

CHRISM Paper 6

Training for MSE

Summary

Survey based on replies to a questionnaire sent to CHRISM members during 1996 to identify important training needs for MSEs and give a basis for further discussion with those responsible for ministerial training.

Training for MSE should not be viewed in isolation, but considered in the context of vocation to ministry, training before and after ordination and in relation to other ministry: stipendiary and non stipendiary, lay and ordained, local and universal.

The single most important task identified is to train people to think theologically about work - this should enable an ability to do theology in any situation of daily life, but lead to a fuller theological understanding of work, its benefits and problems, in the context of the changing economic order.

Ministerial training is primarily to produce ministers for a variety of situations - it is important, that it enables them to apply it to their own particular situation. Part of the process of ministerial formation is to understand the nature of MSE in relation to others and develop an appropriate spirituality for that situation.

The MSE needs to be able to respond to the pastoral needs of colleagues in the work place, but the prime issue at work is working for Kingdom values.

Many MSEs have a significant role in the life of the local church and training needs to prepare them for this. However, the distinctive contribution to be encouraged and developed is to bring work into worship, both word and sacrament.

Introduction

CHRISM has carried out a survey to begin to find out more about the training needs of Ministers in Secular Employment. This focuses mainly on ordained Non Stipendiary Ministers who have the focus of their ministry principally in the doing of their secular work. We set out with the initial question: where did I learn those things that I now realise I needed to know in order to be an MSE?

This learning process has to be put in the context of God's call to ministry. Many people find that their perception and self understanding of what it means to be called to a ministry in secular employment develops during training - so there are parallel questions about how a training course can foster this vocation, But we need to go back even further than this to the things that raise the awareness of Ministry in Secular Employment for anyone exploring a call to ordained ministry. Further work is needed here.

This survey concentrates on identifying those skills which MSEs, looking back on their experiences, consider important for exercising their ministry, and highlights those to which a ministerial training course should/can make the greatest contribution. It has also helped us identify tapirs where CHRISM can make more of a contribution. We offer these findings for further discussion with those responsible for ministerial training in the Churches.

Method

We distributed the questionnaire to all members of CHRISM and others who receive the quarterly Newsletter (some 180). Some members sent further copies onto people within their local networks. The following analysis is based on 30 replies, received by November 1996.

The questionnaire was developed from conversations between CHRISM committee members, and covered a broad range of issues to stimulate responses. However, we reduced this to an acceptable scope to focus on important training needs.

We have analysed the responses numerically from the marks given by respondents, and included the key issues raised under other comments. Responses obviously reflect the different routes to training, and when people were trained. The questions were grouped under the following four broad headings:

1. Theological Education
2. Ministerial Formation
3. Tasks in the Workplace
4. Tasks in the Church

We also include here:

5. Other comments

1. Theological Education

Learning to think theologically about work came out top (of all four headings) in importance, to individuals, for coverage in training and as work for CHRISM. This needs to include recognising the importance of work in human life: the time spent in it, the benefits from it, as well as the demands and the stress. Underpinning this needs to be an economic / political theology which considers the interaction between structures and institutions and their effects on people.

The fundamental purpose of any theological course must be to enable the participants to do theology - not just learn about it - to give them the skills to engage theologically with any issue of daily life.

Both exploring the relationship between faith and work and using work experience to inform our theology are related to this and followed closely in the ranking. The concept of 'the hallowing of work' perhaps also follows from a deeper rooted theology of work.

2. Ministerial Formation

Understanding the relationships with other Christians, clergy and sector ministers featured high in importance to individuals and for coverage during training. This may reflect particular encounters with other clergy, and the importance of a self understanding of MSE alongside other callings (see the other comments below). CHRISM was identified as having some part to play in this, but the most important role for CHRISM is, perhaps predictably, in building networks with other MSEs.

Developing a spirituality of and for work is also important and should be covered during training. (Clearly spirituality needs to be rooted in God, but it is the awareness of the spiritual dimension of all of our life, including working life).

Post Ordination Training came out lowest, and was, as expected, not seen as a prime task for training courses. However, this low mark for the importance of POT may reflect poor experiences of POT - the comments below give some pointers to possible ways forward.

