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Exploring a Formal Model of Discipleship in Higher Education: Case Studies

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The basis of this paper is a study that examines the experiences of a group of participants who followed the Exploring Faith programme developed in the Diocese of Bangor; the unique feature of this course is that it is linked with and leads to a higher educational qualification, the BA in Theology for Discipleship and Ministry at Glyndŵr University. This paper presents a picture of the experiences of three individuals who completed the programme; two of whom emerged with the full degree and one with the Diploma. Two are now clergy and one remains in the ranks of the laity but is an active member in a developing Ministry Area. The research instrument employed to elicit the data was a semi-structured interview. The interviews reveal that the participants have a confidence in expressing their faith, a clear view of their journey of faith and of the vocation they are following and insights into lay theological education both for themselves and for others in church.

KEYWORDS lay theology, theological education, discipleship

Introduction

In a study conducted in mid-Wales a few years ago, Neil (2010, 2011) interviewed 13 church members about their beliefs and practices in the rural Diocese of St Davids. He concluded that, despite an evident commitment to church and church life and despite having a Christian faith expressed in their actions and involvement in church, these participants appeared to demonstrate what might be referred to as a Sunday-school theology that was evident in a lack of confidence and competence in expressing their deeply-felt beliefs. One of the theoretical lines of inquiry which informed that study was the work of Farley (1996). Farley was concerned at the lack of ordered theological education in churches and questioned why there was an un-crossable gulf between the education of the clergy and that of the laity. Farley labelled this phenomenon ‘pre-modern’, which perpetuates the model of an educated clergy and uneducated laity. In other areas of life there is a focus on

keeping up-to-date with developments in knowledge and skill, but the church seems to be content to leave the laity in a state of semi-ignorance and theological malnutrition with the sermon or homily the only sustenance for those attending church. How can they be expected to grow as Christians if they are given no spiritual food?

Those who followed Jesus as disciples were engaged in practical tasks rather than study (Astley, 2015). However that may be, one of the main differences between the first disciples and disciples today is the fact that their role-model is not physically present and they have to look elsewhere for guidance; although this is not to deny that some believers in certain traditions can hear the Lord speaking to them and guiding them on a daily basis. If we look to the legacy of Jesus' teaching of discipleship in the lives of the first disciples, later apostles, it is interesting to note a slight change of emphasis as they pass on his teaching. Peter, for example, in writing to disciples with a faith encourages them to add to their faith goodness, to goodness knowledge: 'For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ' (2 Peter 1: 8, NIV translation). The place of knowledge is a vital component in the lives of those who are post-ascension followers of Jesus. Knowledge of Jesus is the crux of the faith and therefore anything which adds to that knowledge is crucial. Failure to develop leaves the believer 'near-sighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins' (2 Peter 1: 9). Both knowing Jesus through faith and knowing about him and his teaching are integral components of contemporary discipleship. Simply stating that one 'knows Jesus' is not enough, although in some churches such a declaration from even half a congregation would be welcomed. Farley (1996) also warns against the two extremes: one equating faith simply as knowledge, and its opposite, stating that faith is only experiential.

In the context of the contemporary Church in Wales, with its challenges of declining numbers of clergy and sparse rural parishes with small memberships, the model of an educated clergy and ignorant laity, Farley's pre-modern model, is no longer either appropriate or sustainable. Neil (2010) concluded that it was necessary for the church to treat the ordinary member in the pew seriously and to interact with them at a more systematic and sophisticated level. In linguistic terms, he argued that there was a greater need for 'input' of a theological nature; that is to say a greater, ordered knowledge on which to base their faith, in order to give them more confidence in articulating their beliefs. This led to the second recommendation of that study, which was to educate believers with a greater vocabulary and grammar that would help them not only express their faith but also give them a much broader canvass against which to contextualise it. In other words, they would be able to explain what they believe because they understand what they believe, and they understand it better because they can relate to a theological and historical background. The third recommendation in Neil (2010) was that the church needs to provide in educational terms an ongoing programme of continuing professional development (CPD) for the laity. This is mandatory for clergy and in other professional spheres and is designed to ensure that individuals do not fossilise or even regress in their knowledge and skills in a particular area. If the church is to mature and grow, it is imperative to challenge members to develop personally,

spiritually and theologically which, in turn, should strengthen their faith and their commitment.

