

# SWMTC TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGY

## 1. Vision statement and aims

### *Institutional aim*

SWMTC's mission is to provide formation for Christian ministry and promote Christian understanding of the world.

Our overall aim as an institution is to participate in the mission of God by providing the Church in the South West region of England with high-quality theological education, formation and research for those seeking to explore, or deepen their experience of, the Christian faith, along with those preparing for, or already undertaking a public representative ministry in the Church.

### *Ministerial training programmes*

Within that overall aim, the primary aim of our ministerial training programmes is to form women and men for an ever-deepening participation in the mission of the triune God in the world, and prepare them to:

- Lead Christian communities in their discernment of that mission
- Strengthen those communities through the leading and enabling of worship which is both reverent and creative
- Empower those communities through the care and encouragement of individuals and through teaching from the resources of Scripture, tradition, reason and experience, and through discerning and enabling the ministries of others
- Provide an example of lives characterised by prayer, service and self-awareness after the example of Christ

Underlying our programme aims is a set of objectives that are common to all of our programmes. Thus, we seek to:

- Engender in ministerial students a personal maturity which faces its own capacity for self-deception, which seeks to grow through a discipline of life, which seeks a deepening relationship with God and with people both within and outside the Church – a relationship marked by a capacity to receive as well as to give, which is not threatened by the gifts of others, and which

therefore enables the new minister to begin to lead and to pray after the example of Christ

- Develop and deepen in ministerial students interpretative qualities and skills that they require if they are to discern faithfully and confess truly the activity of God: a clarity and creativity of mind which sees connections between the Christian story and the world, and between the tradition and the possibilities of the future - combined with a commitment to teaching the faith, and continuing learning over a lifetime
- Develop in ministerial students a confidence with the practical skills of ministry which enables the newly accredited or ordained ministers increasingly to embody their faith and belief in consistent ways, to begin at once to work flexibly and to empower others to embrace the possibilities of collaborative working and service
- Engender in all students, including those studying on the non-ministerial programme who may have no commitment to faith or church, a passion for study and enquiry into the world, and into the ways in which the Christian tradition has interpreted that world in the light of its confession of the triune God
- Promote theological exploration at all levels – from collaborative research of international standard with the Universities of Durham and Exeter, to the fostering of learning in local communities
- For further specifically academic programme objectives see the programme specifications prepared for our validating University.

These are ambitious aims and objectives. In order to help us realise them, our IME 1-3 and Reader training programmes are designed to be rich and varied, drawing on the resources of the region and making best use of different contexts for learning.

## **2. Theological vision statement**

### *Our ecumenical identity*

Following the decision by the Methodist Church to accept the recommendations of the report *The Fruitful Field*, SWMTC will no longer train Methodist students from 2015. This represents a severe diminishment in our life given the strength and depth of Methodism's historic presence in the region and involvement in the Course. This will mean SWMTC will become, by default, an exclusively Anglican training course. The character of this document therefore anticipates this development in speaking of

Anglican structures and expectations, while recognising the obligation the Course maintains to the two completing Methodist students we have training with us.

### *Our ethos*

Following the Inspection of 2013, our integration with the training and formation structures of the two dioceses was applauded. As such we have continued to build on this approach, together with the Methodist Church, and in so doing have increasingly developed our programmes in close conversation with those we serve. This last point is highly significant for two reasons:

- The Course does not train candidates in a vacuum but within a network of local churches upon which we depend, and which keeps us very close to the realities and demands of ministry today and tomorrow
- The Course promotes an ethos that is resolutely focused on the 'end' of theological education: the service of local Christian communities. Our formation is intended not to promote the acquisition of theoretical knowledge or to frontload leadership competencies but to nurture people in a Christ-like wisdom concerning how to *lead and enable* Christian communities in a variety of ways

### *Training together*

SWMTC trains candidates for Reader ministry alongside those for ordained ministry. This is an interaction which has, we believe, encouraged a deepening sense of the reality of collaborative ministry over time. Given that 'overlap is endemic in ministry' and that this phenomenon is particularly noticeable where the 'ministry of Readers comes closest' to diaconal ministry (*The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church*) we have constructed our summary statement from a broad account of the 'common goal' to which public representative ministry is ordered before turning to the differentiation of ministries.

