

## LEARNING AND TEACHING IN CONGREGATIONS

In your ordination preparation did you study Christian Education?  
Was the Christian Education a compulsory or an elective subject in your theological education and ministry formation leadership preparation?  
Is Christian Education offered as a required or an elective subject in your theological education and ministry leadership preparation this year?

There are many teaching and learning opportunities in Christian congregations. Ask the busy minister or priest about their ministry workload: children's, youth and adult educational ministry in a variety of parishes, and sermons, and future planning!

Recent research into Christian education courses available to Anglican undergraduates in Australia showed that the course was often an elective subject for ordinands in the Anglican Church. This was the case even though leading the teaching and learning in a congregation is a core aspect for the vocation and ministry of a priest or minister.<sup>1</sup>

As part of his Doctor of Ministry studies at the Adelaide College of Divinity, in 2011, John Littleton wrote a critical analysis of four Australian tertiary undergraduate Christian Education courses. These courses were available to Anglicans, 2009-2011, through a three year Bachelor of Ministry or Bachelor of Theology degree.

Three of these four courses were offered as electives. One Christian Education course was required (TC). A Christian Education subject was an elective in the Anglican Dioceses of Adelaide and Brisbane. The ACD Christian Education subject was a requirement for ordination by the South Australian Synod of the Uniting Church.

The four Christian Education courses examined were offered through The Adelaide College of Divinity (ACD), Charles Sturt University Campus at St Barnabas' Theological College, Adelaide, The School of Christian Studies, Sydney, and the Trinity College (TC) Anglican Theological School, Melbourne. The approach in each course was introductory and foundational in the discipline of Christian Education. One common reference was Thomas Groome's work and book *Christian Religious Education*.<sup>2</sup>

The four Christian Education courses were analysed through the lens of a learning community perspective drawn from John's writing and research focus on the congregation as a learning community. A learning community approach is holistic, collaborative, theologically reflective. In a Learning-community congregation, education is seen as an important component in every aspect of a congregation's life, including outreach and mission.<sup>3</sup>

John says, "A commitment to Christian Education as an ordination requirement in the Anglican Church demonstrates that educational ministry in congregations is valued", and the "lack of such a study requirement may communicate that teaching and learning are not central to that ministry".

John's study concluded with a proposal for a Christian Education course that is foundational and introductory of a learning community approach in congregations. This course is recommended as a required subject in the second year of a three year undergraduate theological degree.

A copy of the critical analysis of these Christian Education courses is available.

The author of the critical analysis considers that a Christian Education course on leading the learning and teaching in congregations needs to be compulsory as a subject in the degree required for the ordination of parish clergy.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

### References

1. Anglican Church of Australia, *A Prayer Book for Australia* (Alexandria, NSW, Broughton Books, 1995): 793. In this Anglican Ordinal the priest or presbyter's vocation is described as "a priest, a pastor and teacher". Note well Ephesians 4:11, and Jesus The Teacher as portrayed in the Gospels.
2. Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (Melbourne, Australia, Dove communications, 1980).
3. John Littleton, *A Handbook on Leading Learning in Congregations: A Christian Learning Community Perspective Leadership audit included* (Magill, Adelaide, TJH Littleton, 2010): 22, 24, 28-30.

### Some other resources

Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York, USA, HarperOne, 2011).

Karen B.Tye, *Basics in Christian Education* ( Danvers, MA, USA, Chalice Press, 2000).

*2012 Handbook*, Volume One, Higher Education Courses, three year Bachelor of Ministry, Major on "Christian Education & Discipleship" units (Brooklyn Park, Adelaide, Adelaide College of Divinity, 2012): 15, 27-28, 33-34, 39.

*2012 Handbook*, Flinders University Department of Theology, three year Bachelor of Theology, Ministry Studies subject THEO2525 "Christian Education" (Brooklyn Park, Adelaide, Adelaide Theological Centre Inc): 8,18, 38.

30/7/12 John Littleton

[www.tjhlittleton.com.au](http://www.tjhlittleton.com.au)

[jjlittleton@bigpond.com](mailto:jjlittleton@bigpond.com)

The Reverend John Littleton, 20 Douglas Street, Magill, Adelaide, South Australia, 5072.