Ministerial Formation for Prophetic Leadership: Report of the Faslane Pilgrimage
June 2007

Background

The Church of England and the Methodist Church are seeking to select and train ministerial candidates for pioneer ministry. This will involve ‘a capacity to initiate and innovate’, ‘capacity to handle stress and pressure’ and ‘exploring particular challenges to the gospel from contemporary culture’ (Archbishop’s Council, Ministry Division Guidelines for the Identification, Training and Deployment of Ordained Pioneer Ministers. Appendix 1. January 2006.) and being ‘prepared to act in personal and prophetic ways of witness which may involve risk and vulnerability’. (Methodist Conference, 2003, Selection Criteria for Ordained Ministry in the Methodist Church)

Although there is a tendency to regard such selection and training as appropriate only for certain candidates deemed to possess these qualities, a case can also be made out for the claim that all ordinands should possess such qualities and be trained in them, in view of the rapidly changing nature of British culture, the several points of tension between the gospel and society, and the search for Fresh Expressions of church.

A proposal to improve the teaching of practical theology in the Foundation along these lines was put to the Core Foundation Staff Meeting on 23rd January 2007 and it was agreed that a first attempt should be made to encourage a more practical outworking of the implications of theological study by inviting members of staff and students to take part in an event which would offer an opportunity to encounter, plan and experience non-violent protest and/or direct action. The particular opportunity chosen was to take part in the Faslane 365 campaign on 10th June.
The Faslane naval base, about 30 miles North West of Glasgow is the home of Britain’s fleet of nuclear weapon submarines which form the UK nuclear deterrent. Following the publication of a government white paper on 4th December 2006 and a debate in the House of Commons on 14th March 2007, the government had agreed in principal to renew the submarines together with their Trident missiles and nuclear warheads. This policy was opposed by all the mainline British churches including the Church of England, the Methodist and the United Reformed Church, and resolutions to this effect had been passed by the Roman Catholic bishops, the Church of Scotland and many others. As an outstanding issue of national and international concern involving profound ethical problems, nuclear warfare is an appropriate matter for Christian action, and because it is controversial it implies significant educational challenge.

The Faslane 365 campaign began on 1st October 2006 as a year-long series of protest meetings attempting to disrupt or close the naval base and thus to draw the attention of the public to the gravity of this issue. The campaign is non-violent; no alcohol is permitted during the protests and violent or abusive language is strictly prohibited.

The date 10th June was chosen because it happened to be available on the Faslane 365 rota, fitted in reasonably well with the academic year, and allowed sufficient time for preparation.

**Preparation**

Following consultation with staff, an invitation was sent to all students registered with the Foundation, explaining the nature and reasons for the proposed action and inviting those who wished to be associated with the pilgrimage, as it was now being described, to complete and return a registration form. The form invited students and staff to indicate whether they would support the enterprise without actually taking part in it, while those willing to go to Faslane were asked to indicate whether they were willing to risk arrest. A flat rate registration fee of £10 was charged, the idea being that those who went would not be asked to pay more than this, since it was anticipated that there would be considerably more home supporters, while at the same time everyone would be on the same ethical level. The registration form was sent out under the names of the principal and four members of academic staff.

- 52 registrations were received and of these,
- 35 were associated in some way with the Foundation, mostly as students.
- The remaining 17 were various friends, church members, representatives of sympathetic organisations such as Jubilee Debt campaign and West Midlands CND. In the end, 13 people of whom 12 were from the Foundation, went to Faslane.
- In addition a group of Birmingham peace activists, many of whom were students of the University of Birmingham, asked if they could accompany our party, although they explained that they were atheists. They were registered as an affinity group of the Trident Ploughshares movement, and we were pleased to welcome them. 7 of them accompanied us throughout the experience.
A total of £800 was raised. Many individuals gave more than the required £10 and a donation of £100 was received from West Midlands CND. Trainers from the Trident Ploughshares movement conducted training days in the University of Birmingham St Francis Hall on 26th April and 26th May, each of which was attended by small groups of Queens participants.

On 16th April, an email message was sent to every ministerial training college and course of the Anglican and Methodist churches in England and Wales, inviting their participation.

- 6 replies were received,
- 1 college explaining that although very sympathetic, the date was inconvenient;
- a non-residential course said that they would see if any of their students were interested but nothing further came,
- and 1 college explained that they had already been to Faslane on 7th March with the Bishop of Reading and Clergy Against Nuclear Warfare.
- There were however enthusiastic responses from 3 institutions in the Durham area: Cranmer Hall, the Wesley study centre and Ushaw college (Roman Catholic).
- 10 students and staff from this group joined the party in Glasgow on 9th June.
- Thus the final Faslane group consisted of 29 pilgrims.
A press release had been issued the previous week, the main outcome of which was an article in the Methodist recorder and 2 news items after the event in the Morning Star. More significant, however, was the interest shown by BBC TV 'Heaven and Earth' programme who televised part of the Sunday proceedings and broadcast live. Messages of support were received from the president of the Methodist conference and the Bishops of Worcester and Reading.

