

VALIDATION QUESTION 3

What is the process and content of ministerial education and formation which will most appropriately prepare candidates to begin the lifelong exercise of these ministries?

1 Introduction

It is well established and accepted that formation and training is a life-long exercise. However, the question is how might the formal period of ministerial formation and training be most appropriately shaped in order to best equip ordinands for ministry. There are a number of key aspects. First, the variety of pathways and flexibility of pathways through training that are available. These range from residential theological education to part-time courses to context-based training. Each of these methods and approaches will have their advantages and disadvantages and be suitable for different candidates dependant upon a wide range of circumstances. However, it is important for an institution to take some stock of its own rationale for pursuing one particular model of training and formation and the degree of flexibility which it will seek to include. It is also important to set out and reflect clearly that process and content of formation and training methodologies used by the institution. Finally, especially for a college, often, as in the case of Wycliffe, set by its Deed of Trust in a particular tradition of faith and formation, it is important to reflect upon the impact and influence of the tradition and how that relates to the wider church and its needs.

2 The rationale for residential training and formation

It was Billy Graham who remarked that if Jesus undertook 30 years of training for 3 years of ministry, it did not seem unreasonable for future Christian ministers to undertake 3 years of training for 30 years of ministry. Wycliffe Hall stands unequivocally behind the conviction that a period of concentrated full-time training is overall the form of theological training and formation that will best equip candidates for ordained ministry. Clearly there needs to be some flexibility around this basic, core conviction, but for most students to come together in a residential community of training and formation is going to provide the best pathway. This period of concentrated personal and corporate theological study, centred in a worshipping community, and where self-awareness and spiritual formation and development also lie at the heart of the rationale of an institution such as Wycliffe. This lays down firms foundations for a lifetime of ministry. The advantages of such an approach can be summarised as follows:

- A concentrated period of study and reflection, living in the new world of the bible
- Opportunity away from the pressures of work for self-awareness and development
- The opportunity for corporate spiritual formation as well as individual
- The advantages of being part of a community of daily prayer and worship

The Vice-Principal of the Hall, the Revd Dr Simon Vibert wrote this in an article for the *Church of England Newspaper* :

“Clearly, full-time is not the only way to train, and most theological colleges offer a variety of part-time methods of training alongside the traditional form...Life is fast paced, busy and activity driven. Ministry is about more than learning and doing tasks. It is about discipleship, life sharing and vocation. This takes time. In a full time training institution ministry continues in and through the student body. Full time Christian training offers something that Protestants have often not been good at, namely, accountable ‘up close and personal’ community. It’s challenging, but the stories shared above demonstrate its tremendous value.’

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3 The process of formation

What is the process of formation? To put it another way, what are the components and influences which go together in the shaping and forming of an individual to prepare them for priestly ministry and how are these processes shaped by Wycliffe Hall as an institution. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this is to set out some general steps in the process of formation, and for each one give an example of how Wycliffe prepares and shapes a candidate in each instance and then to summarise at the end how these factors are held together. A possible way of breaking down the process is as follows:

3.1 *Self-awareness*

Ordinands arrive at theological college with a vast range of experiences which have shaped who they are. This will include personal, family, spiritual and secular experiences. The individual will have adopted practices of prayer and discipline but may never have assessed the interaction of these factors nor how to grow further in relationship with God.

Wycliffe addresses these early issues of self-awareness through guided sessions on the *transition* into training, through the formation and development of fellowship groups and cell groups and through individual pastoral interviews with an individual tutor. Quite early on in the process issues may emerge that require further dedicated work with individuals or more specialised assistance.

3.2 *Dismantling and rebuilding*

It is a common experience of ordinands coming to college that they feel de-skilled from their gifts and previous responsibilities. However, the space to reflect and the initial steps towards self-awareness very often also leads to something of the mask, façade, presenting face of the individual being broken as they are forced to confront issues in their personal life and journey, and indeed to face these questions before God. Simply left as it is, this could be very damaging. However, due to the fact that we believe in a loving God, full of grace and truth, means that individuals can be helped to rebuild from the dismantling that has taken place. This can be a very constructive process and reflects something of the conforming of the heart, mind and life to Christ.

The main process used here by Wycliffe is the *Spiritual Formation for Leadership* course. It is led by an associate member of staff, the Revd Simon Walker. This course consists of a series of plenaries and also a number of one-to-one sessions. It deals with issues of recognising our leadership style, about our 'front-stage' presentation, the image of who we are, and our 'back-stage' presentation of the person we truly are in God's image. Hence ordinands are encouraged to be the person God created them to be and to recognise when they are presenting a different image.

