

Estate based learning for ministry

- The Northern Ark Model

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The Northern Ark is a mission initiative with 6 working class parishes. They are predominantly made up of council built housing and are situated in the north of Bristol. Those involved have been regularly asked about the reasons why we approach learning in the way we do. This paper tries to answer questions about the methods and the underlying objectives about why we do things in the way we do. The way this is laid out is by answering four questions. The answer to each question forms one of the four sections to this paper.

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1. What is the Northern Ark's understanding of the mission to which the Church of God is called, and of the pattern of Church life and order through which the Church of England responds to that calling?

We seek to address the need to:

- Develop a ministry of the whole people of God in any place together
- Address the cultural imbalance/dominance of suburban ministry in the Church of England and thereby exploring a method toward affirming a polycentric catholicity
- Treat seriously the ministry **of** the 'poor' as well as ministry to the 'poor' (Not only as sinners and to be helped, but also as sinned against and as helpers.)

This proposition rests on three shifts from predominant patterns of formation.

- A move from investing in individuals to investing in communities (parishes)
- A shift from learning through theorist learning styles (academic qualifications) to pragmatic learning methods (apprentice models)
- A mission perspective that believes faith is best ministered in the language and patterns of the local culture. This suggests a move from the idea of **local** (geographical definition) to the idea of **indigenous** (cultural definition)

This proposition seeks to act on the Church of England's failure to recognise the variety of sub-cultures that make up British Culture save for that of black and ethnic minority concerns. Whilst we appreciate that there are also similar concerns from rural and ethnic cultures this

proposal seeks only to address the needs of what has been traditionally called 'working class culture'.

An understanding of working class culture

Extensive study of white working class culture, its correlation and dissonance with the Christian tradition, underpins the nature of this approach.

For a variety of standpoints we recommend:

- a. <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/WhoCaresAboutTheWhiteWorkingClass-2009.pdf>
- b. Joyce, P. (Ed) (1995): The Oxford Reader on Class. (Oxford University Press)
- c. Green, L. (1995): Church on the Estates (National Estate Churches Network.)
- d. Hasler, J. (2000): Mind, Body and Estates: Outer Estate Ministry and Working Class Culture; (National Estate Churches Network.)
- e. Hasler, J. (2006): Crying out for a Polycentric Church. (Church in Society, Maidstone.)
- f. Hanley, L. (2007): ESTATES: An Intimate History. (Granta.)

UPA under-representation

In undertaking a post code survey of ordinands we discovered that in what used to be designated Urban Priority Area parishes in the Bristol Diocese, these parishes are severely under-represented in licensed and ordained ministry. In Bristol diocese, those designated UPA parishes are primarily either inner city or outer estate parishes. Their populations make up 13.5% of the Bristol Diocese population. The ordinands resident in these parishes make up 3% of those currently training, namely one person. (This survey was undertaken in June 2010) This proposal is aimed at outer estate parishes inhabited by largely, but not exclusively, white working class communities.

Diocesan strategy: The Bristol diocesan strategy is to ‘release the energy’ for all parishes not just the suburban ones. The desire to be inclusive and catholic makes us eager to act.

The Inadequacy of current processes for UPA learners

The challenges included the following:

a. Books

On estates, most learning is through practical situations not books. Learning style is strongly pragmatic. Some will combine either activist or reflective learning traits. Few have the inclination or experience to be theoretical in their learning style. Most courses distribute a book list before you start.

b. Regularity

One obstacle is the requirement to have to be somewhere at the same time and place on a weekly basis. Vulnerable family, personal and community contexts mean regularity is more a problem than frequency. (Bishop Leslie Newbiggin, in 1975, at a lecture in Queens Theological College Birmingham, said of his experience of training in South India, ‘If people (local leaders) could be freed from their communities for a whole week-end we realised we had probably got the wrong people.’) This may be misconstrued as being the result of people living a ‘chaotic’ lifestyle, which is an unfair analysis of people’s situations. Rather, times of meeting need to be negotiated at the previous meeting to reduce the impact of a number of people who may be missing.

