

**CONFERENCE OF
ONGOING FORMATION DIRECTORS FOR CLERGY
(England & Wales)**

COMMITTED TO GROWTH

A paper prepared for

**The Department of Catholic Education and Formation
(Bishops' Conference of England & Wales)**

February 2008



The Bishops' Conference endorses and supports the work of those involved in the ongoing formation of priests. It welcomes the report 'Committed to Growth' and the encouragement this gives for each bishop and diocese to reflect on, continue with and develop this valuable work.

**Bishops' Conference of England & Wales
Leeds – April 2008**

1. INTRODUCTION

Request for the Paper

However ample and arduous the work with that portion of the People of God entrusted to him may be, the bishop must observe a very special diligence in all that refers to the permanent formation of his priests. (DMLP 89)

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Conference of Ongoing Formation Directors for Clergy with the Department for Catholic Education and Formation in September 2006, Archbishop Vincent Nichols invited the Standing Committee to present a Paper to the Department in September 2007, which might then lead to discussion with the full Bishops' Conference at a later date.
- 1.2 Archbishop Nichols requested that the Paper should cover four areas:
 - A vision/rationale for clergy ongoing formation
 - A potential pattern/structure for ongoing formation within a diocese (including possible inter-diocesan aspects)
 - Identification of three neuralgic issues (*ie* things not to be missed out)
 - The resources required for ongoing formation.

Methodology

Within the ecclesial communion, the priest is called in particular to grow, thanks to his ongoing formation, in and with his own presbyterate in union with his bishop. (PDV 74)

- 1.3 At its residential meeting held at Oscott College 15-16 November 2006, the Conference of Ongoing Formation Directors for Clergy welcomed the opportunity to present such a Paper. A Working Party was formed to prepare the Paper, consisting of the following:

Standing Committee

Fr John Rafferty	(Shrewsbury)	<i>Chair</i>
Fr Gerry Ewing	(Southwark)	<i>Secretary</i>
Fr Bernard Bickers	(Leeds)	
Ms Karen Foong	(Nottingham)	
Fr David Hennessy	(East Anglia)	

Co-opted Members

Fr John Hadley	(Nottingham)
Fr Michael Moore	(Nottingham)

The activity of formation is based on a dynamic demand intrinsic to the ministerial charism, which is permanent and irreversible in itself. Therefore this can never be considered finished, neither on the part of the Church which imparts it, nor on the part of the minister who receives it. (DMLP 73)

- 1.4 The Working Party first met at the Hayes Centre - Swanwick 10-11 January 2007. The meeting was chaired by John Rafferty and facilitated by Karen Foong. As a result, Bernard Bickers agreed to compile a Draft Paper to be circulated to the other members of the Working Party for comment, before wider circulation to all the members of the Conference of Ongoing Formation Directors for Clergy for discussion at their March 2007 residential meeting. The Working Party met for a second time at Hothorpe Hall – Leicester 21-22 June 2007. The meeting, chaired by John Rafferty and facilitated by Karen Foong, prepared a Final Paper for the Department for Catholic Education and Formation for September 2007.

The Working Party met with the Department at Hinsley Hall – Leeds 5-6 September 2007 to discuss the Paper. In the light of recommendations from the Department, the Working Party held a subsequent meeting to review the Paper at Hothorpe Hall – Leicester 8-9 October 2007, chaired by John Rafferty and facilitated by Karen Foong, in preparation for a further presentation at the Department meeting in Birmingham on 23 January 2008, before being submitted to the Bishops’ Conference meeting in April 2008. (*The reviewed Paper was also discussed by the full Conference of Ongoing Formation Directors for Clergy at its meeting in Dublin in November 2007.*)

Special care must be devoted to understanding the life and spirituality of the permanent deacons – where they exist, as well as that of the religious and lay faithful. (DMLP 78)

1.5

While the Paper is specifically orientated towards the celibate secular priesthood in active ministry, it is also relevant to religious engaged in work in our dioceses, to those priests who are married, to those who are retired – and also to the permanent diaconate.

