

## **Training For Ministry**

For the past decade and more, much thought has been given throughout the Church of Ireland to the question of training for ministry. This has gone on at General Synod, diocesan and parochial levels. At the heart of the process is the Church of Ireland Theological College, where major re-ordering of training is under way.

In 2004, the House of Bishops called for a root and branch review of the training system, and at the Bishops' invitation an independent inspection team was established in June that year. The team consisted of the Central Director of Ordinands, the Archdeacon of Lindisfarne, the Professor of Education, Uppsala University, the Professor of Mathematics, Queen's University Belfast, and the Head of the Department of Education and Vice-President, University College, Cork.

After written and oral submissions from those most directly involved (staff, students, House of Bishops, recently ordained clergy, Theological College Council), and following a week-long visit to the College, the inspection team delivered its report and recommendations to the House of Bishops in May 2005.

The inspection was conducted within the framework of four key questions:

1. What is the College'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 Ireland responds to that calling?
2. What are the main characteristics of ordained and other public ministries for which the College seeks to prepare its candidates?
3. What is the process and content of ministerial education and formation which will most appropriately prepare candidates to begin the lifelong exercise of those ministries?
4. What forms of assessment are most appropriate for determining the suitability of candidates to begin the exercise of these ministries?

Within that framework, College life was assessed under a number of headings: Aims and Objectives; Relationships with other Institutions; Governance, Management and Organisation; Accommodation; Community and Corporate Life; Common Worship; Ministerial, Personal and Spiritual Formation; Teaching and Learning; Theology and Practice; Training in Public Worship; Teaching Staff; Administrative Staff; Students.

The Inspection Team's Report makes seven principal recommendations:

1. The House of Bishops invite the key stakeholders (staff, students, College Council, RCB etc) to articulate a statement of Aims and Objectives
2. Appropriate structures of governance to be put in place to ensure delivery of agreed aims and objectives
3. Carry out a thorough audit of buildings and resources
4. Draw up a Community Covenant to govern daily life and relationships within the College
5. Focus of training programme to move from content to formation
6. Appoint an educational consultant to assist with designing appropriate content and method for the training course
7. Establish a regular pattern of staff meetings to include not only teaching staff but all staff responsible for life in College

## **The Future**

A number of important developments will flow from these recommendations:

1. Greater flexibility in delivery of training, with alternatives of a three-year full-time course or a five-year part-time programme
2. Greater emphasis on personal and ministerial formation and development as well as academic study
3. Training programme to consist of “blocks” of hands-on practical training alternating with residential blocks of theological reflection and input

In addition to flexibility in provision of training, there will be flexibility of purpose. Since we are now thinking in terms of the ministry of the whole people of God, the new programme will not be exclusively directed at the training of Ordinands, and there will be built-in “departure points” to enable those who are moving towards non-stipendiary or lay ministry to do so. The training they have received up to the point of departure will count towards their particular qualification, as all training will conform to the standards of the National Framework of Qualification.

There will be three distinct phases in ordination training:

1. Preliminary locally-based training
2. Initial Ministerial Education, to include parish placements and ordination
3. Continuing Ministerial Education in curacies

The third phase will be an integral part of the training programme, but will be parish based following on ordination, with residential components. This will be predicated on selected rectors themselves being equipped as trainers, and being active partners in the training programme.

This will also have important implications for the training “plant”, i.e. the Theological College. As it stands, the present College is not flexible enough to deal with such a course, and it will either have to be considerably modified or disposed of and new premises acquired.