SWMTC also runs 4-7 training for the Diocese of Exeter, education for discipleship (EfD) also for Exeter, and evening classes in academic theology that include 'public-access' students who are not training for representative ministry.

First, it is very important to us that ministry students learn theology alongside members of the public, and experience their insights and questions along with more 'churchy' concerns. This is made possible by the ministry programme sharing common evening classes with public-access programmes. Second, 3<sup>rd</sup> year ordinands and Readers in IME4-7 are encouraged to explore the possibility of being tutors on the EfD programme. SWMTC graduates have joined the staff of the Reader training programme even during their 4-7 training, and 1-3 staff are involved in the 4-

7 programme in a range of ways, especially as consultants on the reflective practice module MDMIV and on ministry projects. The MDMIV journal is based on the experience gained in journaling on 1-3.

### *Formation*

Given that biblical anthropology does not offer a straightforwardly normative account of human formation, the term 'formation' inevitably opens up conflicted confessional commitments. Thus, as Jonathan Morrow observes, 'Evangelical spiritual formation differs significantly from the traditional Roman Catholic emphasis upon the sacraments as the means of grace for the Christian life.'<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, in very broad terms, while the Catholic tradition has treated the language of formation as adequate to the entirety of a person's discipleship — perhaps even the whole of their relationship to God — in parts of the Protestant tradition formation is fundamentally inappropriate to the dialectics of justification and, in consequence, may or may not have some value in talking about the experience of sanctification. However, as Morrow goes on, 'With that said, evangelicals can and should learn much from the lives and the practices of holy men and women throughout the history of Christendom, for God has been at work in the lives of these people – conforming them to the image of Christ – for 2000 years.'<sup>2</sup>

This would suggest a possible ground for ecumenical rapprochement and indeed in the work of the Reformed theologian James K.A. Smith we discover the recognition that behind the 'practices' of which Morrow speaks there lies a set of assumptions about the nature of human persons and their capacity to change and grow. Indeed, Smith argues<sup>3</sup> that it is just because modern theology and practice have so disastrously constricted the complexity and richness of human beings that formation (and pedagogy) has been exclusively directed towards the person as 'thinking-thing' (or even just a 'believing thing'). As a result, a significant part of who we are – in particular, our non-cognitive ways of being-in-the world that are more closely tethered to embodiment – tend to drop off the radar or are treated as non-essential.

As a Course committed to training candidates across the whole breadth of the Anglican tradition, and in an ecumenical spirit, we have come to understand formation as the habituation of practices orientated towards knowing God and making God known. This is about the growth both of our gift of personhood and of our calling 'in Christ'. Because it involves loving God with heart, soul, strength and mind (Lk. 10.27), the content of SWMTC's formation has four vectors: namely,

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Morrow, 'Introducing Spiritual Formation', in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (ed. Paul Petit; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), pp. 31-50, quote p. 31, n. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Morrow, 'Introducing Spiritual Formation', p. 31, n. 2.

<sup>3</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, World view and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009, Ch. 1.

Christian Scripture, Christian Thinking, Christian Ministry and Christian Worship. We seek to engender and ensure competency in all these areas taken individually, through training in (for example) hermeneutics, doctrine and ethics, along with pastoral and liturgical theology and practice. But more than that, we pay particular attention, in the life of each individual candidate, and in our communal life, to the interrelation of each thread and their weaving into a whole that embraces the intellectual, practical and spiritual.

