

Think Training

Encouraging and promoting the training of God's people for ministry

Issue 8 Winter 2008

Welcome to another Training Bulletin!

In this issue we venture further into the world of training provision with the views of the Principals of three **Theological Colleges**: The London Theological Seminary (LTS), Oak Hill College, and Wales Evangelical School of Theology (WEST). These are all men whom members of the Training Team have been privileged to interview over the past year and whose views we value highly.

We also have an article on the continuing and developing work of FIEC's firmly established training course '**Prepared for Service**' (PFS), which includes the first-hand experience and observations of several course members. The PFS courses are overseen by the **Training Resources Team**. Last, but by no means least, we have an article by Martin Woodier on the **Christian Ministry Training Course (CMTC)**, a new course from the **Yorkshire School of Christian Ministry**, a co-operative venture of the FIEC churches in North and West Yorkshire.

All this is evidence of two things: firstly, a rapidly growing awareness of the extent and urgency of the need for thorough training for present and future church leaders; and secondly a rapidly growing provision for such training. All of us involved in FIEC Training are delighted at what we see developing across the country. But we are also aware that among a large group of Independent Churches such as ours there is a real need for co-ordination and co-operation. That is why we set up the **Pastoral Development Team** in 2007 with the task of mapping out clear "routes into ministry". Under John Stevens' leadership there has

developed a clear vision for what might be achieved, under God's gracious hand. John will share his perspective on the progress of the work and its future direction in the next bulletin.

Please pray for our efforts. The current Training Team consists of Ray Evans, Martyn Hallett, Marcus Honeysett, Paul Mallard (Chairman), John Stevens and Richard Underwood. Please contact the FIEC Office or visit the FIEC website for past editions of this Bulletin or further information on training.

Martyn Hallett (editor)

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Training at London Theological Seminary

Towards the end of Acts 14, there is a moving description of Paul and Barnabas returning to the towns of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, where they had preached the gospel with some success and had also met with violent opposition. Luke tells us that they returned 'strengthening the souls of the disciples' and 'exhorting them to continue in the faith' and that, as they went, they 'appointed elders in every church'. Behind this last, innocent little comment lies, unspoken, an awesome responsibility, which Paul spells out in his address, some years later, to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. Elders are to 'shepherd the church of God': they are to protect the sheep against 'savage wolves', watch over them unceasingly, guide them, help them and build them up in their faith. It is for this arduous and exacting, but immensely rewarding, work that we seek to prepare men at LTS. Sustaining the work of a gospel minister over an extended period of time requires sound and solid

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preparation. It requires the teaching of sound *content*, so that the student learns the things he needs to know in order to begin and maintain a fruitful ministry. It also requires the portrayal of good *examples*, by men who themselves have experience of the demands and challenges of pastoral life. It must be both *intellectually challenging* - because we are dealing with some of the deepest matters that the human mind can grapple with - and *vocationally relevant* - geared to men who will become pastors and preachers rather than academic theologians. The *ethos* of the training must be entirely Christian, spiritually motivated and biblically shaped in all its aspects. I want to give you a flavour here of how we go about discharging this immense task at LTS. The first section below provides some idea of the essentials of the course. The second section sets out our plans for developing the course in a number of key areas.

THE COURSE AT LTS

The LTS course is two years long (four years part-time). Students can be residential (we have single and family accommodation on site) or come in daily. We aim, in the course, to cover the essential areas which any student for pastoral ministry needs to study.

Biblical & systematic theology: At LTS, about half of the total teaching time on the course is given over to the study of Old and New Testament and the biblical languages. We aim to give students a sound grasp of the unfolding of God's plan of redemption, as it is revealed in Scripture, to help them understand the different genres in which Scripture is written, to get to grips with the different issues addressed in the different books of the Bible and to develop the ability to exegete biblical passages accurately. In systematic theology, we consider the Bible's message doctrine by doctrine, rather than book by book. Systematic and biblical studies complement one another - each is necessary to the healthy study of the other and each feeds into and is informed by the other.

Church history: In our postmodern age, the study of history is often downgraded, or even ignored, either because of the supposed impossibility of doing history at all or because any lessons which might be learned from history are relativised into irrelevance. Such ideas should be anathema to the Christian, whose very faith is built upon historical fact. The study of church history adds weight and significance to the understanding of theology, as the student examines how previous generations addressed issues of doctrine or practice which still surface today. It also encourages, warns and inspires, as we enter into the labours of those who have preceded us.