Indeed the very relationship and sharing of life between the priest and the community, if it is wisely conducted and made use of, will be a fundamental contribution to permanent formation, which cannot be reduced to isolated episodes or initiatives, but covers the whole ministry and life of the priest. (PDV 78)

1.6

With the awareness that priestly ongoing formation is enhanced in partnership with the whole People of God, there remain needs specific to the priesthood which must be provided for separately.

2. THE PRESENT REALITY

Context

Rapid and widespread transformations and a secularized social fabric typical of the contemporary world are what make unavoidable the priest's duty of being adequately prepared, so that he does not lose his own identity and so that he might respond to the demands of the new evangelization. To this grave duty corresponds the specific right of the faithful, who feel the effects of priests' solid formation and sanctity in a definite way. (DMLP 69)

Among other factors that may cause discouragement in the souls of priests are the danger of routine, physical exhaustion due to overwork, psychological fatigue caused by having to struggle against misunderstanding, prejudice, going against organized forces that tend to give the impression that the priests of today belong to a culturally obsolete minority. (DMLP 83)

Ongoing formation helps the priest to overcome the temptation to reduce his ministry to an activism which becomes an end in itself, to the provision of impersonal services, even if these are spiritual or sacred, or to a business-like function which he carries out for the Church. Only ongoing formation enables the priest to safeguard with vigilant love the 'mystery' which he bears within his heart for the good of the Church and of mankind. (PDV 72)

- 2.1 'At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the time and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task.' (*Gaudium et Spes*, 4) This is a good time to be alive: to be part of society; to be part of the Church; to be part of the presbyterate. However, all ages have their difficulties and their challenges.
- 2.2 'The age we are living in, with its own particular challenges, can seem to be a time of bewilderment. Many men and women seem disorientated, uncertain, without hope, and not a few Christians share these feelings. There are many troubling signs, which at the beginning of the third millennium, are clouding the horizon of the European continent...' (*Ecclesia in Europa* - Pope John Paul II, 2003).
- 2.3 The Church is inevitably caught up in such challenges and feelings, and cannot be immune to the speed of change which is now part of life. Priests too are affected by the climate in which they live and minister - in a Church which:
- is haemorrhaging in terms of numbers
 - has some of its practising members having an ambiguous attitude towards its teaching
 - maintains some diocesan and parish structures which are no longer sustainable
 - has a priesthood which is ageing and shrinking, and yet is being asked to take on more responsibilities.
- 2.4 It is also a Church which:
- is very multi-cultural in its make-up of both its priests and its people
 - continues the struggle in balancing the realities of mission and maintenance
 - experiences change as a constant in daily living.
- 2.5 In this climate, some clergy are energised by the present situation and see it as both exciting and fulfilling - welcoming the increased participation of lay people in the mission of the Church. Indeed, many of those new to the priesthood in England & Wales know no other situation, and for them such things are part and parcel of everyday life. Others yearn for the so-called certainties of the past, when there was a perceived clarity of role and understanding of what was expected. Some are left overwhelmed, not necessarily overworked - and unsure what to do. Others retreat into a type of privatised priesthood, which has little contact with anyone else - neither drawing from, nor contributing to, the fraternity of the clergy. Some are treading water, muddling through and waiting for a retirement - which cannot come soon enough.

This permanent formation is a requirement of the priest's own faithfulness to his ministry, to his very being. It is love for Jesus Christ and fidelity to oneself. But it is also an act of love for the People of God, at whose service the priest is placed. (PDV 70)

- 2.6 In this situation, and by virtue of ordination, it is imperative that there is a real willingness by priests to reflect on their calling and identity, as well as on personal growth and professional development. This reflection and commitment to growth and development is at the heart of ongoing formation (OGF).