The approach adopted by the Diocese of Bangor, which encourages both clergy in training and lay people to learn and develop together, seemed to support one model of provision that meets the recommendations in Neil's study. The Exploring Faith programme is aimed at a broad range of believers across a spectrum of education and experience. It provides a balanced diet of theology, biblical studies, historical studies and psychology. In particular, the model of delivery is flexible enough to accommodate people in different social circumstances, it provides a non-threatening forum for discussion and learning from each other, and it leads to a formal higher education qualification with three exit points (Certificate, Diploma and Degree as the BA in Theology for Discipleship and Ministry); details of the rationale behind the course and its design can be found in Francis (2015) in this special issue. Furthermore, it provides a pathway supportive of CPD, leading to further study at master's and doctoral level. What appears to be particularly innovative is that it is home-grown, emerging from within the Diocese of Bangor. This study provides some vignettes of insight into the lives of lay people who entered the course.

Method

The methodological paradigm chosen for this study is a combination of the two areas of hermeneutics and phenomenology. Phenomenology is the philosophy of experience (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 106), which seeks to understand how meaning is constructed in and through human experience. Phenomenology asks: 'what is this or that kind of experience like?' (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). It makes no attempt to explain these experiences but, rather, reveals experiences in ways which those observing or listening may see differently (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 107). Hermeneutics, on the other hand, involves interpretation and comes, therefore, from the particular perspectives of those who are doing the interpreting. Combining phenomenology and hermeneutics in this approach allows the participants to tell their story and their own experiences but also, with the help of the interviewer, provides an interpretation not only in retrospect but also in prospect.

The research instrument employed, a semi-structured interview, was considered the most appropriate in that it gave the participants 'voice' to narrate their stories but also allowed the researcher to probe and seek further information as the narratives progressed. It was piloted and refined following two interviews. The sample was an opportunity sample, comprising 11 female and three male participants; of the total, nine were clergy and five lay individuals. The geography of the Diocese proved challenging; eleven interviews were held in North Wales, to which some individuals travelled from the Llyn peninsula and others from Llanidloes in the south to take part, while three were telephone interviews.

The interview asked participants to reflect on their journey of discipleship and highlighted the following issues: Christian history, educational background, involvement with church life, motivation for joining the course, vocation, experience of learning on the course, perceived changes in relation to theology and

faith as a result of the course, and future plans within their church context. Towards the end of the 14 interviews there was a significant level of data saturation. All interviews were transcribed and the transcriptions analysed according to various ‘domains’ that emerged from the rich data in the interviews.

Results

Three case studies follow that bring to life the journeys of very different individuals, all of whom are seeking to be effective disciples in the challenging context that is the rural church in North Wales at a time of significant change. The names of the participants have been changed as have some non-essential biographical details, although all those whose journeys are depicted have given permission for their respective case study to be published.

Case study 1: Revd Llinos ap Gwilym

Before embarking on the course, Llinos worked in the financial service, taking time out to raise her two children; following the baptism of her children she returned to church where she became very involved. Originally baptised into a Methodist background, she found her way into Anglicanism, was confirmed at the age of 14 and has stayed in Anglicanism for the rest of her life. More recently she was involved in leading a community Alpha course and was encouraged to promote and facilitate it in other parts of the Diocese; for that she wanted external credibility. Although very enthusiastic about her own faith, she wanted to ‘show people that I was serious about my faith and that it went deeper than just surface, so I thought I would like to study further’.

This desire to be more credible led to discussion with other church members, who encouraged her to seek a distance learning course with London Bible College. This was rather impractical and Llinos preferred a face-to-face model that would allow her to engage with other people. She heard about the Exploring Faith programme and began the course in her fifties. At first she was rather sceptical about the model and fearful that the group with which she was to learn would not provide direction, particularly because there was more facilitation than actual didactic teaching. ‘I thought, oh no, we might be going down wrong paths into heresy.’ Soon, however, she got used to the model of learning and changed her opinion: ‘Do you know, how wrong I could have been? It was fantastic. I learnt so much. It really opened my mind.’ When challenged about her change of heart, Llinos identified elements of the course that she found liberating such as the freedom to think for herself, and to be able to work through issues both by reading the core texts but, more importantly, by listening to and interacting with the viewpoints of others in the group. One of the features that added value was the presence of students from other denominations and different theological backgrounds, which gave a richness to the debate and challenged her beliefs. The other interesting thing about the group was the different reasons for undertaking the course – some as part of theological training leading to ordination, some to become better qualified for particular ministries, and others, like Llinos herself, simply out of an interest to learn more.