Pastoral studies: LTS is established as a non-denominational training institution for evangelical churches, under the conviction that it is vital for the future of those churches that it provide for the training of

its own future ministers. We take great care at LTS to help students understand the reality of the challenges they will face as pastors. The vast majority of our lecturers are men with full-time pastoral experience. They bring to their lectures all the benefit of their experience, addressing issues of relevance to pastoral life and work. In addition, a regular course of lectures on pastoral theology addresses the various areas of practical pastoral work, with plenty of opportunity for discussion and examination of real-life pastoral scenarios.

Relationship with churches: No seminary should be a self-contained island. At LTS, we believe our work to be integrally connected with that of the churches. This is manifested in a number of ways. So, for example, we will not, except in unusual circumstances, accept students at LTS without the recommendation of their home church. Throughout the course, we seek to build and maintain links with students' home churches and ensure there is good, two-way communication. The home church needs to know how the student is progressing at the seminary and of any problems or difficulties which he is facing. The seminary needs to know that the student is continuing an active and healthy involvement in his home church. Where a student is resident at the seminary, we place him with a mentoring church locally to provide him with a church home for his time with us and to give some opportunity for involvement in church activities and pastoral work.

In all these areas, the key word for us is *partnership*. We are here to serve the church and desire to partner with churches in order to provide the kind of training which will help men prepare for gospel ministry.

DEVELOPMENTS

Plans are now well advanced to introduce some important developments and new initiatives into the LTS course. These plans should become effective for the year beginning October 2009.

Contemporary issues: If we are to communicate the gospel effectively to our generation, we need to understand two things - the gospel message and the people whom we are trying to reach. We are therefore developing the contemporary issues part of the LTS course to meet this need more effectively. The aim of this part of the course will be to help students to think about the attitudes and assumptions of those to whom they minister. Ideas about truth, the place of religion in society, sexual mores and ethics have undergone deep shifts in thinking in the minds of many. Secular humanists have become much more aggressive in their opposition to the gospel. Feminist thinking is firmly embedded in society. The relativism of a post-modern multiculturalism permeates people's assumptions about religion. The course that we are developing aims to ensure that students examine these trends in order to

be better equipped to meet the challenges that they represent in gospel proclamation and pastoral ministry in our day.

Preaching: LTS was established under the firm conviction that preachers are raised up by Christ and cannot be manufactured by a seminary. However, a man with gifts still needs to be trained to use his gifts effectively. We are developing the preaching course at LTS to provide clear, practical instruction on sermon preparation, structuring a sermon, preaching from the different genres of Scripture and ensuring the Christ-centredness of our preaching. We emphasise that preaching is more than simply the effective communication of the results of sound exegesis. It involves argument, persuasion, exhortation, urgency and passion. Above all, it requires a prayerful dependence upon the Spirit of God.

Teaching methods: The value of any educational or vocational course lies, not so much in what is taught, but in what students learn. We are developing the course at LTS to increase the variety of different teaching methods, so as to maximise the extent to which students learn and to ensure that that learning is focussed on areas and issues which are essential for pastoral ministry. This will involve the greater use of seminars and workshops, alongside traditional lectures, together with the study of set texts.

Placement scheme: We are structuring a scheme, which will become an integral part of the course at LTS, whereby students will have an extended placement at a church, a number of times throughout the course, to give opportunity for deeper involvement in the life of a church and to give greater insight into and experience of pastoral life in practice.

Ongoing theological development: Most professions today provide opportunity for ongoing education and training throughout an individual's career. Often it is compulsory. At LTS, we are developing ways of helping men in pastoral ministry to receive further training and study, if they so wish. Such study may be full-time or part-time. It may be informal, supervised by one of the staff at LTS or by an outside expert, or it may lead to a degree or other qualification. We currently offer a ThM in historical theology, accredited by Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. We are developing plans for similar links for both M.Div. and ThM degrees with two other US seminaries. We hope to be in a position to make further announcements about these in the near future.

This is an exciting and challenging time to be involved in the work of training gospel ministers. Please continue to pray for and support the work at LTS.