Our vision, then, extends beyond content and competency to character, to the desirable characteristics of formation, which can be summarized as 'excellence and engagement'. Excellence in the learning environment means academic standards, of course, but also personal excellence (cf. Phil. 4.8) in all its dimensions. This includes the commitment and enthusiasm of the teachers, including the modelling of consideration of each student's individual circumstances, and attention to individual and corporate spirituality, as essential to human flourishing. Engaged learning results in changed attitudes and altered motives in addition to the acquisition of ministerial competencies. This involves students reflecting deeply upon their training, a process that is catalysed by the use of individual learning journals, regularly revisited and annotated. Reflection is intensified and becomes corporate through candidates learning alongside others from the whole range of Anglican tradition. Regular engagement with others of very different views elicits and engenders attentiveness, and resilience – along with the more familiar fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5.22-3). We view one vital aspect of our vocation as a Course to be the creation of a community that is mutually respectful while unafraid of difference, and so we cultivate practices of hospitality – whether these be intellectual, practical or spiritual – regardless of whether the 'other' is inside or outside the Church.

We resist any reductive or box-ticking accounts of formation, and see it in organic terms – the ministry candidate whose call as a baptized Christian is being radicalized by a call to representative ministry needs to grow like an olive tree in the house of God (Ps. 52.8). The Christian imagination transforms this psalmic image by grounding this growth in Christ. Each tree must develop good roots in Christ, must learn helpful symbiosis with the trees that, for this transient time of training, grow around it. It must learn how to flourish in the hothouse that is the Church, and it must grow in the means to reach out with others into the world as an agent of God's mission. All this is part of the ongoing process of new creation – we read 2. Cor 5.17 not as a once-off event but as a lifelong process of *kaine ktisis*. As so often a hymn offers in miniature something of what we are seeking to express about formation:

O Thou who camest from above,  
the pure celestial fire to impart  
kindle a flame of sacred love  
on the mean altar of my heart.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire

to work and speak and think for thee;  
still let me guard the holy fire  
and still stir up the gift in me.

### *Education*

The Course's pedagogy includes a commitment to valuing candidates' typically rich and varied life experiences: far from presuming a *tabula rasa*, we provide input that is designed to stimulate reflection upon extant practices. While we certainly aim to augment - and, where appropriate, correct - previous learning, we recognise that new insights are a synthetic fruit of our teaching and what students themselves bring to the learning context, whether this be in a collaborative task in the classroom, a practical placement or a moment of quiet epiphany.

A rounded theological anthropology (i.e. a view of the person as made in the image of God and inhabiting God's creation) informs our educational approach, resulting in attention to dimensions of personhood that include the spiritual, interpersonal, intellectual and practical; and the interrelation of each with the other. Importantly, because students are not extracted from their homes, work and churches, they continuously relate their training to known contexts, resulting in an authentic transformation of their ministry practices as well as providing new resources for their training. Indeed, the most profound educative resource is the learning community that bears within itself the multiple transformations that God has effected in human lives and situations.

Our attention to the nurturing of this community is testament to its centrality; and the witness of students, past and present, is that the learning that comes from this community has been the lesson most deeply learnt and most dearly cherished. (An interesting aspect of the sense of community on SWMTC is that though it is intense and much cherished throughout initial training, it is a transient community – ministers flow out from the Course and do not, typically, feel the need constantly to return – they claim their new role and move forward into it.)

As was noted above, we teach biblical studies, doctrine and ethics to ministry students in learning groups also containing public-access students, and this teaching is done almost entirely by past and present members of university departments. The programmes of evening class teaching itself evolved from the Exeter University programme 'Living Belief'. Essential to our pedagogy, then, is that ministry students are exposed both to the methods and questions of the academy, and to the challenges that public students bring. In the addressing of these questions through good-quality Christian Thinking, we emphasise a methodology based on the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. We stress that the appropriation of scripture is itself a function of reason, tradition and experience, and that likewise to draw on reason is also to be informed by scripture, tradition and experience. (That said, particular

attention is given in our work on mission to recent polemical exercises of 'reason' such as the new atheism.) The ordinands' journals explicitly ask them to reflect on how their formation is developing them as users of the Quadrilateral.

A major educational challenge in a non-residential training programme is the maintenance of continuity of learning when residencies and study days may at times be almost two months apart. Here the use of threads of learning within the Ministry and Reader Development Modules is designed to engender a rhythm that establishes continuity in the students' minds. But the key tool for establishing continuity of learning from event to event, and for integrating learning between the Ministry/Reader development programmes and the evening classes, is the learning journal, introduced in 2001 and steadily refined since then. The most recent set of questions for ordinands both press the students for the integration of learning and require them to consider constantly the implications of their learning for mission.