Apart from wanting to learn more and be a more confident Christian, Llinos had no intention of taking on any official role in church; she had been secretary to the PCC in the past and was involved in various other church activities. It was surprising to her also, therefore, to emerge from the course as an ordained priest. In hindsight, however, she admits that she had been ‘kicking against ordination for ten years’. During the programme, Llinos felt the pressure on moving towards ordination become more intense and several events and incidences brought her into conversation with various people in the Diocese, one of whom was the warden of ordinands. Following several conversations with the warden and the Bishop, despite not yet being convinced that the call to ordination was right, Llinos went forward for selection in her own Diocese and at the Provincial selection board, and was accepted. After two years and before graduating with the Certificate, she moved seamlessly to the full-time course then offered by Bangor. It was clear that the Exploring Faith course was one element, but a significant one, on the journey towards ordination. Llinos made it clear that she would not have considered it had she not been engaged in formal study in the Exploring faith context – she would not have had the knowledge, the confidence or the opportunity to engage in such discussions with those who were the decision-makers in the Diocese.

One of the contrasts between the part-time and full-time model was the assessment and focus on academic work. Llinos concluded that the mode of delivery of the part-time model was a gentler start and felt that the Exploring Faith programme was more developmental and formative: ‘I am not sure I would have learnt as much [on the full-time course] if I had not done that [i.e. the Exploring Faith] before ... I wouldn’t have learnt the life skills I did on the Exploring Faith course, I don’t think.’ (Although Llinos had, of course, developed several life skills in her secular employment.) On the full-time course she benefited from the breadth and the depth of the subjects studied, particularly the psychology of faith which enabled her to make sense both of how she learned and how other people learned; this was hugely helpful to her on becoming a parish priest.

Another important aspect of the programme was the placement in various church settings not only within Anglican churches but also in other denominations. This gave insight into different styles of worship and how to make worship accessible to the people. This was a focus throughout Llinos’s interview – she wanted to be in a better position to communicate with people. The programme had given her a stronger sense of herself as a Christian but also of other people. It gave her what she calls ‘life skills’. She was adamant that because of family life she would not have been able to pursue this goal if the Exploring Faith programme had not been available within the Diocese; this was an extremely attractive feature for her. The one aspect she felt she did miss out on was the regular cycle of worship in which other priests attending residential courses in Cambridge or Nottingham had participated, although she herself had met once a week with her training officer for worship. She felt, however, that this was more than compensated for by the life skills that she acquired on the Exploring Faith programme.

The success of this particular model of delivery for Llinos is evident in two aspects. She exited the course with a first class honours degree, which surprised her: ‘I just think how did I do that? Was it a gifting for that particular time?’ A second

measure of success is the fact that she later went on to become a facilitator of another Exploring Faith group. Her experience in leading several Alpha courses helped her with the facilitation, but she continued to learn as she worked with the group; it was important to give them the opportunity to think and work through things rather than imposing beliefs.

In relation to her own faith, Llinos found that she had developed considerably by being exposed to systematic teaching. Comparing and contrasting her responses to questions about her beliefs in the past and now, she admits that ‘it would be a completely different Llinos answering now’. She concludes that ‘the formation has been immense, but I hope it hasn’t been less than what God is calling me to.’ However, far from this being a self-improvement project, the development of Llinos in relation to knowledge, skills and experience is being used for the good of the church in the Diocese; she now manages a team within the Ministry Area and she admits that things will have to change and that people will have to get used to doing things differently. This will involve training lay people in new skills in order to equip them for the work of ministry both in relation to worship but also in visiting. One of the ways Llinos is going to do this is by devising a bridging course specific to the needs of the members of her congregations leading into the Exploring Faith programme. She states that the laity in her parishes are just not ready for the level of work required in Exploring Faith and she talks about the lack of theological knowledge in the pews, despite the intellectual level of many of the members: ‘there’s a lot of work to be done there to make disciples, really.’

One of the factors that militates against involvement in lay education is the lack of commitment, which Llinos sees as a general trend nowadays, and not only within the church. When challenged about how things are going to change, she had a one-word answer: ‘prayer’. Sometimes, however, the problem lies with the vicar, and the metaphor Llinos used to describe it was the flat bottle in the lab with the cork in the top and the cork was the vicar; ‘take the cork out and you release the gifts.’ However, she has tried various ways of getting congregations to learn and to interact in learning. For example, in sermons she sometimes stops and asks questions. She offers different opportunities for the congregation to learn in groups such as Bible study groups. Above all, she feels on a par with the congregation and sees herself as a learner as well, not as someone on a pedestal with all the answers.