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The Work of Oak Hill College

When you watch the last night of the Proms and listen to William Blake's words, 'And was Jerusalem builded here, Among these dark satanic mills', it is very easy to feel the hairs stand up on the back of your neck. It is certainly stirring and inspirational. But what do all those people singing along exactly think the New Jerusalem is to which they're committing themselves? I mention this because a theological college should be committed to building Jerusalem. Paul, after all, tells us about the Jerusalem above, whose children are children of the Spirit. But it can be tempting to confuse this Jerusalem with a present, earthly, more carnal 'Jerusalem', of institutional empires and repute. So let me outline (as much to remind me as you!), what should mark us as a theological college committed to the Jerusalem above.

VISION FOR PREPARING GOSPEL WORKERS

We must begin with God's will. What does God want of his ministers? Personally, I find myself coming back again and again to the mandates of Titus I and Paul's instructions to Titus about the choice of presbyters. We're told that the presbyter must have a certain godly lifestyle, believe and teach the truth, and refute error.

Every element of that matters. Of course, a godly life counts, for a presbyter's own life cannot be divorced from what he must teach. And so for a theological college, questions of personal holiness matter as much as intellectual competence. A presbyter likewise does not just teach the truth but must believe it. We don't say the Lord's Prayer with our fingers crossed, or sing 'And Can It Be' just because we like the tune. As for teaching the truth, a presbyter must know the truth in order to do that, know it as well as he can, not in the sense of mastering and possessing it, but certainly in the sense that the doctrines of grace are precious to him.

Let me develop this a little. Sometimes in the past we've had wonderful generations of people who trust in Christ but haven't always been able to articulate the knowledge that lies behind the faith. The danger with any theological college that is trying to be faithful is that it over-balances the other way. We can strike that right balance by asking: what is the purpose of me knowing things like Greek, church history and arguments about the letter to the Galatians? It has got to be so that I may trust in God more fully. And then I may be a more obedient servant rather than one caught up in the solitary beauty of my own thoughts.

Lastly, there is the refuting of error. The problem with refuting error is that the errors of 2008 are not necessarily those of 1928. That is, the shape that the fallenness of our minds takes is slightly different in each

generation – sometimes radically different. We have got to be equipping this generation of ministers to refute the errors of *our* generation – but also giving them the equipment to recognise and preach to the errors of the past and the future. We are training ministers for a world with a changing climate of thinking patterns. I look at it rather like a wheel with spokes. You move around the circumference of the wheel to very different kinds of people and patterns of thinking. What we want from any spoke is to take us back to the centre, which is Christ. The pastoral challenge is being able to work out where a person is at – which particular spoke they are on at any given moment. To do all that, God's ministers have to know his Word, and they must also be able to understand his world.

So we want to, more accurately we think God wills us to, produce ministers who are faithful in the full sense of that word.

PHILOSOPHY OF TRAINING

At Oak Hill, we think that these biblical requirements hold true whatever form of ministry you may enter. Our aim therefore is to supply biblical training (knowing God's Word) for contemporary ministry (understanding the world in which you minister).

To make that aim real, God's Word is at the heart of what we try to teach. Our Biblical Studies courses therefore try to encourage honesty, rigour and understanding of all that God has said and, where possible, provide instruction in Greek and Hebrew to a high level. Church History, Doctrine, Worship and Ethics courses try to deepen our understanding of God's Word as we see how it fits together, how it coheres, how it applies to life, and how it has been understood over the years by our fellow Christians. Courses in what we call the Church and World area are designed to help students understand both how God's Word applies to the world around us and in local churches, and also how God's Word may be heard by the world around us. Students on all our courses are taught in these core areas.

Since different kinds of ministry require different kinds of specialisation, there is the flexibility to add to these core subjects different optional modules to develop particular specialisms for particular circumstances.

This understanding of God and his ways must not stay in the classroom or lecture theatre, and hence we provide a number of areas where what has been learnt can be earthed in practice. Participating in College missions and evangelism is an important part of what we offer. As well as a placement scheme for Anglican ordinands, I am delighted to say we have developed a voluntary scheme for Independents, and also a stream which deals with practical ministry issues.

