

APOSTOLIC TRAINING FOR AN INDIGENOUS MINISTRY?

Apostolic means 'Go to'
or 'being sent'.

An Apostle meaning
'one sent on a mission'.

- We have had the decade for evangelism,
- a pre-occupation with leadership,
- and now the emphasis on discipleship.

I hope this means
the direction is getting closer
to listening
to the people on the ground.

An important message I have heard in all this is,
"Do we want a 'Come to' church
or a 'Go to' church."

Is it desirable to move from maintenance to mission?

What I learned from my trainers in college
was that the Guru's usually sat in front of us,
or sometimes beside us,
but we always went to them.
They were still.
We moved.
It was a 'come to' college.
In fact,
a defining thing about my courses was that I went to them.
Instead of going to church on Sunday
I went for the whole week,
or a whole year, or more.
In my case,
I went to a walled garden in Birmingham.

At an earlier stage in my life
I did a 'vicar at night school' course. Once a week,
and on several weekends,
I went to the course.
We were enabled to stay in touch with the real world,
until we left it
and came to the course.

We came to the interventionist
just like we came to church. Training was attraction-al
not mission-al.
It was not apostolic.
I was called –
the course was not sent.
What was modelled
was 'our response'
rather than 'God's initiative'.

We were given all the mission words
but we did not actually observe the meaning of them.
We could easily have been dangerously fooled into thinking that those who
can – do,
and those who can't - teach.
These mission words would fill our essays but maybe not our lives.
And when we entered ministry
it was often to a 'come to' church.

So how do the trainers
and their institutions
model God's mission
in the way we do training?

We have been trying to address these issues in the **Northern Ark Mission Initiative** in North Bristol.

The pilot period has come to the end of its initial three years.

Some things could have been done better
but we ask

‘Why do people from local council built housing estate congregations in Bristol come forward into growing ministry teams?’

38 people from 4 out of 6 parishes have stepped out so far;
with some to become licensed readers (6),
and some to become ordained priests (3).

Making ministry training
in a mission model
must be one of the driving forces.
But for all the things
we might have done better
here are four things we did well.

1. Take the training to the people.

- The training intervention went to the people.
 - The theological conversations were on the site.
 - Each session was fixed at the time convenient to the participants.
- And most importantly,
- It was on home ground and among friends.

At the other end of it people said, “Finding time to go when we could go with our neighbours rule out the training on offer before. I could go now because I am more confident.”

The talk was accompanied by the doing.
Training primarily consisted of people imitating observed practise. It was a kind of apprentice style with mentoring

so as to ensure
that it was good practise that was imitated.

(Otherwise we have the only words to be found about leadership on the lips of Jesus – ‘Can a blind man lead a blind man.’(Luke 6. 39.)

Group conversation was also at the core.

These were the foundations upon which the content was worked on.

- Apprentice learning
- Mentoring
- Group conversation.

2. Go in twos. (THE INTERVENTIONISTS)

The interventionists were in twos. One was a bringer of fresh ideas and theological learning
and the other,
the local practise mentors
and listener to local culture.

The incumbents of the six collaborating parishes took on different roles depending on where they were working.

The incumbents would go to a different parish to take fresh ideas and stay in their own
to be mentor
and practise supervisor.

They worked together in the practise and in the ‘theological soup’.

i.e. The conversations about theology with some weighty theological content, took place over lunch with soup and rolls.

Conversations might consist of a lot of stories but were at some depth, often deeper than I remember when I was at theological college, but then it was easier for these local people to connect with the realities of life than when in a walled garden.

Of the two interventionists, generally, but not always.

- The first helped local people interpret the conversations in their own cultural experience.
- and the second linked the initiative to the wealth of Christian theology

3. Forming learning communities in the culture.

The practise of this approach meant that a learning group in a parish became the foundation of what became a Ministry Team.

All learning was discrete to each parish. We resisted the temptation to gather people from separate parishes to learn together.

This way, the learning activities helped the process of forming, norming, storming, and performing.

This process of group development helped give the confidence to feel able to turn into a ministry team.

There would be plenty of time

to mix more widely
when confidence in their own ability was stronger.

In this transition
from learning communities
to ministry teams
the groups might change slightly.
They were seldom formed
of entirely the same group of people
but most people were common to both.
We believed it was important
to have open boundaries.

Some went on, in place,
to licensed ministry and ordination, but all had mentoring and training time
irrespective of their place in the team.

Communicating the importance
of licensed ministry
could not be allowed
to take away from other ministries, or otherwise
the team would be in danger
of becoming little more
than a supporters
club to the readers and priests.

The time given by mentors was a crucial signal about this.

4. Practise what we want to preach.

I want to mention
the importance
of linking and correlation.

Mentoring links the head to the heart.

Finding parallels
between the scripture
and the theological tradition
creates a way of interpreting pastoral experience.

The experience is that the trainers model a 'go to' approach
and learning is integrated
with activity in mission.

- **Apprentices learn by watching and improving on their mistakes.**

And so do the interventionists. Honesty helps. More could be said but this
would be in danger of swamping the central balance in presenting this
initiative.

- **Praising God with the whole church.**

The modelling of the trainers
is to get others
to try things out for themselves.

The beginning
and the end
is in becoming a more self-sufficient congregation
that is more dependent on God.

Indigenous is not isolationist.
It is making a stronger contribution to a bigger whole.
But local interventions
can bring the confidence
to let this, happen.

I think this is mainly
because the trainers,
no matter how good they are,

'go to'.

The result is of a local congregation that naturally goes to the wider world and church.

This is what has been modelled in their training.

What we seem to find hard to learn, in the good old C of E plc.,
is that we can't keep doing
more of the same
when more of the same
isn't modelling
what we want to happen.

Surely this is the right time to think again.

Apostolic Mission is to local cultures.

The universal word only speaks dialect.

So what is the point of 'going to'

if you then ignore the culture

or the context to which you go? Estates in Bristol are still largely populated by white working class people.

This is beginning to change

and we need to become more cognisant of ethnic cultures

as this trend becomes more prevalent.

But I get a little weary,

having engaged with some kind of estate ministry for about 43 years, of people who endlessly complain

of a skills shortage.

We haven't got a secretary, a treasurer, a musician, a teacher etc..

My experience

is not of a skills shortage

but of a different skills set.

Surely Sam Wells is right

in pointing out

that God gives the people that we need to be church
even if they are not the people we want.

After all,
the skills we need from the locality are the skills which enable
the indigenous communication
for mission
rather than local people
learning to be branch managers
for C of E plc.
So the content of our training
needs to be appropriate as well.

Canon Joe Hasler

(More information about the initiative at www.joehasler.co.uk then find
other stuff and click on drop down menu for northern ark publications.)