

A Report of the Task Force on Theological Education for Ordained Ministry, 2000

Background

The Council of General Synod, November 1997, authorized the Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee (FWM) to do more concentrated work on the issues raised in Recommendations C1-6 from the Consultation on Discernment for Ordained Ministry. These recommendations concerned national standards of theological education for ordination. The Consultation had received overwhelming support from all orders of ministry and all areas of the country for the establishment of some basic national standards for all those ordained to the priesthood, recognizing that priesthood is lived out in a variety of ways in today's church. The Consultation recommended a basic minimum core curriculum, and a national core curriculum committee which would address matters related to content of the curriculum, modes of delivery and assessment. FWM called for a study to determine the feasibility of establishing a basic minimum core curriculum for all being prepared for ordination to the priesthood, whether those candidates were being prepared in traditional theological colleges or through alternative training models. That study was to include participation from the House of Bishops, theological colleges, those involved in the training of people for alternative and complementary forms of ministry, and lay people with gifts in the areas of adult education.

The Task Force on Theological Education for Ordained Ministry was set up by FWM in October 1998. That task force met in Saskatoon in January 1999 and represented a broad spectrum of experience and involvement in theological education. After much discussion, the task force felt that defining a core curriculum was neither feasible nor desirable, but that it would be possible to develop an experiential model which would allow us to consult with the parties involved and suggest some expectations and competencies for those preparing for ordained ministry in the variety of programs now available. We decided, because of the short time available for our work, to restrict our study to preparation for ordination to the presbyterate. We recognized however that it is equally important to look at standards and expectations for those preparing for ordination to the diaconate and the episcopate.

A second meeting of the task force, expanded to include groups and regions not represented at the January meeting, was held in Oakville in September 1999. A list of the membership of the task force is attached to this report. We felt a need to work with others in the church to develop a vision for theological education at the beginning of the 21st century, and recognized that our work as a task force is just the beginning of an ongoing conversation. At this second meeting, we used a process developed by task force members which called for reflection on the questions asked of the candidates at the service of ordination to the priesthood (BAS, p. 646). What sort of competencies might be expected in order for a candidate to make these promises? We agreed that the questions of the ordination covenant ought to be set within the wider context of baptismal ministry and the baptismal covenant. What must a priest know and be in order to support the ministry of all the baptized? We then took the revised process to the wider church in order to involve others in the discussion.

Groups consulted

During the year 2000, a wide variety of groups in the Anglican Church of Canada have participated in a process of discussion and reflection on standards and expectations for theological education.

- the House of Bishops
- the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples
- the Heads of Anglican Colleges
- the Council of the College of Emmanuel and St. Chad
- the Examining Chaplains of the Diocese of Rupert's Land
- members of the Provincial Synod of Rupert's Land
- the Council of the Province of Ontario
- participants in "Seedtime and Harvest", a ministry conference of the Province of British Columbia and Yukon
- the Provincial Synod of Canada
- a gathering of Edmonton Diocese theological students
- the Examining Chaplains of the Diocese of British Columbia
- the Examining Chaplains of the Diocese of Kootenay.

We received helpful information also from the Diocese of Toronto ("Core Values of Priests in the Diocese of Toronto"), from the Ontario Provincial Council on Theological Education (OPCOTE) in the form of a report and action commitments from their June conference on theological education, and a statement of the Ontario House of Bishops ("Godly, Learned and Able"). The spring 2000 issue of *Ministry Matters*, "Focus on Theological Education", brought some responses. We are thankful to all who participated in the discussion. We are grateful for their willingness to engage in this discussion in such a lively way, and for the rich variety of ideas and opinions which have helped us shape this report. We hope that this process will lead to a wider discussion of issues around theological education in Canada in the coming years.

A Summary of the Discussion

Participants identified many roles, knowledge areas, skills and qualities which they felt those ordained to the priesthood ought to have. The full set of responses will be archived in the Faith Worship and Ministry office.

Roles

Among the roles which were identified were teacher and mentor, liturgical presider, and leader (both displaying leadership qualities and fostering leadership in others). Other roles included gatherer of the community and facilitator, preacher and story teller, reconciler and healer, advocate, counsellor and confidant(e), colleague and evangelist. The priest should be a life-long learner.

Skills and Knowledge

Mentioned often were competence in Biblical scholarship and interpretation, a thorough grounding in Anglican theology and tradition (history, the sacraments, liturgy, spirituality) and skills in preaching and public speaking. Other important skills identified were

- an ability to connect theology with everyday life
- an ability to articulate one's own beliefs and the faith of the church
- an ability to provide spiritual leadership and to use the pastoral rites of healing and reconciliation
- an ability to introduce change
- skills in education and an understanding of different leadership styles
- skills in group dynamics and leadership
- listening skills
- a good knowledge of one's self, of human nature, of contemporary and local culture, of the community
- conflict management
- organizational skills
- a knowledge of appropriate boundaries and the norms of behaviour for those in positions of power, with specific attention to issues of sexual harassment and abuse.