### *Mission*

We do not begin from the mission of the Church but from the mission that flows from the heart of God. That is the foundation of every thought, prayer and action that contributes to the Church's task.

In *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church* the approach of *Presence and Prophecy* is constructively developed into the following working definition: '*Mission is the whole Church proclaiming the whole Christ to the whole world* (p.56).' To set forth our understanding of the mission which the Church of God is called will always demand profound recognition of the fact that the Church of God proclaiming Christ to all the world demands a personal response to the Christ who has cleared a space in this world for the community called to be his body – the Church. The integration of the mission and ministry of the Church is therefore forged in the person of Jesus Christ and so, first of all, in Christians and their communities as participants through baptism in the glorified body of Christ. The minister is called, in radicalization of that basic baptismal call, to be a leader, encourager and enabler of the functioning of that body for the working-out of the mission of God.

To be such a missional minister means to be able to inhabit the culture of the ecclesia without being trapped in it; to interpret the world to the church without being seduced by it; thereby to empower communities to serve and witness to the Crucified One who is Lord of both church and world. It means working, and living, towards the imperatives of the Five Marks of Mission – praying with longing the mystery of 'Thy Kingdom come', stressing continually the minister as teacher and enabler of others in their discipleship, modelling and inculcating good pastoral practice (including the recognition of the place of failure in the life of the pastor), and including as a central concern (and worked example of doctrine and ethics in practice) issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

For the Church 'to proclaim afresh in each generation' the good news of the gospel requires the taking from the treasure-store 'what is new and what is old' (Mt. 13.52). It requires the development of a form of virtuous perception and disciplined improvisation that yet remains a faithful witness to the action of God. It requires then a sort of contemplative insight, just as it requires a level of technical competency. On contemplation, we recall the words of Bonaventure that the contemplative must: 'bring the natural powers of the soul under the influence of grace, which reforms them, and this [he] does through prayer; [he] must submit them to the purifying influence of justice, and this in [his] daily acts; [he] must subject them to the influence of enlightening knowledge, and this, in meditation; and finally [he] must hand them over to the influence of the perfecting power of wisdom, and this in contemplation. For just as no one arrives at wisdom except through grace, justice and knowledge, so it is that no one arrives at contemplation except through penetrating meditation, holy living and devout prayer.'<sup>4</sup> As we indicated above, the sort of practical wisdom we seek to form in ministers combines this type of prayer-informed contemplation with a contextually-sensitive practice of the craft of ministry.

Above all, wise participation in the *missio Dei* requires the wisdom of knowing in Christ how and when *to act* so as to join in with what God is doing. It requires something of the wisdom and approach that no doubt guided the church in Acts 15. For here the corporate discernment of the Christian community came to make a judgement as to how the gospel and scriptures related to the particular demands of its life by way of the narrating of human lives, recognising divine action and seeking holy consensus.

It is worth emphasising that in all we seek to do and be God's grace comes first. But to live in Christ, for Christ, and hence to serve him in whatever contexts of missional opportunity, whether it be the making of disciples (Mt. 28) or the loving attention to the vulnerable and forgotten (Mt. 25), is still a positive choice. The working-out of this choice under the guidance of the Spirit enables us to 'give an account' of our hope with gentleness (1. Peter 3.15-16): the people of God witness to God's presence among them by seeking to live in scorn of the idols of the world, without being afraid of wisdom that may come from the world, or blind to possible work the Holy Spirit may be doing already, outside the context of the church.

### **3. Context, Community and Residence**

SWMTC seeks to be a place in which students and staff alike are continually formed as disciples of God, called to particular vocations in his kingdom. Our ethos is focussed on the corporate working-out of what it is that God calls us to be, as a

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<sup>4</sup> Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*, Ch.1.8, quoted in *Wonder and Wisdom* by Celia Deane-Drummond (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006, p. 57.



community and as individuals. We put worship, respect and care, a need for authenticity in our relationships, and inclusiveness at the core of all that we do.