Pastores Dabo Vobis (PDV) and other documents

...permanent formation – an activity linked to the exercise of the ministerial priesthood – belongs to the responsibility of the Pope and of the Bishops. (DMLP 72)

- 2.7 The publication of *PDV* in 1992 was the genesis for a more formal approach to the ongoing formation of priests. *PDV*, and subsequent documents (*Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests (DMLP)* 1994 – Congregation for the Clergy; *The Ongoing Formation of the Clergy (OFC)* 1994 – Committee for Ministerial Formation BCEW; *Directory for Priestly Formation in England & Wales (DPF)* 2001 – Committee for Ministerial Formation BCEW), underline the importance of ongoing formation for all priests - recognising the role of the local bishop in encouraging ongoing formation, but putting the primary responsibility on the individual priest himself. (*PDV* 79)

In a certain sense, it is the priest himself, the individual priest, who is the person primarily responsible in the Church for ongoing formation. (PDV 79)

- 2.8 The 1994 Committee for Ministerial Formation document entitled *The Ongoing Formation of the Clergy (OFC)* gave a working definition of OGF; an outline of what had already been achieved; recognition of the task in hand; a draft *Ad Clerum*; a draft Pastoral Letter, and an approach towards a diocesan policy.

Responding to the challenge of PDV and other documents

The gravity and the effectiveness of a plan of formation will depend partially on the organization, and principally on the directors. (DMLP 90)

- 2.9 In more than a decade since the publication of the first of these documents much has been achieved. At present, 22 of the 23 dioceses of England & Wales, including the Forces, have a named person with responsibility for ongoing formation. There is a national Conference, to which all Directors belong, which meets for a residential meeting twice a year.

It is also important to create a committee for planning and implementing, whose task it is to help the bishop to set the topics to be considered each year in any of the areas of ongoing formation (DMLP 90)

- 2.10 In 2005, the Conference of Ongoing Formation Directors for Clergy modelled good OGF practice by organising for its members a 5-day in-service course at Palazzola - Rome, looking at the four strands of priestly life highlighted in *PDV* - the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral. A meeting was also held with Cardinal Hoyos and members of the Congregation for the Clergy. By common consent, those who took part in the Palazzola Conference were enriched by the quality of the lectures, enlivened by the supportive conversations and encouraged by the common experience and camaraderie. They returned refreshed and grateful for having deepened their own relationship with the Lord, and with each other - and encouraged to offer similar experiences to the clergy of their dioceses. A second 5-day residential took place in Dublin in November 2007 - with similar results.

Ongoing formation is a right-duty of the priest and imparting it is a right-duty of the Church. This is established in universal law. (DMLP 72)

- 2.11 At diocesan level there is a wide range of courses on offer to priests, plus days of recollection, annual retreats, conferences, support groups and opportunities to meet socially – along with much other provision contributing to their human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral development.

2.12 There are, however, very significant differences in the responsibilities assigned to the ongoing formation directors for clergy. There are also very significant differences in terms of resources of both personnel and finance across the dioceses. The varied experiences of the Conference of Ongoing Formation Directors for Clergy highlight these differences, provide the opportunity to share good practice and expertise, and have proved to be of great benefit to its members.

In providing for the formation of his priests, the bishop must be involved in his own personal and permanent formation. Experience teaches that the more the bishop is bent on his own formation and convinced of its primary importance, the more he will know how to encourage and sustain that of his clergy. (DMLP 89)

2.13 Bishops, and others in positions of leadership within the diocese, greatly encourage their priests by their own commitment to OGF - reflecting with their priests on their vocation and identity, on the fraternity of the priesthood, on their relationship with the Lord (through the celebration of the sacraments, individual prayer and, for the majority, commitment to the celibate life), and on the heart of priestly ministry.

2.14 To create a culture of OGF, each diocese needs to develop a strategy which both expresses an expectation for priests to participate and encourages their willingness to do so. This requires a commitment of diocesan resources in terms of personnel, finance, time and accommodation.