Looking to the Diocese as a whole and its aims within its strategic plan, Llinos is very optimistic and sees the Exploring Faith programme as integral to the success of the Ministry Areas. ‘Looking at a lot of [the Ministry Areas] across the Diocese we are very committed, very hard-working and I think the Diocese has done something right, you know, the course.’

Llinos is an inspirational asset to the Diocese; she brings with her life experience, theological learning, a thirst for knowledge, a love of people and a commitment both to Jesus and to the work of the Ministry Areas. She was adamant that she would not even have begun the journey towards greater involvement if the opportunity of the Exploring Faith programme had not existed in the Diocese.

Case study 2: Jane Jones

Jane is an example of someone who undertook the course and remained in the ranks of the active laity. Jane had worked in a technical role in a local authority and has

been a member of an Anglican Church for the past 30 years. When her family grew up she became more involved in church formally, taking on the position of churchwarden at one stage. Following what she described as a ‘wonderful experience’ at Flames of Fire in Bulth Wells in 2005, Jane experienced a real awakening and became more committed: ‘I actually had a relationship with the Lord.’ After that she had a desire to learn more about the Bible and to explore faith. She admitted that her time at school had been a bit of a struggle and she wondered whether she might have been dyslexic, though not diagnosed as such. She was introduced to the Exploring Faith programme by a friend at church who realised that Jane wanted to learn more about the Bible. On joining the course Jane was initially intimidated by the apparent level of knowledge of the other participants, to the extent that for the first few months she considered opting out. The highest qualification Jane had was an ONC in a technical subject area, so she was rather reluctant to follow the course with a view to seeking any formal qualification. The mode of delivery with facilitation and without pressure to participate actively suited Jane’s learning needs at that time; she sat quietly, listened and observed and gradually gained enough confidence to submit an assignment: ‘If there had been one slightest bit of pressure I would have been out through the door.’

Despite the fact that she felt she was struggling academically, Jane managed to pass the first assignment; this was due in large measure to the support and guidance she had received, particularly to increase her self-confidence. Jane found that she out-survived many of the initially more confident participants on the programme which, in turn, gave her even more confidence to continue. She felt that she needed the space to develop as a learner and became more confident as the numbers of participants in the group reduced: ‘the course has given me confidence, heaps of it.’ This confidence in turn led to better outcomes in assignments across the course, ending in A grades which Jane readily attributes to divine intervention: ‘It’s a miracle. It’s of God. I prayed every time I went to the course and started an assignment.’ One of the important aspects for Jane was the necessity to try and relate her experiences and learning on the course with her Christian faith and real life. When asked about times when the content of the course was in conflict with her strongly held faith, she recounted her experience in relation to Christmas:

The Professor said that the Christmas story was a fabricated story, they had taken elements out of the Old Testament and I was just devastated. I looked into it a bit more and came down to the basic thing that the person of Jesus, son of God and his life, death and resurrection and teaching how to live [were] the important things.

Jane continued on the course for nine years, exiting with a degree, having gained, in addition to knowledge, a raft of skills in relation to research and learning in general and communicating the gospel. She is of the opinion that both the knowledge and the skills are important to supplement her faith and experience; both are essential. Having gained the qualification, Jane still makes a distinction between her role as a lay person in various capacities in church and what she terms ‘the call’. She does not feel that ordination is right for her, not yet anyway, and continues to operate as a responsible lay person in a large parish church. Although she regards the ‘title’ as something which gives authority, Jane feels she has a significant contribution to

make to the lay people from the ranks of the laity. She is an associate chaplain in the Cathedral and finds her ministry is a listening ministry.

Crucial to educating the church members as disciples is a conversion experience, to which she continually returns in the course of the interview as the turning point in her life. In the context of the Ministry Areas, Jane has a major role to play and she just wants to be used in any way God wants. The Exploring Faith course has been a significant element of her Christian journey and she is a different person now, nine years on, from when she started the course. As she looks to the future Jane declares her reliance on God's direction: 'I must be obedient in following what God wants me to do next. I am sure there is something. Bracing myself, but I don't know what ...'