Qualities

Responses described the priest as a person of prayer and of commitment to the Christian faith. The priest should be a person of maturity and integrity, a "wholesome example" to the parish and community, a person of good moral character. Important qualities listed were a liking for people, a warm and welcoming presence, compassion, humour and optimism, good common sense. The priest needs to have a respect for the breadth of Anglican tradition and be sensitive to differences in culture. The priest should be accepting of others, able to keep confidences and to set and keep boundaries.

An Evaluation of the Process

Our original proposal asked for another meeting of the task force in the fall of 2000 to review the data gathered from regional and local groups and to prepare a report for FWM, COGS and General Synod. It was clear by mid-1999 that this would not be possible because of financial constraints. The scheduling of the final FWM meeting of the triennium in mid-September 2000 has pushed us to prepare a report in the time available. A steering committee of Patricia Bays, Stephen Andrews, Helena-Rose Houldcroft, Richard Leggett and Barbara Liotskos met in Saskatoon in early September 2000 to prepare this report. We have circulated it for comments to the members of the task force, and it represents our conclusions at this time.

Some Comments

The task force, at its first meeting, felt that a standard core curriculum might not be sufficiently flexible to be adapted to local contexts of theological education. We wanted to try to express a set of core expectations for theological education that could be affirmed in a variety of contexts across the country. We affirmed that theological education is dynamic, and always evolving. It must be responsive to the local context. It will use a variety of methodologies and deliveries, and should be evaluated by looking at competencies as well as a particular body of knowledge.

The task force also recognized the importance of providing a forum for all those involved in theological education to communicate with each other. We were a representative group

of clergy and lay people from all provinces of the Canadian church, with a variety of involvement in preparing and assessing candidates for ordained ministry. We found our discussion valuable in the opportunity to share information, ideas and concerns. We felt that this discussion ought to continue in the Canadian church, and that there should be more sharing of expectations and concerns by bishops, parishes, colleges/training centres and diocesan and regional programs of training. We would like to encourage the active participation of First Nations people in this discussion.

There are some questions that need to be asked. What are the ministries for which people are being prepared? What are the different models of ordained ministry within the Anglican Church of Canada? What is the nature of priesthood, and is the ministry of all ordained priests clearly seen to be universal and transferable even though they are ordained in specific local situations? What constitutes readiness for ordained ministry? How does the church develop and assess this readiness after all component requirements are met? How do theological colleges/training institutions differentiate between graduation/completion of a program and suitability for ordination, between competency in academic skills and in professional skills (for example, a testamur certifying suitability for ordination distinct from the degree or diploma)? How does the church assess educational programs to ensure that people are being adequately prepared? Who should be responsible for the evaluation of such educational programs? How do we shape programs and processes of theological education that are contextual, have integrity and will prepare candidates to exercise ordained leadership in a church whose structures are changing and whose communities are increasingly diverse?

We felt that the best way to continue the discussion would be the setting up of structures within provinces and between provinces that would look at these questions of assessment of candidates and programs, and would identify experiences and resources for theological education. We recognize that all provinces have a concern for theological education and have begun to work at these questions. We want to encourage that conversation to continue with a wide variety of participants, and that the results be shared with other provinces.

Recommendations of the Task Force to FWM

1. In order to encourage this discussion and sharing, we recommend that each province have a commission which deals with theological education. The commission should have representatives from the episcopate, presbyterate, diaconate and the laity, and should include representatives from every diocese and from all institutions and programs of theological education for ordained ministry in the province. This should include representatives of programs which prepare aboriginal candidates, and diocesan training schemes for local preparation of candidates. Their work should be shared with the other provinces, by reporting and sharing resources, and by meeting together on occasion.
2. The Ontario House of Bishops has produced a useful statement on Theological Education, "Godly, Learned, and Able". We encourage other provincial houses of bishops to produce a statement on theological education.

3. We recommend that the national church continue to have an interest in theological education and encourage the sharing of information and resources. This might be done by a national staff person, a designated representative of a province, a faculty member or other interested person.

4. We encourage the national church to develop a program of funding, perhaps through the Anglican Foundation, to encourage advanced theological study and the training of faculty and other teachers of theology. A model for this might be the Episcopal Church Foundation Fellows of the Episcopal Church in the United States.

5. We would like to see our report circulated widely in the church. We ask FWM to see that a copy of the report goes to all those groups listed above, who participated in the process, and to provincial ministry committees. We express our hope that any action taken by FWM in response to the report will be communicated to Task Force members and to the participating groups.

We thank the Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee for calling us together and for making it possible for us to share in an ongoing discussion of theological education in the Anglican Church of Canada.

Respectfully submitted,
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