3.3 *Corporate spirituality*

Ordinands, perhaps especially those from the evangelical tradition who most frequently are those that come to Wycliffe, are often highly individualistic in their spirituality. Aside from corporate worship on Sundays, they often have little or no experience of any form of community spiritual life.

Wycliffe introduces the idea of daily prayer and worship as a *community* from the beginning. The welcome and orientation programme contain regular worship and prayer together as a community.

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Bible readings are given, the sacrament of Holy Communion is shared and the idea introduced that we read, pray and worship corporately. This is then reflected across the pattern of the weeks of term. A combination of approaches to our corporate prayer life are used. Hence there is both corporate worship, small group prayer and worship and a college quiet time. Many students find the corporate provision and approach to worship and spirituality deeply formational in their Christian journey.

3.4 Personal spiritual formation

It is clear that after the sort of process outlined above, some individuals will seek and need more individual attention on their spiritual journey. This may involve discussion and reflection upon matters of faith, issues perhaps that can only be discussed in a private and confidential setting with a spiritual adviser. Part of the process of self-awareness is the recognition that the rebuilding and putting back together cannot be done alone, indeed it cannot be done in human strength at all. Ultimately it is a work of the Spirit, but God has equipped individuals with gifts to help others on this spiritual journey.

Wycliffe approaches this in a number of ways. First, there is the work of individual fellowship group tutors. Second, we have provided around 50% of the time of the Tutor in Prayer, Spirituality and Mission to be available for one-to-one spiritual conversations. These may of course range from an individual struggling with their prayer life to a serious crisis of faith. The Revd Dr Liz Hoare is an experienced parish priest and teacher, trained and gifted in spiritual direction. Dr Hoare is able to give significantly from her own time to this task, but she is also able to refer students to a range of external spiritual directors and counsellors.

3.5 Spiritual disciplines

In a sense all of these factors lead back to a renewed and refreshed embracing of spiritual discipline and disciplines. Crucial to spiritual formation is not going through the spiritual motions convincingly, but growing in our relationship with Christ.

Ordinands find renewed vigour in prayer, bible reading, worship and many adopt a new range of spiritual disciplines. For some this is a renewed appreciation of a sacramental spirituality, or a discovery of solitude, quiet, silence, for others a new passion for group prayer and for others a reaffirmation of the traditional disciplines of prayer and bible reading.

3.6 Review and accountability

All of this explains the Hall's understanding of the process of spiritual formation and seeks to explain how the Hall puts this into practice. However, crucial to any process of formation is the importance of regular review and accountability. In essence we are, of course, each one of us accountable to God, but, not least for those who are entering the ordained ministry, it is important to establish early patterns of accountability.

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Review and accountability operates in a number of ways in Wycliffe. All ordinands are interviewed at least once a term by their fellowship group tutor. Similarly, we have a well-developed reporting system with reports on students at the end of every year in Wycliffe with a minimum of two reports per student going to the sponsoring bishop. The whole body of tutors at Wycliffe meets every two weeks with the prime objective of reviewing the pastoral and spiritual needs of individual students. Many students also form their own accountability groups, and these quite often continue into ministry.

The key to understanding the process of formation is that it consists of a number of interlocking dimensions; critical self-awareness, openness to change and renewal and above all the centrality of our spiritual relationship with Christ. Our role in an institution such as Wycliffe is to both *equip* students with the necessary tools for ministry and also *model* the process and processes of formation. Naturally different traditions and the range of backgrounds from which ordinands come means that sometimes different language is used to describe these influences and processes. Our responsibility is to transcend language so that tomorrow's ministers are open to the shaping of the Holy Spirit in their lives and characters renewed, changed and transformed spiritually in their personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

4 The content of theological education

It is very important to us at Wycliffe to emphasise that formation and its processes are essentially linked to the content of the programme of theological education. In many ways they cannot and should not be separated. The detailed content of the various courses on offer are available elsewhere. The main courses are the BA, the BTh, the CTh and the ODM. In addition there are a variety of postgraduate courses including the MTh, as well as research degrees. However, it is helpful to set out the basic form and content of the theological education on offer, the educational and methodological approaches and the assessment which is used.

