

## **Training Strategy**

May 2008

### **Introduction**

#### **Principles**

There are three guiding principles for the training that needs to be delivered in the Wessex Synod:

- It needs to support the Synod strategy; in particular
  - *to assist the local church in its response to God's call to mission, as expressed in the Five Marks of Mission and*
  - *to use resources effectively*
- It needs to support the United Reformed Church's training strategy as articulated in the Assembly Reports 2006; in particular
  - *to have ecumenical engagement at every stage*
  - *to be integrated to equip the whole people of God for mission*
  - *to present a distinctive reformed ethos*
- It needs to meet our obligations within the denomination's training framework; in particular
  - *to provide support at Synod level for the Educating Ministry programme.*

#### **Challenges**

In addition to this, we are aware of a number of challenges:

- the diminishing number of Stipendiary Ministers available to the whole United Reformed Church
- the particular opportunities and demands created by engaging with the *Vision4Life* process
- the geographical challenge of delivering accessible training across a whole Synod
- making training cost effective with the small numbers that are often involved

#### **Aims**

With this in mind, we have identified some key objectives:

- To provide training that is mission-focussed
- To support and equip ministers as demands on them change and possibly increase
- To strengthen resource provision for lay training
- To equip lay leadership for a wider and deeper role in church life
- To widen the number of people engaged in delivering training and equip them to do so
- To work with ecumenical colleagues wherever possible

## **Training for Ministers**

- We will continue to support the Educating Ministry grant scheme, and encourage ministers to take their allocation of training days and grants for their renewal and development. In 2007, less than half our ministers used all or part of their grant. We aim to increase the take up and reinforce the concept of continuing professional development for ministers by visiting each serving minister once every two years to discuss training needs. These visits will be carried out by the Development and Support Officers.
- Spring School will continue to be an integral part of our support for ministers in the Synod. The attendance is regularly 30 – 35 ministers, which is a significant proportion, and evaluation forms indicate a high level of satisfaction. However, the cost to the Synod was over £6,000 in 2007, and is estimated to be about £5,500 in 2008. We aim to reduce the level of subsidy progressively.
- Ten study days per year, organised on a Synod basis, will be aimed primarily at ministers, although open to all. These will cover a variety of topics and be published annually in a Training Calendar.
- Newly ordained ministers (EM2) will have an induction day each September, and two further events each year tailored to their needs. Each will have a Pastoral Advisor appointed by their Development and Support Officer, part of whose brief will be to help them establish the habit of lifelong learning and critical reflection. Training will be provided for the Pastoral Advisors.
- The Synod's involvement in initial training (EM1) is limited. However, the Development and Support Officer for training will be expected to offer the URC Introductory Course to new students each year and to work with the Resource Centres for Learning over placements as required.
- We will continue to work in partnership with ecumenical colleagues, with the aim of making one another's continued ministerial development courses available across denominational boundaries, thereby increasing choice and opportunity. We will actively promote the development of fully ecumenical courses where possible, through engagement with the Regional Training Partnership.

## **Training for Lay People**

A key objective is to enhance the support and training available to existing lay ministries, namely Elders, Lay Preachers and Local Church Leaders. A further objective is to enable lay people to be more fully prepared for other tasks in church life.

### **Eldership Development**

- The existing Elders Training pack is being well used in some places, but is sometimes seen as too "weighty" and taking too long to work through. We aim to encourage better use of this resource by offering Development and Support Officer time for training in Mission Partnerships or other local groupings, and encouraging a "pick and mix" approach to the pack, rather than seeing it as a ten session programme. Training Co-ordinators and local ministers are seen as key resources in delivering this material.
- The United Reformed Church does not take initial training for Elders seriously enough. We aim to provide a one session introduction to Eldership for new and prospective Elders on an area basis, and encourage take up. Training co-ordinators have been invited to share in the delivery of this resource, and will be enabled to take the lead role in the future. They are also best placed to identify new Elders in their area and make them aware of training opportunities.