### *Worship*

Worship is vital to the life of SWMTC. In our corporate worship we focus our attention on the God whom we are learning to love and serve. Through it we offer our lives to God and search for God's living word to us. In it we express and find our identity as SWMTC, a particular community of the people of God. Worship is also one of the areas in the Course in which the experience students bring is honoured, even as their faith, gifts and skills are being developed.

Through worship we respond in faith, penitence, praise and love to the God who has called us to be his children by adoption and grace. Through worship we listen to his living word, and offer him our life and work. Through worship we express and find our identity as the pilgrim people of God, of which SWMTC represents a significant part of all our journeys as we meet together in study, fellowship and in the breaking of bread. Through worship we are opened to the guidance and enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Worship also gives us the opportunity of realising and developing particular gifts and skills that we have been given.

At SWMTC, students have room to experiment with both formal and informal liturgy. They have opportunities to grow in understanding and appreciation of ways of worshipping with which they are not familiar, including ones of their own denomination which they might not yet have encountered. It is hoped that they are excited and interested by the gifts others bring to worship, and that they discover gifts they never thought they had. It is expected that they find themselves growing in sensitivity to what helps and hinders other members of the Course in their worship. It is our desire to develop skills of collaboration, so worship is planned in a group, and responsibility for the leading of worship during a residential is shared with this group (for IME 1-3 students this is their Tutor Group; for Readers in Training it is their year group).

### *Respect and care*

SWMTC is an environment in which relationships are characterised by openness to the other, and a deep mutuality. We value the experience of all our students and staff, and recognise the unique contribution they make to our corporate life. Yet we encourage everyone who is a part of our community to be open to God's transforming grace, and to the chance of being changed through our encounters with one another, and the risen Christ.

With this in mind, interaction is at the heart of what we do in community. Teaching sessions are designed to be dialogic in tone, and staff are always open to feedback, both on the subject matter under discussion, and their performance. We always seek

to enhance our provision, and to deliver theological education that is empowering, and draws on the best practice in adult education.

To keep formation at the heart of our common life, we place a high premium on group work. The IME 1-3 first year group is always kept together, and follows a different track during residential periods from the second and third years. Similarly, the Readers in Training are taught in separate year groups, while coming together as a whole during other residential periods. This enables relationships of trust, openness and respect to be nurtured from an early stage in training. The theory and practice of groups is explicitly explored within both programmes.

Our IME 1-3 tutor group system puts students from all three year groups together, providing an opportunity for them to learn from each other and grow. These are formed geographically, and supported by a tutor, who facilitates discussions that contribute to corporate and individual growth.

SWMTC's staff members model a culture of care and support in their relationships with each other. This sets a tone that is seen throughout the organisation, and mirrored in the relationships formed between students, and staff (including the course chaplains), during residential periods. In addition, IME 1-3 personal tutors visit students regularly at home, to help them make connections between their residential work and their local context. This provides a particular support to spouses, and helps us promote an ethos of respect and care that percolates beyond the students themselves.

### *Authenticity*

We pay close attention to group dynamics, and work hard to equip our students with appropriate listening skills at an early stage in their training and formation. It is our hope that, through this, we can facilitate an authentic encounter between persons that enables them to share in God's work of creation, reconciliation and redemption.

By helping our students develop effective models of group working, we hope to equip them for an effective ministry in the Church; one that models what can be achieved when we come together in the Spirit and are open to being transformed by each other's witness and life.

At the heart of this approach, then, is a commitment to authenticity. To put that differently, we are committed to empowering our students, and staff, to be more fully the creature that God intends them to be. SWMTC hopes to engender a culture in which people are confident in offering their own viewpoints, and being *themselves*, knowing that they do so in a spirit of love, mutuality and respect.

### *Inclusiveness*

Thriving communities are life-giving, but they can have an ugly underside: those who do not feel as if they fully belong to the community can become isolated, and unhappy. At SWMTC, we recognise that God's kingdom is inclusive, and work hard to fight discrimination, among our students and within the wider church.