c. Low confidence in learning situations

If people decide they would like to try and learn they are already putting themselves in an unsafe place. This is especially true if their last experience, maybe school, did not serve them well. So their next question will be, ‘who else will be there?’ They will be frightened that when they say something they will be made to look silly. So it will help if the learning experience takes place where they are, and among friends, or at least with folk that they know and trust. (By ‘know’ we mean they have some experience of doing things with them over time. We do not mean ‘know of’ or ‘have met a few times’.) The difficulty is as much to do

with raising the glass ceiling in people's experience as it is in changing the way courses are delivered and arranged. It may be better to work with people in the place where they are.

The proposal for piloting a variant approach

The proposal for the Northern Ark centred on 6 outer estate parishes. They form an arc around the north of Bristol City. It sets out to create local ministry teams in each parish in a way that is open to discovering licensed ordained and lay ministry. We want to find a way that will develop licensed ministry in these parishes, which in Bristol are still mainly, but not exclusively, populated by the white working class. Bristol Diocese would want to make an intervention of high quality and takes note of a culture which only marginally buys into the present opportunities. We desire an intervention which is consistent with the tradition of the Church of England and coherent with working class culture.

In response to these mission concerns this proposal seeks to implement:

- The predominant working class learning style
- The need for flexible timing
- And the need for colleagues who are known

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2. In the light of that understanding what are the main characteristics of ordained and other public ministries for which The Northern Ark seeks to prepare ministers?

The aim of this initiative is to discern and develop contextually and culturally appropriate, sustainable ways of being Christ's church and to live out the values of God's kingdom where we are.

The main aims of this initiative are:

- To discern and develop ways of implementing the aspirations of 'Releasing the Energy' that will fit the context of the Northern Ark
- To become a collective of confident, growing parishes committed to supporting the mission and ministry of every member and every parish within the Northern Ark.
- To become churches dependent upon the life and ministry of Christ in our discipleship as we serve Him and one another for the glory of God's kingdom

It is our firm belief that, in accordance with the Diocesan strategy for growth the following manifesto holds true.

***Communities of Brokenness
held together in the Hand of God:***

*are there to treat **life** as a glorious mystery to be explored and enjoyed, and not only treat it as a number of problems to be solved.*

The prime task of these communities

- *is to worship God amongst our muddle*
- *and to grow in communion with God*

This involves, both personally and together

- *Discovering where God is in the ups and downs of our lives*
- *Calling attention to God's splendour in the ordinary*
- *Respecting the creation that God has made*
- *Doing the right thing as God reveals*

A priest is ordained to open up the mystery of God's beauty and love by

- *Helping the community worship in word and sacrament.*

- *Hearing the complaints of the people*
- *Preaching about God, his kingdom, and his good news*
- *Encouraging people to pray alone and together*
- *Continuing to tell the story of Jesus*
- *Pointing to the presence of the Holy Spirit*
- *Insisting that God comes first*
- *Reminding people of God's promise, invitation and command*

**Others will have a part to play in these things too.
Priesthood is both focussed in 'the priest'
and shared among 'the people'.**

The priest is not there to

- *Run the church*
- *Solve the problems*
- *Tell other people what to do*
- *Be the one who is most visible*
- *Be the broker between the worshipping community and other groups*

The priest is there to give a lead in how we

- *Explore the mystery of God's love for humankind*
- *And how we learn to be in communion with Him¹*

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NB: Beware of Locality as insularity

One of the dangers of a locally trained priesthood is perceived that the priest will be so conscious of their locality that they will have little regard to the wider church.

¹ CF 'The Contemplative Pastor', by Eugene Peterson, published by Eerdmans 'The Church with a Human Face', by Edward Schillebeeckx, published by SCM. 'Ministry and Priesthood', by Alastair Redfern, DLT.

What we observe is, that under traditional roles, the priest is expected to be:

- the one who leads
- the only full time paid employee in estate parishes
- and is expected to 'represent' the church on outside bodies

Under this initiative indigenous and locally trained priests are very likely to be very different.