On Saturday evening, 9th June a training session was conducted for the whole party by Angie Zelter the principle organiser of Faslane 365. This took place in the crypt of the Wellington Church of Scotland in Glasgow after the catering team had provided an excellent meal. Final plans were made for the conduct of the service of worship and witness which was to take place outside the North gate of the base on the Sunday morning.
Events at Faslane

Sunday June 10\(^{th}\) dawned bright and fair. Our party had parked outside the North gate by 9.00 and found the TV crew already setting up.

At 10am the service began, led by a music group consisting of keyboard, drums, 2 guitars and a trumpet.
We used a hymnbook which had been especially prepared for the occasion. We sang vigorously, prayed and read scripture for 2 hours and there were 7 short sermons.

At the same time, a service took place in the Queens chapel which was attended by about 12 students and friends as an act of prayer and support. A leaflet advertising this had been prepared.
Shortly after mid-day those willing to risk arrest, about 10 plus the 7 in the affinity group, moved onto the road.
The gates of the base were closed, the traffic halted and the police immediately arrested 6 of the members of the affinity group, who had attempted to use lock-ons to delay their removal.

Photo by Pam Turner
At about 2 o’clock the police warned the group that further arrests would take place if we did not move immediately.

The 7th member of the affinity group was arrested and after further consultation with each other 3 members of the Queens party together with Angie Zelter herself were also arrested.
Those arrested were taken to Clydebank police station and charged with committing a breach of the peace.

Throughout the whole day the police behaved in a most professional manner, with discipline and even with courtesy. We were well aware of how different our situation might have been in some other countries. One of the Queens party was released later that evening on medical grounds, while the rest of the arrested party were kept overnight and released in the middle of Monday afternoon. Those who had had to return to work on Monday morning had already returned to Durham and Birmingham on the Sunday evening.
When those arrested had been released, they were greeted by members of the legal support group and, after a brief visit to the Faslane peace camp, returned to Birmingham late on the Monday night.
The Aftermath

Foundation worship on Tuesday 12th June was led by a member of staff who had gone to Faslane and been arrested. The chapel featured displays of the various banners that had been used during the protest meeting, the largest one showing the words ‘Theological Colleges Against Trident’.

![Chapel display]

Pictures of the various events were projected and a number of people shared testimonies of their experiences, including 1 or 2 from the home supporters service and 1 member of the affinity group, who contributed ‘an atheist’s prayer’.

Members of the pilgrims’ party were invited to send in their reflections and memories together with their suggestions of what should happen next. At least 500 pictures were taken on the Sunday at Faslane, some of which illustrate this report.

There were many animated discussions in the dining hall and around the campus in the days that followed.

The Research Project

The Saltley Trust, a Birmingham charitable trust owned by the 5 Dioceses of the West Midlands had expressed an interest in carrying out a research enquiry into the effectiveness of the Faslane action as a contribution to transformative ministerial education. 10 or a dozen participants responded to the research invitation which involved interviews before and after the event plus the keeping of a journal. The Saltley Trust has provided the Foundation with a grant of £1700 to cover the costs of this enquiry.
What Has Been Learned

• Although the numbers participating were not disappointing, better preparation could greatly increase any future action. Many students after the Foundation service on 12th June remarked that if they had realised what it was all about, they would have taken a more active interest.
• Amongst the benefits of the experience was the way that students from various walks of life were able to contribute their professional skills. This was notable in the case of public relations and media, which was handled professionally by one of our students.
• On the other hand, it was pointed out that the repertoire of hymns and songs which the Foundation draws upon does not appear to be well stocked with words appropriate to this kind of activity.
• Most members of the party had had little or no experience of public protest, of open air preaching or of peaceful but firm confrontation with police. It may be expected that if the Foundation is able to accumulate such experience it will lead to wiser and more theologically informed activity.
• We realised that there was inadequate education concerning the action and the Trident issue prior to the invitation to participate, and that if a training event on civil disobedience had taken place in the Foundation beforehand, many of the questions and fears which has restrained people might have been allayed.
• An outstanding feature of the whole experience was the solidarity and mutual support which participants gave each other, the sense of spiritual support provided by like minded people at home and the deepening of faith which takes place when words of faith, scripture and prayer are turned into action for justice and peace.

What Next?

The Faslane pilgrimage was not undertaken only by a number of enthusiastic individuals; it was an official part of the ministerial formation offered by the Foundation. A group of students who took part in the experience wish to encourage further enterprises next year, although not necessarily on the same issue.

Although clear policy decisions will have to be informed by the report of the research project when it becomes available, it can be concluded that a useful start has been made in preparing students to lead a counter-cultural church, and that some such activity should become a regular and publicised feature of training in the Foundation, and that where appropriate the issues raised by such activity should permeate other aspects of the teaching and worship of the Foundation.

Photographs by Caroline Pascoe except where otherwise indicated.
Text by John Hull
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