4.1 *The form and content of the theological education at Wycliffe*

Across the various degrees and certificates offered by Wycliffe the following key elements form the curriculum:

- The classic disciplines
- Integrated studies
- Focus Days
- Practical formational exercises

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The Hall, with the University, asserts the study of the classic disciplines lying at the heart of theological study. As applied to Wycliffe these would involve papers in:

- New Testament (theology and texts)
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- Christian Doctrine
- Church History
- Spirituality
- Missiology
- Worship
- Homiletics
- Leadership
- Ethics

Integrated study weeks are weeks of themed studies which combine biblical, doctrinal, historical and practical approaches to the topic under discussion. These currently cover:

- Death and bereavement
- The Holy Spirit in Ministry
- Church Growth and Church Planting
- Anglican and Evangelical Identity
- The Ministry of the Sacraments
- Leadership
- Preaching

Focus Days, currently under review, are 'days' handed over to the study of a bible book, or a theme, perhaps with an outside speaker. Topics covered or planned have included:

- The authority, interpretation and use of the bible
- Philippians
- Amos
- Marriage and sexuality
- Diversity issues
- Islam
- Prisons ministry
- Men and Women in Leadership
- Youth and Children's Ministry

Practical preparation and formation consists of the following elements:

- Practical placements (both weekly and block placements)
- Missions
- Quiet Days
- A Leavers Course, including canon law, professional codes of conduct etc

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Module outlines for a wide selection of the above courses and classes are included with the submission of these questions. The core education comes from study, reading and practical experience, or, more precisely, from the integration of these approaches.

4.2 Educational approaches and assessment

The educational methods which are used range from the traditional lecture to seminars, reading classes, personal study and guided reading. The methods include theological reflection and writing upon practical experience. In terms of assessment a variety of methods are used. Many courses are assessed by 3 or 4 internal essays (of around 2500 words each) followed by an externally assessed essay. In some instances this assessment is more of the form of a diary entry, a book review or a sermon. Practical assignments and placements are also assessed. These matters are explored in more detail in response to the fourth validation question.

5 Formation within a tradition for the national church

Theological education has undergone much transformation over the course of recent years and continues to do so. It is no longer possible for colleges to be looked at in isolation from other pathways of training; indeed it is right that this is not the case. However, the church remains clear that the residential colleges have a particular role and it is worth setting these out, not least as they relate to Wycliffe.

5.1 Colleges are a national resource for the church

The General Synod of the Church of England in its consideration of *Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church* ("the Hind Report") specifically removed the colleges from simply being absorbed into regional training partnerships by enshrining in church policy that the colleges were *national* rather than *regional* resources. That is not meant to mean that colleges are not to relate regionally as well as nationally, but rather to point to one of the distinctive points of the colleges. The residential college brings together in their Faculties, significant national resources for the church in terms of theological expertise, policy experience and indeed support and weight to the theological traditions which they represent.

5.2 Colleges allow in-depth theological education

We have already discussed the basic rationale for residential training. Theological education undertaken in the context of a residential training college allows for an in-depth and sustained period of study. It seems to us, simply unrealistic to suggest that a part-time course can give that same level of depth. Being immersed in the emphases of a tradition, being soaked in Christian study, theology and community are opportunities which can be rarely taken. For Wycliffe this means particular attention to the study of the bible, the Reformation, Anglican and Evangelical traditions, leadership, preaching. It is a training that thoroughly prepares for the ministry into which the students are called.

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5.3 Colleges permit candidates to be trained within one of the classic traditions of Anglicanism

The colleges tend to represent one of the classic traditions of Anglicanism, in broad terms, evangelical, catholic, liberal, though of course the inadequacy of all such labels does not need to be rehearsed. There are considerable benefits to such a training. To be trained in one of the classic traditions means neither that the tradition itself is monochrome, nor the students who choose to train within it. However, it allows a deep appreciation of the roots and foundations of the tradition itself and its role within Anglicanism. Both comfort and challenge need to come, but in an environment which is safe and affirmative. Indeed a training within a tradition that is open and honest about its objectives and purposes is likely to be considerably more beneficial (and indeed more honest) than the alternative 'label' of claiming 'no label'.

Applying some of this to Wycliffe, the Hall stands unambiguously on its Trust Deed, representing the classic reformed evangelical understanding of Anglicanism. That tradition of course is the one most rooted in the foundations of Anglicanism. Indeed this tradition itself is a fluid and broad category spanning what may be described today as 'conservative', 'charismatic' and 'contemplative' strands of evangelicalism; and all the various combinations implied! So the Hall seeks to enable its students to understand those foundations, those formative things which go together to form Anglicanism.

6 Conclusions

To summarise, the whole rationale of the Wycliffe approach to education and formation is to ensure that academic, formational and practical elements of preparation are integrated and held together. We do so with some conviction of the continued appropriateness of teaching the classic disciplines, but with a range of methods and approaches, including formal integrated studies, together with a broad range of assessment. We do this self-consciously as a residential college and within one of the classic traditions of the Church. We give particular attention to the processes of spiritual formation alongside academic study in order to encourage a holistic approach to personal growth and development. All of this is with the purpose of producing ordinands equipped to lead, preach, pastor and defend the faith.

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