When the priest is trained among other ministries, lay and licensed, we would expect them to be pushing, goading or encouraging others to do various things. So, rather than measure the activity of the ordained minister, if you measure the number of times any team member steps out of the parish to be interested in the wider church that is a more realistic measurement for what is proposed. (In the Lockleaze pilot the congregation has been commended by many about their enthusiasm to attend various extra parish meetings and functions; especially by deanery and ecumenical colleagues. These events occasionally include the ordained ministers, local or otherwise.)

Working class indigenous ministry has grown up in its context but needs to appreciate that it sits in the midst of a suburban church from which it can learn, even in the face of it perpetuating its disadvantage. The timing and process of how this issue is addressed requires determination on the part of the trainers but also considerable sensitivity.

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3. What is the process and content of ministerial education and formation which will most appropriately prepare ministers in the Northern Ark to begin the lifelong exercise of these ministries?

Forming the team.

This process involves a combination of

- discovering gifts
- a preparedness to learn
- a willingness to work with others

The relevant groups in the parish encourage the forming of a team, this requires people with a degree of humility. The development of humility takes place in the context where people have often been given the message that they are academically inadequate. Humility often means, for example, the task is to humbly accept ones gifts and run the risk of ridicule by using them.

We require humility that:

- recognises skills and aptitudes are a gift
- says there is more to be discovered
- sees that joining others is necessary to work for the Kingdom of God

More objectively:

- Gifts are not of our own doing
- We do not know everything
- We can't do it on our own

We seek to foster:

- an expectation that others may recognise our gifts better than we do ourselves
- a vision and care for one another that prevents the turning of a gift into a job

Formation of spirituality is a defining aspect of the whole process.

The Discernment of roles

The challenge to the team is to find a pathway to do what is needed to sustain the mission of the parish.

- a. The conversation of members of the team with one another is guided to see what roles are best fulfilled by virtue of gifts.

- b. Personal mentoring is helpful to discover and clarify what they are thinking.
- c. It is crucial that team members learn to tell each other what they are thinking and feeling.
- d. This process fosters a sense of group discernment about what roles are appropriate to them. This is true for those the team will put forward, either toward licensed and ordained ministry, but equally true for lay ministries. (Else after the discernment process the other ministers will ebb away if they discern that their ministries are less important to the enterprise.)

Training

Thread 1 – mentoring / supervision

Thread 2 – brainy bits

Thread 3 – group life and network development

Programme tested during the pilot scheme in the parish of Lockleaze.

Preparing a local person for OLM Estate Priesthood - The tested Lockleaze pilot. It is crucial to note that much of this apprentice style formation took place alongside other members of the ministry team.

Elaine Mills underwent an Apprentice training consisting of several streams. Her training was arranged by, the Diocesan Director of Ordinands (DDO) and The Vicar, at the request of the Bishop. This has been acted on during 2006/8, and was linked to some modules of the process of Continuing Ministerial Education (years 1-4.)

The outline package agreed was as follows:-

Proposed 'Preparation for Ordained Local Ministry' for Elaine Mills

- To help Elaine use the learning cycle. Experience, Reflection, Thinking, Acting. Experience, Reflection etc.

- To help Elaine understand who she is, what God is calling her to be, and what is happening to her as a person
- To help Elaine use the Lockleaze context as central to her learning (OLM), but to recognise this is placed within a wider context
- To help Elaine gain some tools for doing theology

There are a number of streams which I have numbered *Streams 1-6. (not in priority order)*²

Stream 1. Doing the Job

Sessions on

- Working on practical matters: ‘why we do things the way we do?’ ‘Order and shape?’ etc. To include worship leading, preaching, offices, singing, legal frameworks. etc..
- Supervision of her learning programme based on practical experiences.