We want to provide not just a programme from which students learn, although that is important enough, but also one that also gives them space to live and grow as Christians. That is why we lay such emphasis on full time residential training in which College Chapel, fellowship groups and common prayer provide ways for us to be the body of Christ in which the very different gifts which God has given us for ministry can be encouraged and shaped into patterns that will make Christ known and bless his people.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COLLEGE AND THE CHURCHES

As a college we were set up initially to train Anglicans, and we are privileged to stand in the tradition of Anglican evangelicalism. It has, though, equally been a privilege to have been training more and more from the Independent constituency over recent years. Not only is this a privilege, it also involves an element of trust. It would be appropriate here to say something about how I understand the relationship between the college and local churches. The college is a servant institution that exists for the sake of the ministry of local churches. It is not the other way round. Local churches raise and nurture future ministers, and receive our students as those trained for this next stage of ministry. To serve in such a way is to be put in a position of trust and we must endeavour to deserve that trust by the faithfulness of what we do.

PLANS FOR DEVELOPING THE MINISTRY

Thinking about the future it would be easy to think about what kind of facilities, or what size student body it would be good to have in five years. Those are important things, but I wonder whether they don't run the risk of degenerating into an 'earthly Jerusalem' style of thought. More important in five years' time is for us to be faithful, fruitful and humble. Each of these has a number of dimensions.

With regard to faithfulness, there are four dimensions. We want to be faithful to the Bible, being a college of faithful disciples of Jesus Christ by abiding in his word. Forgive me for citing the Anglican homilies, but I find this statement on the Bible inspiring: 'Unto a Christian man, there can be nothing either more necessary or profitable, than the knowledge of Holy Scripture; forasmuch as in it is contained God's true word, setting forth his glory and also man's duty.' (Homily 1, on Reading Scripture). We must, second, be faithful to our purposes set out in our foundation, as is only right, training people for a conservative evangelical Christian ministry. Third, we must be faithful in our relations of trust and stewardship with local churches. Fourth, we must be faithful to our students, providing them with all that requires, as far as in us lies.

On fruitfulness, I think there are five dimensions. We want to nurture ministers of the Gospel who will

themselves be fruitful, taking their part in winning men and women to the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, we would like to be fruitful ourselves, in doing this in greater and greater numbers, because the fields of our country are indeed white to harvest. Third, we want to be fruitful in a different sense, by fine-tuning and improving what it is that we have to offer students by way of training, responding to their needs and abilities, and the calls of the current situation in our land. Fourth, we want to be fruitful in our proclamation of the Gospel at a scholarly level, taking forward the name of Jesus so that knees even in academic theology may bow to our Lord Jesus. Fifth, we want to be fruitful in raising the next generation of committed and faithful evangelical scholars, who will discharge these duties in their turn.

Finally, we turn to humility. There are few things quite so repellent as a proud evangelical scholar. Before God we are humble because he saves not for our deservings, but out of his great mercy, made effective by Jesus' death on the cross. But likewise we are to be humble before others, recognising and prizing all that God has done in and through them. Why so? Because we are servants, and we serve a Lord who humbled himself and took the form of a servant and for our sakes was obedient to death on a cross.

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WEST-Side Story

For many years now, the training of potential pastor/teachers and church planters for the evangelical free churches of the UK has been tragically inadequate. This has been due to a shocking complacency and lack of vision on the part of both churches and theological colleges.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

A sub-biblical view of independency has meant that churches have been trapped in parochial thinking. One result has been that there is often no conception of the huge theological, biblical, and practical skill-set required by those who would lead evangelical churches surely and safely through the treacherous seas of our post-Christian world. When compared with those in major denominations, evangelical free churches, whether from naivety or arrogance, almost uniquely continue to believe that they can survive and prosper without ministers of the word who are trained at the highest level.

As long as this situation persists, our constituency will continue to decline at an ever-increasing rate. It will continue to be unable to produce leading evangelical

thinkers who will capture and mould the imagination of the next generation of believers. It will continue to fail to produce evangelical scholarship of any consequence, so that its libraries must continue to depend parasitically on the writings of others. Most pathetically of all, it will continue to fail to seek out, nurture, encourage and support the full-scale training of those men in its own congregations who could ultimately rescue it.