We pray that our students will be formed through their participation in the corporate life of SWMTC. For that community truly to flourish, it is important that it is welcoming to all. As such, we work hard to raise awareness of the needs of, and show hospitality where appropriate to, people with disabilities. We also seek to promote healthy relationships between people of different ethnic origins, and sexual orientations.

### *The use of residence*

The IME 1-3 programme has six residential weekends (from Friday evening to Sunday lunch) at a venue in Plymouth, and a seven-day period of residence in the Easter school holidays each year. These residential events are undertaken only by SWMTC members, so they focus on the understanding, skills and formation that those training for public ministry specifically need. The first year group, normally around 15 people, follows its own programme; the second and third year groups work together.

The Reader Programme has two residential weekends and four study days per year. Students are also required to complete three placements in the course of their training, and to keep a Learning Journal throughout their training.

Residential periods provide an opportunity for students on our programmes to learn in community, within an overarching context of worship and hospitality. They are times to come away from the day-to-day pressures of work, family and church life, and reflect in a focused manner on the reality of vocation. In this, they provide a useful model for thinking about public ministry, and are highly valued by both students and staff.

The focus of residential periods is on formation and training, but the teaching sessions retain intellectual rigour and encourage deep engagement from students. These periods provide an opportunity to connect the different areas of theological learning encountered elsewhere in the course, and relate them to the ministry to which our students are called. In this, they represent one of the key moments in which theory and practice are fully integrated – they are, in other words, an opportunity for the students to enter into the *praxis* of the Church, and be formed by it. More than that, a very special type of community is engendered by the periods of

residence, one that evinces particularly strong bonds and commitments between students and staff.

### *The use of context for learning and formation*

We believe that theology is inherently contextual. The challenge facing students is how to use context effectively in training and formation, so that it illumines the theological task rather than being a distraction from it. Equipping students with the skills to discern what is required of them in a given context, and how that context informs their ministry and theological reflection is at the heart of our approach to training and formation.

There are three important contexts at work in our programmes:

- **Regional contexts:** Provided by our residential programme, discussed above, which draws candidates from all over the South West
- **Local Contexts:** During term time there are evening classes in local centres - Truro, Plymouth, and Exeter - 27 sessions each year, plus three Saturday study days. The modules taught in these sessions provide students with theological understanding and knowledge in biblical theology and doctrinal studies, and are studied by ministerial and non-ministerial students. In addition IME 1-3 students have six meetings with their local Tutor Group. Ministerial students also complete a programme of placements and ministry in the local church, tailored by SWMTC to suit their needs and complement their previous experience.
- **Individual contexts:** Personal Tutors work with students on an individual basis to help them explore the impact of training, using Learning Journals to focus their thinking and help them intentionally to consider formation. We also expect them to have a spiritual director or soul friend. Staff Tutors visit students at home in order to understand their individual context to the full, and to help support them and their families through the training process.

### *The significance of the local church context*

The local church occupies a vital place during training. First, it is a place of encouragement, pastoral support and prayer. We encourage students to find ways to share with the congregation what they are doing and how training works. We explore with them and their local minister how they may need to re-allocate time and priorities to take account of the demands on them during training.

Second, in the first year we help students to reflect on the setting, life, mission and ministry of their local church in new ways, developing new tools to understand it more deeply. We encourage them to share this new understanding with their local

church so that it can also learn from the process. This 'sociological' approach to local church in Year 1 is complemented by a theological approach through sessions on introductory ecclesiology.

Third, the local church is a place to develop key skills in leading worship and preaching. We discuss with students and their ministers appropriate expectations for how often they should be involved in significant ways in these roles, for this will depend considerably on experience and personal circumstance. In general, we suggest that a commitment once a month is reasonable.

On two occasions each year students' leading of worship or preaching is formally reviewed, with feedback given from members of their congregation, and where possible their minister. On one occasion each year this focuses on preaching; on one occasion it focuses on worship leading.