Stream 2. Doing the Prayer and Spirituality

Personal sessions

- To include Using Spirituality Workbook (Runcorn)
- Janet Marker(SSM) offered a reflection opportunity to the emerging local ministry team

(At the time the LMT looked as if it will consist of SSM deacon to become priest (Janet), OLM ordinand (Elaine), potential Lay Administrator (Sandra), Potential Lay Community Minister (Mavis) but others joined later.

Stream 3. Doing some thinking

Seven Topics, each of three sessions,

Session 1. Identifying the range of the topic

Session 2. Reflecting on Practice, using Scripture and Context

Session 3. Discerning Practice outcomes and Future Action

² It was intended that the trainer/vicar would co-ordinate delivery, with the DDO. The DDO moved away before he could properly engage. His successor affirmed this approach.

Topics for exploration based on the following content: -

- a. The relationship between God and the World: how do we discern God's activity?
- b. The relationship between God and us: how do we accompany God's activity?
- c. The stor(ies) of God's people: History and Scripture.
- d. The implications of an incarnational theology: this God embodied in this Jesus
- e. The place of Pastoral Ministry in Society and History
- f. The place of worship in the life and witness of the Church
- g. The place of the cross in salvation

Stream 4. Being part of a Team.

Meeting with rest of the 'Local ministry team' and Joe Hasler to work on Group Processes

Stream 5. Filling the Gaps (optional)

Looking for weak areas of preparation so far and supplementing with two of the Trinity foundation level units. There are also opportunities for Elaine to join Janet on WEMTC (West of England Ministerial Training Course) components that are outstanding. We believe them to be a pastoral Studies module, Group dynamics, and Anglican studies.

Stream 6. Doing some Reading

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4. What forms of assessment are most appropriate for determining the suitability of ministers to begin the exercise of these ministries?

The Hind Report specifies learning outcomes. These need to be understood in the particular sub-cultural context of the predominantly

white working class housing estates. A separate document gives indications how this would be done. (see *A Sub-cultural understanding of the Hind report Learning Outcomes.*)

Selection assessment (BAP Equivalent)

This would be undertaken in the context of the local ministry team.

Sam Wells points out that during worship:

“...the congregation realise again that the body of Christ has many members, and that all its gifts are given for the building up of the body. The gifts are everything that the Church needs –but seldom everything that the congregation want.”³

The assessment needs to be of the utilising of the gifts given to the local ministry team and which of them should exercise ordained, licensed or other lay ministries. Pragmatic considerations mean this can only be done by an examination of the local context and an assessment of their choices about who undertakes which role, i.e. the assessment of the priestly role should be to evaluate the potential of candidates to meet the criteria set out above, set out here again below.

A priest is ordained to open up the mystery of God’s beauty and love by:-

- *Helping the community worship in word and sacrament*
- *Hearing the complaints of the people*
- *Preaching about God, his kingdom, and his good news*
- *Encouraging people to pray alone and together*
- *Continuing to tell the story of Jesus*
- *Pointing to the presence of the Holy Spirit*
- *Insisting that God comes first*
- *Reminding people of God’s promise, invitation and command*

³ Wells, Sam. (2006) *God’s Companions* Blackwell, Oxford.

Is the person they have discerned the person given them to play this part in their ministry together? If we believe that other ministries are as important to the coming and becoming Kingdom of God then all should be subject to this evaluative scrutiny. If God gives all that is needed then this assessment needs to be made in the context of what God has given to the local congregation. Practically this should be undertaken by diocesan personnel (E.g the DDO, Senior Staff, Sponsoring Bishop – or others appointed by the Diocesan Bishop for this task), with the addition of an external assessor. These persons, internal and external, should be experienced and knowledgeable about ministry in working class culture. The assessment should be in the form of structured conversations in personal and group settings. The assessment should be based on the criteria above and the sub-cultural interpretation of the Hind learning outcomes. (See separate document)

Assessment elements and procedures in training

We are clear that with regard to the criteria for selection and oversight of the strategic framework for training the responsibility lies with The Ministry Division of the Archbishops Council as providing the lead nationally. We note their responsibility for