A working definition of Ongoing Formation

The path towards maturity does not simply demand that the priest deepen the different aspects of his formation. It also demands above all that he be able to combine ever more harmoniously all these aspects, gradually achieving their inner unity. (PDV 72)

2.15 'Ongoing formation is not *merely* in-service training. It is all that will help priests and deacons to grow and mature emotionally, spiritually, intellectually and to care for themselves physically. It is also all that will help them develop and improve those personal and professional skills which are necessary for the successful exercise of their ministry'. (*The Ongoing Formation of the Clergy* - Committee for Ministerial Formation, 1994)

2.16 Effective priestly ministry requires that each individual priest:

- will acknowledge the need for, and be committed to, his own personal growth and professional development by reflecting on his calling and his identity as a priest in the 21st century
- will be given the opportunity to discuss his own developmental needs within the context of the mission of the Church and the pastoral strategy of the diocese and put in place a plan to meet those needs
- will be willing to evaluate what has taken place.

The future of Ongoing Formation

.... ongoing formation is an intrinsic requirement of the gift and sacramental ministry received; and it proves necessary in every age. (PDV 70)

2.17 For this to happen, the profile of ongoing formation within the national Church and individual dioceses will need to be raised, so that it is no longer seen as an 'add on' or an 'optional extra' for the enthusiast, but rather a 'sacred duty' of every priest - part of his call to holiness.

3. NEURALGIC ISSUES

- 3.1 Three distinct, but related, areas were identified as key *neuralgic* issues which could also be described as the *gap* between the ideal and the reality experienced to different degrees throughout the Church in England & Wales. These are offered under three general headings:

Ownership

The existence of a 'plan of permanent formation' requires that this be not only thought of or planned but also carried out. In this regard a clear work structure is called for: with objectives, specific topics and instruments to carry them out. (DMLP 86)

- 3.2.1 Referring to bishops and others with positions of leadership within the diocese, including OGF Directors for Clergy - when those in positions of leadership embrace and support OGF as a priority within the diocese, there is greater progress.

- 3.2.2 In comparison with the finance made available for initial formation of priests, and for supporting priests with significant problems, the finance made available for OGF is clearly of a different order, even where there is a sustained, comprehensive and well resourced programme of OGF. Inadequate financial arrangements undermine the effectiveness of OGF and demonstrate a low priority.

For priests ... ongoing formation must offer stimuli to 'continue their service to the Church in a serene and vigorous way', to be eloquent signs of the primacy of being over acting, of content over technique, and of grace over exterior efficacy. (DMLP 95)

- 3.2.3 Priests are worth investing in. *Fire prevention*, involving good management and care of priests, including affirmation and challenge, is both pastorally better and financially more cost-effective than *fire fighting* after the damage has been done. The bulk of OGF should not be focussed on problems but should be a way of positively building up the personal strengths and professional abilities that a priest brings to his ministry.

- 3.2.4 The Conference of Ongoing Formation Directors for Clergy needs an Episcopal Liaison who understands, and who is committed to, OGF.

Vision, Strategy and Structures

.... ongoing formation is not something haphazard but a systematic offering of subjects, which unfold by stages and take on precise forms. (PDV 79)

- 3.3.1 Whilst the Church presents us with an overall vision for OGF, its implementation requires both a national and local strategy to move from that which is perceived to be *bitty, hotch-potch* and *as and when*, to that which is holistic, well-structured and truly ongoing.

.... the idea that priestly formation ends on the day one leaves the seminary is false and dangerous, and needs to be totally rejected. (PDV 76)

- 3.3.2 Realising such a vision and strategy requires a professional approach to OGF, providing a seamless transition from initial formation in the seminary to active priestly ministry – and continuing throughout the life of the priest.

- 3.3.3 Creative ways need to be found of winning over the hearts and minds of priests, so that they see all aspects of OGF (human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral) as an integral part of their life and ministry.