In looking back at the programme and at its effect on her discipleship, Jane is adamant that it was crucial in taking her on to the next step and that it was a journey in itself. She feels that many people in churches would benefit from the course and believes that it was not publicised sufficiently, certainly in her parish. This case study is an example of the Exploring Faith programme at its best. Here is someone who had never thought of formal study, had no intention of taking a formal qualification and yet was gently attracted to the programme content and delivery model, supported in submitting assignments, and encouraged by feedback and by the learning environment to continue. The essential ingredient for Jane, however, was her deep faith, the direction of the Holy Spirit in her life and a hint of the miraculous to enable her to succeed and be empowered as a lay theologian in the Diocese. This is a success story from which parishes which need more active members can learn much.

Case study 3: Revd Aled Gruffydd Morgan

Aled is a case of a mature man who entered the course post-retirement and emerged as clergy. He left school with O levels and went into the armed services. He left after eight years and did a variety of jobs throughout his working life – factory work, lorry driving, bus driving. From his earliest years he was involved in church as his parents were churchwardens and he was brought up to read aloud in church from the age of 10. He entered the Exploring Faith programme with a view to becoming a Reader. He felt a sense of calling very early on although he had no particular goal in sight: 'it's an inner feeling that you have, yes, I can do more than I am doing now.' Initially he found the course what he called a 'culture shock', having not read academic books for many years apart from books on business. Aled described himself during the early months of the course as 'very much a fish out of water' and felt like giving up the course. He sought out the Archdeacon and explained to him honestly that he was neither enjoying the course nor benefiting from it. The Archdeacon's advice was that he should persevere until Christmas (which was a month away); the Archdeacon commented that he had seen that sense of being overwhelmed in several people in that age range. Aled did continue until Christmas and after that 'I came back and it started flowing then much better.' Looking back, he said it took time to 'fall into place'.

One of the attractive aspects of the programme from Aled's point of view was the experience it gave in placements and in visiting other establishments and other

denominations, which allowed him to observe, to reflect and to comment. He considered this an important element in his growth as a Christian that gave him a much broader perspective. He started to look at the role of the lay Reader as a ministry, rather than something to fill up a Sunday. When he was struggling at the outset with essays and the academic work in general, his view was that he did not need the academic angle to become a Reader. He realises in hindsight, however, that he could not have been a successful Reader without the academic dimension. He found the assignments difficult at first and did not appear to get much support in writing or research skills. What was a vital element was the learning together aspect and the general ethos of helping and support that permeated every aspect of the course. Of particular value was the role of the facilitator who encouraged debate and learning from one another.

Aled recounts the time when a woman in the group asked him when he had been born again. His response, 'my belief is I haven't been born again', had an interesting effect: 'Phew, she went bananas.' Aled is now much more confident in articulating his journey of faith, and is able to look back at various key moments in his Christian life although he cannot pinpoint a date on which he had a conversion experience. This episode also illustrates for Aled the need to accept difference, to learn from other people, and to be able to live and work with people of all shades of doctrine. He developed, above all, confidence and the ability to listen to and appreciate other people. Aled finished the Certificate and went on to the Diploma. He was initially encouraged to put himself forward for ordination but was not accepted at his first Provincial Board. He decided not to take the result lying down and went ahead a second time, when he was accepted. He originally intended becoming a non-stipendiary priest on a part-time basis, but the Bishop persuaded him to go full-time. Aled now has a number of parishes in the Diocese and laments the lack of younger people who leave the region for employment.

As a native Welsh speaker, Aled is very aware of the differences between Welsh and English-speaking congregations. He maintains that the Welsh speakers are more resistant to developing and moving on. He attributes this to differences in culture and attitude rather than in language, although he notes their inextricable nature. In looking ahead to the implementation and operation of the Ministry Areas, Aled is sensibly sceptical, commenting that they will be massively challenging. He feels that he was supported by his congregation when he went into the Exploring Faith programme and progressed to the priesthood; he now sees it as his turn to support his parishioners as they progress.

Aled has a criticism similar to that voiced by Jane, namely that the course is a hidden gem that is not widely advertised within the Diocese and parishes. He comments that he is very supportive of it and wants to encourage as many on to the course as will benefit from it, although he admits that it is not a one-size-fits-all and that other courses may be designed that better meet the needs of people in different parish contexts.

Here again is an insight into a unique journey of someone post-retirement entering the Exploring Faith programme with the intention of doing some additional ministry only to find himself as clergy with the responsibility for others on their journey of faith. Similar to Jane, he had little academic background but has exited with a Diploma and will consider continuing onto the degree next year.