- The setting of Church wide standards
- Promoting the development of best practice in training, formation and development
- The funding of ordination training by administering the money raised by dioceses and parishes for this purpose
- Through its quality assurance work, checking that church wide standards are maintained and encouraging training providers to develop best practice⁴

⁴ <http://www.churchofengland.org/clergy-office-holders/ministry/ministerial-education-and-development.aspx> accessed 29/03/2012

We delight that the Northern Ark initiative has been given the opportunity to apply these criteria within the context identified above in order that we are able to ensure those seeking selection, training and licensing may be recognised by the wider Church. However this aspiration is expressed within the cultural framework we have been describing and defining in this document and we therefore propose that the above standards of excellence be reshaped and adapted for the needs of those whom God is calling in our parishes.

As outlined above the style and content of this learning model has been developed with this context in mind. All the study and group learning material was submitted to the Bristol diocesan team for consideration and approval before it was implemented.

The working model of the initial scheme as well as the Northern Ark initiative have been submitted to **the Diocesan Bishop for scrutiny and used following his approval and with his authority to proceed.** We therefore have some confidence that the work prepared so far and used as the basis of formation and training is consistent with the expectations and concerns of the wider Church in this Diocese of Bristol.

Ministerial practice, the experience of, and reflection on aspects of ministry, have been in the hands of the Training Minister responsible for the group and/or individuals concerned. It has been vital that Training Ministers have been able to develop their own working models of apprentice style models of ministry as well as their own skills as reflective practitioners.

As the facility or ability of the learner is highly dependent on the skill of the practitioner with whom they are working, we believe this to be one of the most important elements of any future development of the training model. We would hope and expect that The Ministry Division would be able to assist in the development of standards and criteria for Training Ministers in our context, in line with their stated aim of providing best practice in this area.

Methods and criteria of assessment

Equally we anticipate that methods of assessment would be consistent with our context, though without any lowering of expected standards or learning outcomes. It is likely that assessment through reflection on observed and experienced practice would become the norm for candidates following this pathway.

We would like a person from the IME team to be nominated to serve as a point of reference and support for the Training team and the Local Learners during the initial period of training. Also that this person might also co-ordinate the requirements of IME 4-7 as appropriate to ensure that contextually appropriate training opportunities be provided and are taken up. We expect that those in training, would be afforded the same level of scrutiny, resources and encouragement from the Sponsoring Bishop and those working with him towards the development of ministries in the Diocese of Bristol.

Conclusion.

This is the position of the Northern Ark interventionists to date. But we are utterly convinced that it will be subject to fine tuning in the light of practice. Like true researchers we will observe the practise and modify our analysis and expectations accordingly. All good theory comes from the observations of practise and reflective practitioners we aim to be.

Sept 2012

About the Northern Ark.

The Northern Ark is a collaboration of six council housing estate parishes forming an arc across the North of Bristol. They are working together to create indigenous 'Local Ministry Teams' in each parish with a view to becoming less dependent on imported 'stipendiary' clergy. The underlying principle is that mission and ministry is best exercised by those who confidently present the Christian faith to their own working class culture. Secondly it is better for the Church's ministry to be seen to 'belong' to the community, even when challenging it.

The approach was pioneered at St. Mary Magdalene Lockleaze. The apprentice style of training of the Ordinand, Reader, and unlicensed members, was developed with, and approved by, the Revd Malcolm Herbert and Revd Canon Derek Chedzey as the appropriate Bishop's Officers, as pilot schemes.

This Training approach, known in Bristol as *Go-local*, *Grow-local*, was launched in the diocese on 22nd July 2010. Anticipating this launch, the Archdeacon of Bristol called a meeting of the incumbents of the Northern Ark parishes on the 7th May 2010 to explore the possibility of collaboration of the Northern Ark initiative by using the *Go-local* scheme. A proposal was developed for the Archdeacon.

On the 3rd of October 2011 the Bishop of Bristol approved the initiative, initially for a three year period, with a review to begin after 2 years to assess its future potential. He seeks to offer this as a pilot to the Ministry Division