In the meantime, some professedly evangelical theological colleges have loosened their grip on the truth, employing faculty members who could not subscribe to a fully authoritative, sufficient and inerrant Bible. Others have retained their commitment to the Scriptures but have sold out to arid intellectualism, or failed sadly to understand the necessity of contemporary cultural engagement, or hopelessly neglected instruction in practical ministry, leadership and people skills, or forgotten that ministers of the gospel need to be trained first and foremost in godliness... Moreover, theological colleges have often in the past proudly ignored the churches they were supposedly serving, baselessly assuming they instinctively knew what was required. Colleges and churches can still live in parallel universes.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

All the above, and much more along the same lines (which, you'll be pleased to know, I have neither space nor time to record here) contributed to bring me to what is now WEST (Wales Evangelical School of Theology). Our vision could be simply expressed as a passionate desire to redress the ills mentioned above. Essentially, we are utterly committed to recovering the pastor-theologian model – think of Calvin or Edwards – that disappeared when Church and Academy split in mutual disdain and rancour with the rise of unbelieving 'higher criticism' in the mid nineteenth century. We don't want theologically illiterate pastors, any more than we want detached theologians who are unaccountable to the churches. We want to prepare, humble, godly, loving, practical, self-aware, culturally-attuned, passionate pastor-preachers. That's all!

Also, seeking to love the Church of God as much as the Lord Jesus Christ does, we want to work responsively with God-honouring, Bible-centred congregations. We believe, in cooperation with associations like FIEC, we can help to reform the thinking of both churches and training institutions alike. I long for the day to dawn when free churches, both individually and collectively, will see how vital it is to work together to support the kind of servant-seminaries that are needed – and when they truly recognise that faithful servants should also be paid and supported. Part of the levy paid by denominational churches generally goes to support their theological training institutions. But what happens when a college seeks primarily to serve the independent constituency? We love to meet the needs of the many churches which contact us week by week. But how many

of them pause to wonder who has paid for the costly training of the new pastor they have been freely given? I hope I am not just griping! These are vital issues that must be addressed and remedied. But let me turn to turn to what WEST offers. There are two initial routes for prospective church leaders. The Main Course consists of a three-year BA (Hons) degree in Theology followed by a one-year, home-based MTh in Scripture and Practice. The innovative Binary Course offers a one-year, intensive Licence in Theology (LTh), for those with a prior degree, followed by a one-year, church-based MA in Contemporary Church Leadership. Courses are often customised in order to suit individual needs.

I have concentrated on the crying need for the equipping of men for church leadership here in the UK. I should at least mention that we also train men and women from all around the world, from all sorts of evangelical church backgrounds, for omni-directional mission; that our BA women's track, based firmly on complementarian principles, is meeting an ever-growing demand; and that WEST's postgraduate and research programmes are second to none on the UK evangelical scene, with around 50 PhDs currently being undertaken by godly students whose main desire is to honour God and serve his Church.

As we look to the future, we hope to increase our already very fine faculty and develop our facilities in order to accommodate anticipated growth. Please pray that the Lord will be pleased with all we are seeking to do for his kingdom.

Jonathan Stephen is Principal of WEST and can be contacted at principal@west.org.uk

Christian Ministry Training Course

The Christian Ministry Training Course is being launched by a group of FIEC churches to cater for very real needs which exist amongst those who want to take their theological and biblical education and their training for ministry to a deeper level. There are a number of colleges and courses available to them but these usually require them to leave their home, church, job and sometimes family for all or most of the course. It is also consequently very expensive to train in this way. Some churches are large enough to fund people through such courses, but they are few and far between, certainly in our area (the north of England). Courses like our own PfS and the Proclamation Trust's Cornhill Training Course are different in the way they are run, but they require that people have regular days off work, which is fine for some people but is just not possible for others.

We therefore set out to provide serious Bible and ministry training which:

- is affordable to average people from any size of church
- does not require the students to leave their job, home or church
- both educates and trains, is theological and practical

HOW CAN THIS BE ACHIEVED?

The CMTC uses lectures which will be downloaded from our own website, others' websites or as podcasts so that a vast amount of material can be covered during the four year course by just listening to three lectures per week on the students' iPod, MP3 player or computer. With that manageable commitment a student will complete a carefully designed course of Biblical and Theological Studies, Church History, Contemporary Culture and Ministry of 600 lectures! This is an extensive course. On 'staff' we have people like John Piper, John MacArthur, David Wells, Tim Keller, Don Carson, Douglas Kelly, John Frame and J.I. Packer! This gives an enormously flexible approach to learning. It can be done at a time and a place to suit the student. They can be sitting at a desk or digging the garden. It can be Monday evening, or the crack of dawn on Thursday, or on a Saturday afternoon. The lecturers are always ready and waiting!

