

resource sheet 14

theological training

Choosing a theological college or course is a very personal matter. The decision is yours, in conjunction with your diocesan director of ordinands (DDO), but throughout the whole process you must be looking for the type of training that will best prepare you for future ministry, whilst meeting the needs of your family, if you have one. How and where your vicar or curate trained may not necessarily be the best for you. It may seem obvious, but it is crucial to pray – and to ask others to pray – about this important decision.

College or course?

The first question to consider is whether the training should be at a theological college or on a theological course. Training at a college takes two or three years (depending on factors such as your needs in training) and will involve lectures, seminars, group work, individual study, placements and the like. Training on a course normally takes three years and involves many of the same elements, but on

midweek teaching evenings (or work with a local tutor), weekend courses and summer schools. Bishops' Advisers at an Advisory Panel may recommend to the bishop whether a candidate trains at a college or on a course, but you will be expected to have addressed the issue for yourself prior to the Panel.

Theological courses will be the norm for those who train for non-stipendiary ministry, since they are not normally in a position to leave their job for two years to go to college! However, it is also possible for those over 30 to train for stipendiary ministry on a theological course. Details of what is involved in both types of training are to be found in the booklet *Theological Training in the Church of England*, produced by the Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council, and obtainable direct from the Ministry Division, or from your DDO. Both methods have advantages and disadvantages and these must be considered carefully.

Training on a course is often easier

on families if children are not at a stage in their education when a move could be detrimental. It is a lot cheaper for the Church and may be more financially comfortable for the student. It also provides opportunities for relating your study to everyday life when, for example, you may be facing ethical issues at work which you were considering the previous evening on your course.

This type of training can place enormous pressures on the student and is therefore much more difficult if your employment demands long overtime or periods away from home which would prevent attendance at central teaching evenings or tutorials. (This is obviously less of a problem if the course uses a local tutor system in place of central teaching evenings.) Between ten and fifteen hours of private study are required each week and so local church responsibilities must be shed if you are going to cope with your employment and maintain healthy family relationships. While the amount of time spent with your fellow students on a course is clearly

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less than at a college, the level of fellowship and involvement with others on courses can be very high during those times together.

Training at a college provides the opportunities for connected study (with ready access to libraries), in that you have the time to see particular subjects through from start to finish without the interruptions of workaday life. Subjects can often be studied in greater depth this way. It also brings you into community life. The deep friendships forged here can be a source of support throughout your future ministry. It can also be frustrating as large numbers of Christians tend to find it harder to live together than non-Christians,

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for their expectations of each other will be higher! The opportunity to be part of an ongoing daily worshipping community can be a real plus in helping you to grow in your faith.

Training at college will usually involve a change of location, which may unsettle children who will have to face another move at the end of the training. It must also be said that levels of financial support, though meant to be adequate, are rarely generous, and so a change in lifestyle will usually be required. This may, of course, be a useful adjustment before living on a clergy stipend! (For more information about the financial side of training, see CPAS Resource Sheet 16, *Grants for Training*.)

Mixed-mode training

As its name suggests, mixed-mode training is a mixture of residential

and non-residential. However, it is also different from both, as it allows students to study while working in either an existing or new church context. These courses are usually four years with students being ordained deacon after two years, and a priest a year later.

Mixed-mode training is only available in certain colleges, so you will need to find out more details from individual colleges.

Looking around

If you are to train on a course you will generally have to study on the one that serves your diocese, unless you live in a boundary area between two courses and can travel easily to a neighbouring course. Whilst the colleges are acknowledged to represent particular strands within Anglicanism, the courses are intended to be non-party and will therefore be coloured theologically by their staff and students.

Most candidates will have begun to explore where they might train prior to attending a Bishops' Advisory Panel and may have been offered provisional places subject to the decision of their own bishop in the light of the Panel recommendation. For those who hope to train at a college, approaches to theological colleges should never be made without the knowledge and approval of your DDO. Some DDOs prefer candidates not to visit colleges before their Advisory Panel: do find out how your DDO works on this. It is valuable to visit more than one college as a part of this process. Those who are unsure whether to train at a college or on a course may visit both at this stage. You will need to write to individual colleges or courses for prospectuses, and further information can be gleaned from websites. The addresses are to be found in the Ministry Division booklet, *Theological Training in the Church of England*.

Choose those that you wish to visit and write to request an interview. You will need to visit the college midweek in term time to see the place at work. Ideally you will have the opportunity to share in worship and sit in on some teaching as well as meeting staff and students plus some of their spouses. If you are married or engaged your partner should visit the college with you, though you will gain more if you avoid taking your children.

Aims of training

Throughout the visit you must be asking lots of questions – but what are the issues that need to be addressed? In broad terms theological training should aim to do five things:

Help you to grow spiritually

It is clear from the Pastoral Epistles that in the lists of qualities needed for Christian leadership, most are concerned with Christian maturity (e.g. 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9).

Teach you to think theologically

You need to have a growing working knowledge of the Bible and Christian doctrine, and to learn to think critically. You also need to be able to relate your knowledge of the Christian faith to the world around and to help others to do the same.

Develop your pastoral skills

The New Testament pattern is that teaching and caring go hand in hand (e.g. Ephesians 4:11-12 is worked out in Paul's own life in Acts 20:17-35). Your training should give plenty of practical help in the areas of preaching and other pastoral matters.