Discussion and conclusion

The conclusion reached by Neil (2010) was that the participants in the mid-Wales study lacked confidence and competence when discussing their faith and spiritual journey. The backgrounds of those individuals differed in some ways from those in the present study, but there were also some similarities. For example, both groups were selected from small rural parishes where the main language was Welsh. All of them were committed to faith in some form; expressions of faith and original churchmanship differed and these added to the flavour of the originality of their responses. Three of the main differences between the mid-Wales group and the North Wales group are illustrated in the case studies in different ways. All the participants had a sense of calling; they all spoke with confidence about their faith and their discipleship; and they all demonstrated a commitment to theological education and to continuing professional formation for church members.

A sense of calling

It was clear from the responses that the participants were aware that they were called and that a call was not just one moment in time but an ongoing process in which they were involved. They felt that their lives had a plan and that they were being directed by God; there was a reliance on God's direction and a trust that God had plans for them. Specifically in relation to the course itself, none of the participants interpreted their enrolment on the programme as exclusively their own desire; there was always a purpose behind their engagement, although in most instances the end of the journey was not clear at the beginning of the process. In choosing to follow a call, the individuals in this study acknowledged the reality of having heard a call (expressed in different ways for different individuals), but they all accepted the responsibility of responding to and, more significantly, of pursuing the call to its end (though some are not yet at the end). Almost all the respondents saw the call as a lifelong journey of listening and responding, interpreting and continuing to interpret through changing circumstances. For all of them it was a conscious act of discerning what was from God, or in the words of Ignatius, the 'discernment of spirits' (cited in Neafsey, 2004, p. 179). In other words, they felt moved by the Spirit and resolved to follow. In the words of one participant, vocation just 'felt right'. This echoes the statement by Levoy (1997) who said that there was an intuitive rightness and aliveness to the response to call. In this sense, the calling is a co-creation of the pathway and decision to follow on it. The stories told by the individual participants reveal that no two journeys were the same, that the routes taken were tailor-made, and that there was gentle progression rather than a kicking against the goads (Acts 26: 14).

An increased confidence

Unlike the respondents in the previous study based in rural Wales (Neil, 2010, 2011), there was a confidence and boldness in the responses of participants. Whether this confidence can be attributed to their participation in the course is debatable; nevertheless, they demonstrated both a coherent vocabulary and a sophisticated grammar. It was clear from these case studies, however, that their confidence was built up during the programme itself in various ways, such as a

confidence in their ability to tackle academic work and an increased confidence in working with and learning from others. They also demonstrated confidence in their own knowledge and skills which, in turn, gave them the confidence to tackle questions from others. That led them to be better listeners and to respond more effectively to others because they had an inner confidence in their beliefs. Part of that confidence came from the experiences they had interacting with the material, having to grapple with different, sometimes contradictory arguments and, as illustrated by Aled, in finding a way to deal with hostile stances taken by other participants in the group. The process of the programme, therefore, was as important as the content in relation to their confidence building.

A lifelong commitment

The impressive thing is that they were confident that they were moving on in faith and in their Christian journey, despite not being necessarily aware of the final goal; they had a purpose to their learning that was not purely head knowledge but was designed to equip them for better discipleship, and to be in a much stronger position to encourage others in their discipleship. What they had learned themselves gave them a much greater insight into the needs of others; they were, therefore, able to see the advantage of the Exploring Faith programme for others but were also aware of the need to be sensitive in tailoring future courses to the needs of the actual believers in their parish. This was clear in Llinos's response about the need to produce a 'bridging course'. The other aspect that emerged clearly was that there was a willingness to work within the changes being implemented in the Diocese, specifically in relation to the Ministry Areas. More importantly, however, there was a desire to get beyond the structural change to changing the experiences of lay people in their respective congregations, to jolt them out of any complacency and to move them on in their faith.

The experiences from all three case studies illustrate the claims of Farley (1996) and of Neil (2010, 2011) that the *status quo* is not an option, and that if the Church in Wales is to survive it needs to develop a model of discipleship that equips the laity, and indeed other clergy, with the confidence and competence, knowledge and skills to drive Christ's agenda forward. From the limited evidence presented here, it is possible tentatively to conclude that the programme on which these individuals were engaged is serving the purpose for which it was designed, and the Diocese should be encouraged that this branch of its strategy is bearing fruit.

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