There will be an online student forum to facilitate questions, discussion and application. In addition, two weeks a year (one around Easter and one in late July) will be spent in residential learning in an idyllic setting with experienced tutors who will be able, in light of what will have been learnt through the recorded lectures, to especially concentrate on practical ministry skills. There will be six assignments per year where two of these will be essays; the others will aim to be developing other gifts which are rather more useful in ministry. As well as receiving tutorial support from the Directors of the CMTC the students will also be linked with someone suitable in their own church or locality to receive ongoing mentoring.

In all, over the four years, there are four key elements to the CMTC:

- 600 recorded lectures
- eight weeks of residential training
- 24 assignments
- tutorial support from the CMTC Directors and a mentor in their own locality

The vision of CMTC is to put in depth Bible and ministry training within reach of as many people as possible so that they are not excluded by any practical reason, be it financial, or family, or job, or geography, or church commitments. All they need is a heart for God and a serious intention to learn and study alongside their current commitments.

By the end of the course we believe students will have:

- developed gifts for ministry in the situation God has placed them in
- the skills to handle Biblical and theological questions thoroughly and with a breadth of understanding which comes from the ability to rightly interpret the text of Scripture and is informed by the historical development of the church
- a thorough understanding of the times in which we live and contemporary worldviews
- the ability to share their faith in a culturally sensitive way
- the ability to work with people as a part of a team,
- handling the challenges which come with that
- an understanding of how to make progress and implement change in a well-established church as well as in a new church plant
- developed skills in caring for people and pastoring them
- looked thoroughly at leadership within the church, and the particular challenges of working with it and within it

It is suitable for those entering pastoral ministry but also relevant for men and women who want to take serving God to a deeper level.

The fees for the course are normally £250 per year, but there is a discount of £50 per year for those who join the course in 2009. The residential weeks will cost around £100 each, which includes accommodation and meals.

Are there people in your congregation whom you can recommend this programme to?

For more information please visit our website at www.yscm.org.uk/cmtc. *The Christian Ministry Training Course is run by the FIEC, West & North Yorkshire Group, in association with the Yorkshire Gospel Partnership and is open to all Bible-believing Christians on completion of the application form which can be downloaded from our website.*

Director

Martin Woodier, Pastor of Bethel Evangelical Church, Otley, FIEC Council Member, YGP Steering Committee Member and Training Director. You can contact Martin at martinwoodier@yscm.org.uk

Assistant Director

Steven Bowers, Pastor of Brighouse Evangelical Church

PfS—Partnering with Church

Dave Cook, one of the Administrators of Prepared for Service (PfS), has collected personal testimonies and reflections from present and recent student on PfS. These give a helpful insight into the nature of the course and how it could help others.

Prepared for Service—PfS—was established in 1994 and began with fifteen students at Carey Baptist Church in Reading. Since then, in 14 years it has trained 259 students. In the past five years 26 of those graduating have been appointed as Pastors or Assistant Pastors. In September 2005, a second training centre was established at Walton Evangelical Church, Chesterfield. More than 40 students are currently in training, each beginning their two-year programme either in September or in January/February each year.

More than seventy serving pastors, some with their wives, together with some Bible College lecturers from LTS, Oak Hill, Moorlands and WEST provide valuable and memorable contributions as PfS course lecturers. Course members have recently come from the four corners of England and Wales - Kent to Cornwall, London, Lincoln through Leicester to the West Midlands, North and South Wales, Lancashire to Yorkshire. PfS is training them on behalf of and in partnership with their sponsoring churches.

David Cook, Administrator

Paul - Prepared for Service or PfS as its members affectionately call it, is a part time Christian ministry course enabling people involved in church ministries to have the breadth of a Bible seminary training whilst not having to be residential at a Bible school. Whilst it cannot imitate the depth of a 2 or 3 year full time course it covers the same breadth of subjects such as Bible Overview, Theology, Church History and many practical aspects of church life, such as encouraging fellowship, caring, mission and evangelism. It allows students to deepen their knowledge in any of the component parts by further reading and putting things into practice.

