugurates the programme takes place in the November before the modules commence. It combines taught sessions and discussion groups with times of worship and reflection, and explores the fullness of Christian vocation. Over 6 weekends in 2027 students undertake modules on the Old Testament, Creeds, New Testament, Public Worship, Theological Thinking and Spirituality & Self-Understanding.

The certificate is designed to allow participants to develop a grasp of theological concepts, and to learn critical and reflective approaches to subjects which they will have experienced in practical ways in worship and private devotional discipline. In addition to classroom contact, there will be further online engagement, both with tutors and in self-study exercises, through web based content.

A variety of methods of assessment, from short creative exercises, to longer pieces of writing, to personal-reflective tasks, is used in each module to accommodate different learning styles.

Diocesan Training
This involves around 9 evening sessions over the 15 months focussing on developing the knowledge and skills to deliver biblical preaching and lead liturgical worship in church. These practical skills will also be assessed via 2 preaching assignments and a short liturgy assignment.

- Training Support: The support for each candidate undertaking this course will be a crucial element in helping their development as Diocesan Lay Readers. Each meeting of diocesan candidates will include some tutor group support as well as one-to-one support from the Diocesan Warden of Readers and Diocesan Development Officer.
- 2030 Readers: The diocese is keen to encourage younger Diocesan Lay readers in their 20's and 30's to play a full part in the leadership of the church. Candidates in this age range will, in addition to participating in the rest of the training, be offered further help to develop their leadership skills.

SELECTION

Key characteristics that candidates should be developing for Diocesan Lay Reading Ministry include vocation, faith, leadership, relationships and spiritual disciplines.

The selection process is designed to test the vocation of applicants for Reader ministry and to assess both their potential for serving and developing as a Reader and their ability to cope with and benefit from training. There are 3 steps:

Step (1) **Vocation**

This involves your prayerful consideration of whether God is calling you to be a Diocesan Lay Reader and a discussion with your local minister or church leader. At this point it may be helpful to also meet with the Diocesan Warden of Readers to informally talk about what is involved and get more information.

Step (2) **Nomination**

Should you and your minister both believe that this is a calling you would like to test further your minister will nominate you to the Warden of Readers for the diocese, who is responsible for Lay Reader Training. You will also be asked to fill out a short application form to accompany this nomination.

Step (3) **Interview**

Once nominated, the Warden of Readers will arrange a time for you to be interviewed by a panel of 3-4 people. These interviews are designed to help explore, in a supportive environment, the key characteristics that candidates should have for Diocesan Lay Reading ministry.

Other selection criteria: Previous qualifications or courses regarding Biblical knowledge will help with the application process but are not needed if the applicant can demonstrate at interview their regular biblical engagement. Candidates should also have been (or willing to be) confirmed in the Church of Ireland. A final 'exit' interview will take place with the bishop at the end of the course and before commissioning.

Cost

The total cost for the course is £1,500. The diocese pays one third of the amount with the remaining two-thirds shared by agreement between the sending parish and the candidate. This sum can be paid in instalments. Before applying you should talk to your parish about financial support for this course as most parishes will help with course fees. Bursaries may also be available were needed.

The cost includes all the teaching, materials and accommodation and food provided during study weekends in Dublin but it does not cover travel expenses.

Key dates:

Selection Process:

30th September 2026 Closing date for nomination letters and application form

7th October 2025 Interview evening for candidates

Training Programme:

Dates	**Study**	**Venue**
27-29 November 2026	C of I Theological Institute introductory 'Fit For Purpose' w/e	Dublin
Jan-Feb 2027 ***or*** Jan-Feb 2028	Diocesan Preaching Course over 5 evenings	Banbridge
8-10 January 2027	CITI Weekend -Old Testament and the Creeds	Dublin
19-21 March 2027	CITI Weekend -Old Testament and the Creeds	Dublin
16-18 April 2027	CITI Weekend -Theological Thinking & Leading Public Worship	Dublin
11-13 June 2027	CITI Weekend -Theological Thinking & Leading Public Worship	Dublin
24-26 September 2027	CITI Weekend -New Testament and Spirituality	Dublin
5-7 November 2027	CITI Weekend -New Testament and Spirituality	Dublin
March 2027 ***or*** March 2028	Diocesan Parish Readers' Course (leading church worship) over 4 sessions.	Belfast
April 2028	Diocesan Reader commissioning	D & D

For more information:

Contact Andrew Brannigan on 07950 846621 or abrannigan@downdromorediocese.org

Name:

Address:

Contact Phone No:

Contact E-mail:

Parish Church:

D.O.B:

Place of Baptism:
(leave blank if you are not baptised)

Date of Baptism:

Place of Confirmation:
(leave blank if you are not confirmed)

Date of Confirmation:

Occupation:

Academic Achievement:
Please list any academic qualifications of A-level standard and above, including grades attained:

Please note any other relevant academic achievements or courses of study, including module titles if applicable:

Do you have the support of your church rector/leader?
(If so please enclose or email a nomination from them)

Give a brief outline of your involvement in your local parish:

Give a brief outline of your faith journey to date:

Finally, please outline why you wish to pursue Lay Reading within the Diocese of Down and Dromore:

Signed: _____ Date:_____

DATA PROTECTION ACT

By signing this application form you are giving consent to the Diocese of Down and Dromore to hold and process your personal data for all aspects pertaining to your application, selection, training and future ministry within the Diocese and wider Church of Ireland.

The Diocese may check the information collected with third parties or with any other information held by the Church of Ireland. We may also use or pass to third parties, information to prevent or detect crime, to protect public funds, or in other ways as permitted by law.

You can withdraw or change your consent at any time by contacting Tracey Taggart at Diocesan Offices. Please note that all processing of your personal data will cease once you have withdrawn consent, other than where this is required by law, but this will not affect any personal data that has already been processed prior to this point.

By signing this application form it will be assumed that you agree to the processing of sensitive personal data (as described above), in accordance with the principles set out in the Data Protection Act.

Please return your application and a Rector's nomination to Andrew Brannigan at the Diocesan Office, 285 Castlereagh Road, Belfast, BT5 5FL or email to abrannigan@downdromorediocese.org by 30th September 2026