Response on the part of Priests

Recognising the difficulties that permanent formation usually encounters, above all due to the multiple and burdensome tasks that priests have, it must be said that all these difficulties are surmountable if they are carried out responsibly. (DMLP 86)

There is no profession, job or work which does not require constant updating, if it is to remain current and effective. (PDV 70)

.... a courageous action of pastoral government must be undertaken which is designed to take care of priests in a very particular way. It is necessary that the bishops demand, with the force of charity, that their priests be generous in following the legitimate dispositions made in this matter. (DMLP 86)

- 3.4.1 The climate of the day, where the Church and priesthood are in transition, demands a more accountable, professional and supportive approach to ministry whilst taking care that such demands do not become a burden for the priest, but rather enable him better to fulfil his vocation.
- 3.4.2 While in the priestly vocation a more professional approach to ministry is required by civil law in certain areas – *eg* financial record-keeping, professional boundaries, employment procedures *etc* – a less than professional approach in other areas of priestly life and ministry is too easily accepted.
- 3.4.3 The vocation of priesthood and enhancement of priestly life requires that the priest be ‘accountable’ to the People of God whom he serves. Indeed, the element of accountability whereby a priest reflects on his life and ministry is absolutely vital, and cannot be ignored. Without such accountability, there is a real danger of the privatisation of the priesthood, and of priests being isolated from one another and from their bishop. OGF can help the priest both to appraise his ministry and to build up fraternity with his fellow priests.

4. CLOSING THE GAP – RECOMMENDATIONS

National:

.... ongoing pastoral formation which should begin in the seminary, must be supported by the bishops at various levels: national, regional and, above all, diocesan. (DMLP 70)

- 4.1.1 That the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales publicly endorses and supports the work of those involved in the ongoing formation of priests, encouraging each diocese to develop and resource appropriate strategies.

Diocesan:

For an adequate pastoral formation, it is necessary to organize encounters in which the principle objective is the reflection upon the pastoral plan of the diocese. (DMLP 78)

- 4.2.1 That each diocese reviews (and if appropriate develops) its existing structures for the care of, and service to, its priests, in line with the overall pastoral strategy of the diocese.

.... the entire particular Church has the responsibility, under the guidance of the bishop, to develop and look after the different aspects of her priests' permanent formation. (PDV 78)

- 4.2.2 That each diocese budgets annually for a resource allocation in terms of personnel, finance, time and accommodation which is realistic, and which promotes OGF as a priority within the diocese.

.... it is essential for the young clergy to grow in a spiritual environment of genuine and refined fraternity, manifested in concern for one another, including their spiritual health and other material aspects of life. (DMLP 93)

- 4.2.3 That there be a clear statement of an entitlement to a minimum of time and finance allocated each year to OGF for every priest and a corresponding statement of expectation.

- 4.2.4 That special care be given to those priests who are recently ordained or recently arrived in a diocese.

- 4.2.5 That each diocese seriously considers the appointment of an Episcopal Vicar for Clergy, with a clear mandate and recognition, to enable the implementation of OGF policy.

- 4.2.6 That each diocese encourages the Dean (or equivalent) to exercise his fraternal role of affirming, supporting and challenging the priests of his deanery in their ongoing formation.

5. CONCLUSION

It is encouraging to note that there are already many Dioceses and Episcopal Conferences involved in promising initiatives aimed at enhancing an authentic permanent formation of their own priests. It is hoped that all Dioceses may be able to respond to this need. (DMLP 70)

- 5.1 The Conference of Ongoing Formation Directors for Clergy recognises the significant developments that have taken place in response to the challenge of *Pastores Dabo Vobis* and subsequent documents - some of which have been mentioned earlier in this Paper.
- 5.2 The Conference of Ongoing Formation Directors for Clergy appreciates that its comments and recommendations relating to OGF need to be seen in the context of a change of culture in thinking regarding all adult formation throughout the Church in England & Wales. Such a change would develop appreciation of the mutual:
 - service of priests to people and people to priests
 - journey of faith travelled by priests and people
 - rights and expectations of people and priests.
- 5.3 The Conference of Ongoing Formation Directors for Clergy is seeking to develop understanding in regard to both the necessity and the value of OGF, and urges the Department for Education and Formation to support its attempt to raise the profile of OGF, both at national and diocesan levels.
- 5.4 The Conference of Ongoing Formation Directors for Clergy believes that raising the profile of OGF would endorse a commitment to growth and promote the priesthood as a life worth living.