Its features include lectures and discussions, completing practical and written assignments which are assessed. It is not just a case of turning up and soaking it all in like a sponge. You have to do something with all that you hear! It is distinctive in that it draws together men and women for their appropriate Biblical ministries and brings Bible college lecturers and local pastors into the course. The key distinctive for me was the privilege of rich fellowship with other Christians, male and female, lecturers and students, all ministering to God's wonderful grace in many diverse situations.

The benefits of PFS continue after the course finishes. For one church in the Midlands it has not only given a rich source of people to minister during its year long interregnum, but PFS has even trained its new pastor! I would thoroughly recommend PFS for anyone wanting to know more of God and His purposes for their life. Even if unsure of these, going on the PFS Access Course is a wonderful opportunity to hear mature, experienced pastors give their views and assessments of your gifts. I would heartily recommend that you find out more from PFS about their next Access course, whether for North or South.

Femi - I have found PFS not only to be an informative and in-depth theology course but, more importantly, a great experience in getting to know the Father, whom we serve, even more.

Wes - PFS for me was ideal. In a busy new role as Assistant Minister, to leave all that for three days each month and go and do some serious study was a complete change, challenge and strangely refreshing break. To study and have fellowship with others from many varied situations was inspiring and encouraging. To have access to wise experienced leaders of church life always on hand was invaluable. The Bible Overview was a great way to see the constant need to teach systematic theology in everything we do in church life, from children's talks to sermons.

The practical aspects of the course were thorough and taught by seasoned experts, bringing enthusiasm and real passion. The fellowship with fellow students proved a real source of strength, support and great fun over the two years. In a time of financial difficulties PFS has to remain one of the most flexible, adaptable and affordable training courses. It is fantastic, now as a Pastor, to be recommending and sending someone from our own church to the course.

Jon - Having spent 13 years in industry prior to my first ministry placement, PFS provided the perfect opportunity for me to combine my new post with credible theological training. The mix of Biblical, systematic and practical theology was just right, part refreshing and part challenging, but on the whole useful for the work I was beginning to undertake with young people and young families in Bournemouth.

Steve - PFS was an invaluable means to challenge my thinking, explore the Bible and ultimately learn more about God whom I love and serve.

Andrew - PFS has been an ideal compliment to the practical training I have received in my church as an apprentice. The course is well structured. It encourages the practical relevance of theology to a variety of ministry contexts. As a result, PFS is a great benefit both to the students on the course and to their churches.

Rob - As a reformed Evangelical I have strong opinions about preaching the full counsel of God. However in some areas I had strongly held beliefs but I wasn't sure why I held them. PFS has greatly helped in cementing these beliefs through Bible Doctrines and Church History along with the more practical areas of Pastoral Care.

Richard - My contribution to PFS lies within the area of Church History. To some, remembering their school days, this may be a dreary and uninteresting subject. Yet, remembering Jesus words, "I will build my Church", Church History is really the story of how Jesus has built His Church and how, in spite of spiritual opposition over many years, the Church continues to grow worldwide. Paul's words to Timothy, 'And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others,' (2 Timothy 2:2) are relevant and applicable to the local Church. The most appropriate training for the ministry takes place within the local Church; which PFS is accomplishing. It is encouraging to see the enthusiasm and dedication of those on the PFS course, and their desire to grow in their understanding as they become equipped for ministry."

Dennis - One of my fondest memories is my host family, their prayerful interest in us and how they welcomed us into their home and treated us like one of the family.

Phil - I greatly valued the sharing by other course members of their situations and learning from their experiences.

Simeon - PFS has proved to be an excellent base of Bible teaching which I have been able to draw upon and develop as new situations have arisen in my ministry.

Iain - PFS has given fantastic fellowship with the other course members and the lecturers. The days are very intense, the lectures are informative, stimulating and give you a desire to delve deeper into the things of God. The lecturers have different styles and their different approaches are refreshing. Who can forget Eric Harmer's lecture on The Cults using Star Trek as a teaching aid? Who can fail to be enthused by the Desi Maxwell approach to making difficult subjects understandable or the OT narrative interesting?

Details of the course are available on the FIEC website at www.fiec.org.uk or contact David & Laraine Cook pfs@fiec.org.uk

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