3. Tasks in the Workplace

There is consistent support here for working for kingdom values - this would seem to include the issues of wealth creation, changing working practices etc. Responses indicated that CHRISM should also be involved in handling workplace issues and interpreting failures / discovering new life. The emphasis for courses was different: on training for pastoral ministry in the workplace and the encounter with other faiths and value systems.

The degree of emphasis on pastoral work may depend strongly on the individual's understanding of MSE and the extent to which they believe pastoral care is the responsibility of all management. This may lead to varying emphasis on the need for occasional offices for non-church going colleagues, issues of stress at work and living with change in organisations.

4. Tasks in the church

Responses indicated that courses should do more on bringing work into worship, both word and sacrament, both spiritually and liturgically - for example, for particular themed Sundays. They should also help the individual develop preaching from the MSE/work background. CHRISM should aid both of these, but the second highest mark (in all four sections) was for CHRISM to be encouraging interest in and debate about MSE.

Team building with ministers in the local church was seen of least importance to individuals, but rated more highly for coverage during courses (presumably through training with local clergy of the future). However, the issues involved in equipping laity for all of these tasks have been picked up strongly in the comments below.

5. Other Comments

5.1 Training for What?

The replies reflect the broad spectrum of the NSM/MSE continuum -between a ministry focused on the work place, and helping out in the local church. It is therefore important that training balances input for parish based tasks with issues and opportunities in secular employment. One respondent pointed out that Ministerial Training is primarily to produce ministers in whatever situations - MSEs are to apply that training in their situation. This points to a commonality in all training, and all ordained ministry, and reinforces the need for training to encourage working together in different ways with mutual understanding.

However, there is still a strong emphasis on the need to include issues specifically relevant to MSE, particularly with changes in patterns of ministry: MSE encouragement and training is essential as a core element in every Ministerial Training course - this could be a module led by MSEs brought in from outside the course staff, and CHRISM could help resource this. All trainers should be open to the need to help MSEs apply the training in their own situation. Indeed, many part time courses now encourage

theological reflection on daily life, and so enable MSEs to choose to focus on workplace issues. A course, rather than a residential college, is generally recognised as the most appropriate training route for an MSE.

Several respondents had found very little emphasis on the specific needs of MSE in their courses, even though in some cases a significant proportion of the members were MSEs. This is obviously coloured by the date of training and the type of course - although while some people who were ordained a decade or so ago hope that training for MSE has improved since, others report dioceses with no specific training for MSE in recent years, and a decline in those dealing with issues for MSE in the last ten years.

5.2 Integrated Training

There is an underlying assumption that ministry in secular employment is the ministry of all Christians, and so the ordained MSE should be an enabler of the ministry of all. Several respondents suggested MSEs should receive training alongside others - not necessarily candidates for ordination - who may also be in paid work. This may require courses to broaden their outlook - although in some regions, authorised lay ministers are already trained through the same curriculum. MSE thinking needs to clearly include all secular ministries, to use the opportunities of training and ordination to equip other Christians in their work based ministries.

The increasing presence of local ministry teams and Local Non-Stipendiary Ministry raise further questions about the need for an Integrated approach to training and support. The MSE aspect of all these new ways of working need to be clearly identified, to avoid a narrow focus on simply supporting the activity of the local church.

5.3 Post Ordination Training

Training does not stop at the end of a formal Ministerial Training Course, but continues through Post Ordination Training (and Continuing Ministerial Education). The one mention of this in the questionnaire triggered many comments, mainly reflecting the inadequacy of POT to the needs of an MSE. Some respondents received none; others expressed disappointment at the lack of opportunity to explore the difficulties being faced as a practising MSE, in groups largely composed of local church-based ministers.

We need to explore ways to get more positive input and support with those responsible for CME, to develop CME as a continuation of the MT course (and indeed, pre-ordination training), and to provide a sympathetic team in which this can happen, whilst not separating parish and work-focused ministers.

Conclusions

The results of this survey have emphasised the training course as place for acquiring the tools of theological analysis and interpretation of the secular situation. The course is also an important place for ministerial formation - and this needs to take place in relationship to other callings, so the MSE can support others in their own ministry.

However, there are specific tasks associated with being an MSE both in the church and at work which need development and support. These skills should be encouraged during ministerial training, but need further support through appropriate CME, and with networking through organisations such as CHRISM.

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Phil Aspinall © CHRISM 1997

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