The feedback forms are included in students' portfolios, as part of the evidence of their learning and development. In each year of training they write a formal reflection on these experiences and what they have learned as a result.

### *Our learners*

SWMTC's IME 1-3 students come principally from the Anglican Dioceses of Exeter and Truro, though it is possible for students at the western end of the Diocese of Bath and Wells to elect to train with us, rather than with the other regional providers.

SWMTC students train for stipendiary and self-supporting ministry, including a small number sponsored for the permanent diaconate, and we have a reasonable balance between male and female candidates, with a slight numerical bias towards the latter. Candidates often choose to train with us because our non-residential approach fits well with existing work or family commitments. Many of our students also greatly value the contextual approach to training and formation that is at the heart of our vision: for them, the vocation to public ministry derives from their location in a local church context, and is nurtured by that context. So it makes sense to retain a relationship with their local church during training, while experiencing unfamiliar contexts, and encountering God in new places.

We tend to have a small number of South West based Methodist students each year, though this is likely to change as the Methodist Church moves to a centralised model of training provision, as described above. The United Reformed Church adopted a similar policy in 2007, and we do not currently have any URC students registered with us.

Our Reader candidates are all drawn from the Diocese of Exeter, with whom we have a contract to deliver this training. We are currently exploring the possibility of a pathway for 'Young Readers', in the hope of helping the Diocese foster more Reader

vocations in the age-group 18-26. This will have points of connection with the existing programme, as well as providing alternative training in areas that are especially likely to resonate with a younger constituency of students.

#### **4. Self evaluation of the approach to formation**

SWMTC has developed an approach to formation that marries serious engagement with a range of contexts to rigorous academic theological study and regular periods of residence. Our experience is that students find this rewarding, stimulating, and empowering for their future ministries, whether as Deacons, Presbyters or Readers.

It is always a challenge to know how best to fully integrate theory and practice in theological education. That is to say, the task of helping students think theologically, while nonetheless remaining rooted in the daily realities of the world (and the Church), is never easy. Theory and practice are by no means separable, for reasons we have already detailed, and we hope to show students something of what it is to engage in the dialectic between them. Of course, some of our students do not fully grasp this concept, and have a preference for either one end or the other of the theory-practice continuum.

Nonetheless, as we have shown, it is the hope of the staff team to model, and help form in our students, a ministry that is both theologically informed and practically grounded. The sacraments provide a touchstone here, of course, for they are both symbols of this world and carriers of God's grace.

This speaks of an inherent focus in SWMTC's programmes on the formational power of *praxis* – i.e. theory-laden practice. Through regular participation in the practices of the Church, mediated through our institution, we see that students become effective ministers, who are able to take their appointed place in the communities they ultimately serve. These practices include teaching, worship, hospitality, group work, face-to-face encounters, prayer, and so on.

SWMTC's staff team recognises that the effectiveness of our programmes in forming people is hard to discern, since formation itself is an apparently ungraspable concept. Even so, the staff regularly spend time together, and in company with other practitioners, in order to wrestle with the meaning of formation, and the fitness of our programmes for facilitating it.

As well as these discussions, we organised and hosted a two-day consultation with representatives from the Dioceses of Exeter and Truro in December 2011, with a focus on formation. The consultation resulted in a number of developments,

including a renewed commitment to developing discipleship in the region, and to the strengthening of the Community of Piran and Luke.<sup>5</sup>

To conclude, then, we believe our approach to formation has much to commend it – not least because it recognises the inherent ineffability of the notion. Because of this, however, we realise there is always work to be done in developing an approach to formation that meets the needs of the contemporary church, and continues to equip students with the skill of practical wisdom that we regard as so important to their future ministry in the Church.

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<sup>5</sup> Our two diocesan bishops are committed to developing a collaborative partnership, called The Community of Piran and Luke (CPAL). This will in many ways function as a *de facto* RTP in the region, with SWMTC as the key provider of formation and training for ministry and discipleship. CPAL will be an umbrella ‘commissioning’ organisation, helping the region’s key players work effectively together in pursuit of the highest quality theological education.