Equip you for teamwork

As the Church rediscovers the corporate nature of leadership from the New Testament, ministers must be trained to work with others.

Prepare you for your role as a leader in a mission-shaped church

The Church generally and ministerial

training in particular have been greatly influenced by the 2004 report *Mission-shaped Church*. While inherited models of church will continue to be important, there is increasing emphasis on 'Fresh Expressions' of church, and theological training needs to prepare you to lead a church which seeks to engage with our 'spiritual' but 'post-Christendom' culture.

As you look at the colleges and courses and talk to students, ask if the training, the staff and the community life on offer will help, teach, develop, equip and prepare you in these ways.

Questions to consider

What is the theological stance of the college/course?

Most college students are happiest to train within their own tradition, where they find that an agreed basis for study can save a lot of time in getting down to the real work. A move outside your tradition will need to be considered carefully. Issues to consider wherever you are considering training include:

- Will you be made to look at every strand of theological thought in your studies or only those favoured by the staff?
- Will the staff and your fellow students accept or look askance at your theological position?
- How does the college/course view ecumenical links?

What academic courses are on offer?

- Is there a course that will stretch you academically without imposing undue pressure?
- Are there links with other educational institutions, such as universities?
- Does the college/course have adequate library facilities or access to other theological libraries nearby?
- What kind of learning and assessment methods are used?

- If you wish to study for a theology degree, is this on offer?
- If you are a theology graduate, is there a course that will take you on in your thinking and not simply cover old ground?
- What about opportunities for postgraduate theological study?
- What are the particular current concerns and interests of the staff?
- On a course, how flexible are assignment deadlines when unexpected work pressure occurs?

What about the practical and evangelistic ministry training?

- Is there adequate training in preaching – and voice production?
- What pattern of parish (and other) placements is there?
- Are there opportunities to specialise, perhaps in rural or urban ministry?
- If you want to gain a particular experience (in a factory or prison, for example), are such establishments within easy reach?
- How is evangelism regarded, taught and practised?
- If there are mission teams from the college/course, what are the aims of such teams?
- What is the balance of academic and practical work?
- In what ways are they integrated?
- What is the range and balance of academic, church and mission expertise and experience amongst the staff?

What about the worshipping life?

- Are you 'at home' with the style of services – but not so comfortable that you will never be made to think outside of your own tradition?
- Are there opportunities for worshipping and sharing fellowship in small groups?
- Will worship together nourish you in your faith?

- Is there teaching on spirituality?
- Does the college course draw upon a variety of forms of spirituality in its worshipping life?
- Will worship help to prepare you for leading parish worship (for example in the variety of styles used)?
- If you train in a college of another tradition, will you grow through experiencing the worship of another tradition most days of the week for two or three years?

What's the community life like?

Marriage and singleness

- Are single students taken seriously or seen only as potential babysitters?
- Are singles helped to be creative and positive about their lifestyle?
- Is there help for married students in working out their relationships, with opportunities for singles to understand life on the other side of the fence?

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Can marriage partners and children eat in college?

- Is there any provision for children during main chapel services?
- Can partners attend classes and are special courses run for wives or husbands?
- Are there crèche facilities?
- Is there a group for wives (or husbands) for fellowship and preparation together?

How welcome are women students?

Most colleges and courses now have similar numbers of men and women in training, but women are the minority in a few colleges. This is obviously significant if you are a woman, but it is also of concern to a man! Smaller numbers of women are not necessarily a bad thing, as long as they are wanted and not simply tolerated.

- Is there good balance of women and men on the full-time staff of the college/course?
- What is the attitude to women in leadership?
- Is inclusive language used (about the people) in worship and in the Bibles?

Will you be helped to develop personally?

Personal growth and development is crucial if you are to understand your 'representative focus' role.

- Is there help available with spiritual growth (e.g. through spiritual directors or small groups) and opportunities for retreats and quiet days?
- What pastoral support do the staff offer?
- Are you encouraged to build lifelong friendships for future support?

What about the locality?

- Is there appropriate housing available? Families usually need to rent or buy in the area.
- If you are single is it possible to live out of college, should you wish to do so?
- Is there year-round accommodation for single students who need/want it?
- Is the schooling adequate, especially if you have children with special educational needs?
- What about employment if your partner needs to find a job – will he or she be able to find work nearby?

Where do you feel at home?

This is subjective but it is important. The college you choose will be where you work, worship, eat and live for two or three years and you do need to be sure that you fit. It is equally important that your husband or wife is sure that he/she will fit, too!

Deciding

So, ask lots of questions and talk it over with your DDO, clergy and friends. Do remember that ordained friends will always be looking back to their own training experience, and that all colleges and courses change constantly with every fresh intake of students or new staff member. Above all be sure to pray about this choice and to get others to pray with you and for you.

Finally, do help the colleges and courses you visit by letting everyone know when you have decided which offer of a place to accept. If that place is provisional, the admissions tutor needs to know whether or not you are recommended for training following your Advisory Panel.

resource sheets

Download sheets free of charge from www.cpas.org.uk/vocationresources or buy a complete set of printed sheets at www.cpas.org.uk/shop. For bulk copies of individual sheets, phone 01926 458461 or email mnorris@cpas.org.uk.

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