### **Lay Preachers**

- In the past, the Synod has offered one training day per year to existing Lay Preachers, with some Districts offering a further day. This year, we have offered three training days in partnership with ecumenical colleagues. We aim to repeat this pattern next year, but to offer one Synod event in addition to reach those who have not identified an ecumenical event as “for them”. This additional event would have a strong URC focus.
- Initial training is by Training for Learning and Serving (TLS) or TLS Lite, in accordance with national guidelines. We will continue to offer a subsidy for TLS and guidance for each student’s Support Network. Support will be given to those leading TLS Lite courses wherever possible (primarily by offering Development and Support Officer input to the study day element of the courses).
- A training grant of up to £200 per year will continue to be available to Lay Preachers and Local Church Leaders. Take up has been low so far, but appreciated by those who have applied. It will be explained and promoted at the URC focussed training day.
- There is potential for Lay Preachers to be more actively supportive of each other, and for experienced Lay Preachers to share in the formation and training of new colleagues. This must be explored with the Synod Lay Preaching Commissioner and draw upon existing best practice.

### **Local Church Leaders**

- This ministry is still to be fully developed in the Wessex Synod. However, we aim to offer one training day per year to existing Local Church Leaders for ongoing development. Any prospective Local Church Leader will be required to complete TLS Foundation and/or a suitable one year TLS course if they have not done so already.
- New Local Church Leaders will always be appointed with an ordained minister working alongside them in some way. Part of their brief will be to encourage the habit of lifelong learning and critical reflection. Training and support will be provided for such minister colleagues to enable this to happen.

### **Other Ministries**

- One training day per year in each half of the Synod will be offered to support officers of the local church (primarily church secretaries, but also treasurers). These will be aimed particularly at those new to the role, but will be open to all.
- The Development and Support Officers will work in partnership with Synod committees and the Youth and Children’s training team to ensure that other training needs are not overlooked. For example, advice and support for those managing employees, familiarisation with the United Reformed Church for those serving in our churches from a different background, and shared input for young people who are involved in leading worship.

### **Equipping lay leadership for a wider and deeper role in church life**

- An annual training and update day will be offered in each half of the Synod for people (ministers and lay people) willing to serve as Interim Moderators. A one-to-one session with support material will be offered to those who are appointed as Interim Moderators without having attended a training day.
- This year, four training days for presiding at Sacraments are being offered, following the introduction of a Synod policy. In future years, one day in each half of the Synod will be offered, and will include presiding at baptisms. The need for training for other occasional services will be monitored.

- A Pioneer Ministry course is being run ecumenically from September this year. We are supporting this new opportunity and will encourage lay leaders in particular to take part.
- We want to support churches who are grasping the opportunities presented by *Vision4Life*. Development and Support Officer time will be budgeted to allow us to respond as needs emerge. For example, a short course on leading small groups is being offered this autumn to help churches in the year of Bible engagement. If training courses are to be accessible to each local church, training co-ordinators will need to be involved in their delivery.

## **Publicity and Promotion**

- Training events will be publicised in an annual training calendar, on the Synod website and via the Synod e newsletter. Ministers, Lay Preachers and Church Secretaries will be notified of particular events by e mail or by post.
- A leaflet will be produced annually by the Development and Support Officers advertising the resources available to local churches and promoting what can be offered locally.
- TLS will be actively promoted, using the March Synod and other opportunities. Lay Preachers and ministers will be encouraged to promote TLS in their own congregations.

## **Resources for Training**

- The most obvious resources for training in the Synod are the Development and Support Officers. The DSO with lead responsibility for training will offer 30 days per year for training events, and will take responsibility for the overall programme. The other DSO will offer 15 days per year for training events. Each Development and Support Officer will have primary responsibility for the delivery of training in their geographical part of the Synod, and will administer EM3 for the ministers within it.
- There will be four Training Co-ordinators, one for the churches covered by each Area Synod Pastoral Committee. Together with the Development and Support Officers they will form a training team for the Synod and will be actively involved in identifying training needs, arranging and delivering training locally, and planning future strategy.
- Ordained ministers and Lay Preachers are our most important theologically trained resources in local churches. They will all be encouraged to see themselves as potential trainers, not just practitioners. More work needs to be done to realise this potential across the Synod, and equip those with this self-understanding for their task. The Development and Support Officers will find ways of “training the trainers”, including formal courses as part of EM3 and co-leading sessions with less experienced colleagues.
- The Regional Training Partnership is potentially a huge resource for the Synod. We will continue to engage with it at every level to enable it to realise its potential for us. This will require the time and commitment of a wider number of people than at present, and the formation of a small strategy group to oversee and co-ordinate our involvement.
- The Development and Support Officer with lead responsibility for training will continue to work with colleagues in other Synods, and encourage resource sharing in order to use time and skills more effectively.

## **Appendix**

Training calendar for 2008