

Commission on Ministry Report 2005.
Proposer: The Reverend Olive Donohoe

Embargoed until Delivery

There is an old Christian Aid cartoon which goes like this, bespectacled, earnest young man, boater in hand, speaks diffidently to Rector seated at overflowing desk. Excuse me, he says, I'd like to volunteer for work involving sensitivity and sacrifice in challenging a secularised, value impoverished society with the radical claims of the gospel. I have Thursday afternoons free. I have Thursday afternoons free. Ahhhh. we don't have Sunday School on Thursday afternoons, the healer prayer group, meets on Wednesday evenings, at 8.00 p.m. to be precise....

Or how many of you have completed a passion assessment recently? I have, and I hope that didn't sound too smug, but It was a really interesting passion assessment which was followed by a huddle group and a spiritual Gift assessment. Now I have to admit that the huddle group made me stop in my tracks and wonder if there really was nothing else I could be doing for four consecutive Tuesday evenings. A huddle group, I mean, we are the church of Ireland after all. We don't do huddle.

Well, of course I'm being facetious because as many of you have realised I'm talking about the Network Course, which is American, and none the worst for that. Yes, it's a bit simplistic but strangely gripping. although it's not quite unputdownable. Is there anyone quite so fascinating as ourselves? This is the sort of course, or resource, which can actually help to clarify not only a person's gifts but also guide a person towards a type of ministry where they may be most effectively used, deployed or as they say in the blurb on the back cover, mobilised.

It is only one of a vast number of resources which can be used very effectively to help people, lay and clerical, become more involved in pastoral ministry. I'm speaking about it today because having just finished doing it. I wanted to do it myself before I urged it on an unsuspecting public and the ever supportive people of the United Diocese of Meath and Kildare.

And the reason I mentioned it is this, when the Commission on Ministry asked you, the people, through a Summit process what you needed to grow and develop and mature as Christian disciples, the following issues were identified as being the most urgent. And so the Commission decided to appoint 4 Working Groups to tackle these issues and report back to you.

The four issues identified by you were

1. In-Service training
2. Training for Lay Ministry
3. The Diaconate
4. Auxiliary ministry and Local Ordained Ministry.

The Working groups were set up and some have already made preliminary reports which

you can find on page 331 and following in the Book of reports. The In Service training Report addresses the issue of training for the Ordained Ministry. And let's face it, we all have an opinion on that one But the overwhelming realisation is that In Service Training must be also On-Going Training, because although three years may have been the perfect recipe for the production of perfect clergy such as yourselves, it is realised that some radical changes will have to be made, and that increased support, for both curates and for training rectors is essential.

It also has to be realised that we cannot simply deploy our curates on an ability to pay basis, only parishes with enough financial resources can get a curate, where if we are intent on bringing the good news of Jesus Christ into the world we must be ready to go anywhere, to any Parish. Because although the church seems to have thought in the past that the best training rectors are in the wealthiest parishes, this is not actually the case. Some rectors have the particular gifts needed for training curates, and others simply don't but they have a) the money and b) a really busy parish where they need trained assistance.

The Theological College cannot really be expected to produce perfect curates in just three years, but it certainly can produce candidates who are perfect for training into perfect curates over the next three years.

And the report doesn't stop there, it goes on to make the case for in service training for Rectors, and believe it or not for Bishops too. And it makes the point that since we are one Church we should have the same practice with regard to In Service training in each Diocese.

So, it's not rocket science, but it is Smart,

The issue of training for Lay Ministry is one which is going to become increasingly more urgent as we move forward as a Church. And do you know what has been recognised elsewhere as the greatest obstacle in the way of training for lay ministry? It's actually the clergy themselves. They will not delegate, they will not relinquish control, they cannot relinquish control, because if they do, what will they do? what's left?

These days almost everything is quantified and measured and standardised and measured against, and we haven't even looked at bench marking. And the Church has already embraced a number of commercial management strategies and indeed, in some places goals, where prophets are replaced with profits. There is along with the usual amount of existential angst, an anxiety, or an under current of worry amongst some of us clergy about our roles and our relevance. If we are not seen to be doing everything, earning our keep, what then? If we delegate, will we survive?

And although it's overstating the case a little, there is some element of truth in it because let's face it, training lay people for ministry has not exactly been top of our Agenda at the General Synod, or the Diocesan Synod. And it should be. Because that would imply that we were intentional Christians, meaning to help develop a mature and adult faith in our lay people.

There has also been a tendency to think of training as clericalising our lay people, oh, they're really interested in finding out about their faith, let's make them a lay reader. because we really don't know what else to do with them.

Or we're short of clergy, let's make it possible for lay people to assist the clergy.

5. Training for Lay ministry is an end in itself not a means to an end. It is essential so that lay people can be helped fulfil their baptismal call and promise.

And it's not just once off, it is like in service training, an on-going process.

And it requires a commitment by both clergy and laity, each must accept the other's ministry. It doesn't just happen, it has to be made happen.

And it is we, gathered here today who must make sure it happens. Take a Passion test yourself soon, you may be pleasantly surprised.