

Report on my training for becoming an Ordained Local Minister (OLM), for the PCC, 24 June 2021

As I come to the end of my first year of training, I would like to thank everyone at St Martin's for their support and encouragement, especially Nick, David Candlin, the rest of the Ministry Team, David Eggett and John Flower, Nicky and Gina, the members of my Parish Support Group, and of course the PCC.

There are five of us from across the Diocese currently in LMP20 (LMP being the abbreviation for Local Ministry Programme, and 20 the year when we started the course). Four of us are ordinands training to become Ordained Local Ministers. OLMs are deacons and priests with a sacramental ministry, just like any ordained person, but they are distinctive in that they are called from their local congregation and return to serve that same congregation, rather than being nationally deployable. Christopher Hancock and Graeme Lodge trained on LMP to become an OLM and LLM (Licensed Lay Minister) respectively.

It is a part-time three-year training scheme, Initial Ministerial Education (IME phase 1) leading to a Diploma of Higher Education in Theology, Ministry and Mission. The curriculum is validated by Durham University and approved by the Ministry Team of the Church of England, and is delivered by Guildford LMP as one of the partners of the South Central Theological Education Institution (SCTEI); the others are the Dioceses of Oxford, Salisbury and Winchester, and Sarum College. Licensing is followed by four years of ongoing training (IME phase 2).

In September we were able to start our training in person at Christ's College in Guildford, although socially distanced and wearing face masks, but just before the Autumn half term we had to resort to using Zoom for all teaching, including two 'residential' weekends and two study days. Sadly Summer School in Bristol had to be cancelled because of Covid.

The training is not simply about gaining knowledge about theology, biblical studies and ministry but about our 'formation', that is, our growing into a public ministerial role. That involves the whole person: our intellectual, emotional and spiritual capacities. The backbone of it is theological reflection. Our training helps us to understand ourselves, through analysing different personality types, and how we react and relate to those with different traits from ourselves. It helps us to understand our church context – reflecting on how St Martin's fits into and serves the wider parish community. Our written assignments have included compiling a portfolio which covers mission and ministry in the parish and the theological foundations and leadership styles of OLM ministry; as well as assignments on our church's theology of baptism and its particular spirituality.

We have been given the tools to carry out exegesis of scripture, to ask questions about the context of a passage, its form, why it was written, for whom it was written and how it speaks to us in our lives today. The ethical issues that are of great concern to our world today, such as climate change and racism, have been the focus of our Study Days; and this term's module on Christian Discipleship is concerned with Christian ethics with regard to such matters as euthanasia and abortion.

LMP is a very caring community. The tutors on the course are wonderful and have done their utmost to support us in very difficult circumstances. It has also been a joy to learn alongside such loving and supportive fellow students, who come from different church backgrounds and worship in different ways. It has been a challenging, inspiring and exciting year. Each day is a revelation as I learn more and more about what it means to serve in ministry. I am so thankful for the opportunity I have been given and the transformation God has wrought in my life, and for all those who are helping me on this journey.

Judith Mitchell