



Students learn in two sessions in St Luke's Church hall



The students take it in turns to lead worship after enjoying a meal together



Students thriving in city's training venue

It is late afternoon on a Tuesday and a church in the centre of Portsmouth is a hive of activity.

Men and women are arriving at St Luke's Church in central Portsmouth with books and laptops ready for an evening of fellowship, worship and learning.

They unpack their bags and enjoy freshly brewed tea and coffee served by fellow students as they catch up with one another and chat about the topic they are going to be tackling that night.

The students will sit down and enjoy a meal together before a short time of worship in the church and then two sessions of academic learning with a coffee break in between.

This is Portsmouth Pathway, our new centre for training lay ministers and clergy. It's the first time we've offered ordination training within our diocese.

There are currently 18 students on the course, 10 of whom are training to become clergy and eight who are training to be Readers. Nine are in their first year of training, and nine in their second year.

Our course takes place in the evenings and at weekends to help those who are working full-time or part-time as well as studying.

The training programme started in September 2015 and the first intake of students are now half way through their second term of training.

The course blends academic learning and practical experience. It also models collaborative ministry because trainee clergy and Readers are training together.

The Pathway is led by Rev Dr James Grenfell. The three-year course will lead to diplomas or certificates in theology.

James said: "This is an innovative and exciting initiative and I'm delighted to be leading it. Our students come

from a very wide range of backgrounds but they have a shared commitment to learning more about theology, to acquiring the skills they'll need for their future ministry, and to deepening their sense of vocation and discipleship.

"I have the pleasure and privilege of teaching some of the modules whilst we also draw upon the considerable experience and expertise of other tutors across the diocese who include serving and retired clergy.

"The academic learning blends lecture-style teaching with seminars that provide lots of opportunity for students to participate. We have lively and enormously stimulating discussions and debates that have enriched and challenged all of us.

"We sometimes discuss issues which are very deeply and personally held, and so it's important that we are also committed to respecting one another's different opinions and that we learn to disagree with courtesy and charity.

"But it's not just the academic learning that's important, the course is also concerned with students' spiritual growth and formation.

"This takes place as students explore and establish patterns of personal prayer but also in the life that we share as a community on Tuesday evenings, eating, worshipping, and learning together.

"This kind of learning and preparation for public ministry is very different to most students' previous experience of education but is one which they find exhilarating and deeply fulfilling."

As the students gather each Tuesday at around 5.45pm, some are coming directly from work, some have just left children in the care of spouses.

One woman shares that she found the reading for that night's session on ethics particularly challenging, because



The opening of the Portsmouth Pathway, with Bishop Christopher, administrator Claire Loveridge, director the Rev James Grenfell, and chaplain the Rev Annie McCabe outside the centre

it reminded her of a particularly difficult experience in her personal life. She is comforted by others.

Then the food arrives. The home-cooked meal is prepared elsewhere and served to the students in the church hall. There is the clatter of knives and forks and chatter from the students.

The meal is as much part of the training and formation as the academic studies that will come later, because the

sharing of food and conversation helps to build up relationships.

Once they've had pudding and someone has started the washing up, there's a short time of worship together in the church itself at 6.30pm.

This service is planned and led by a team of three different students each week. This helps to build their leadership and teamwork skills.

At the end of each term, there is

WHAT THE STUDENTS THINK OF THE COURSE



"The more you learn, the less you realise that you know. There are always more questions than answers, and that stretches you and makes your faith grow.

"It is more convenient having the course based here than in Oxford. It's nice to get to know different people from the diocese, students and tutors. And being next to a church does mean we can enjoy fellowship and worship before we study.

"I work as a materials controller, but can work from home on a Monday and Tuesday, which means I can be here."

Sue Lambert, Reader, Christ Church and Holy Trinity, Gosport, in her second year, of ordination training



"I had no idea what to expect before I came on the course. I wouldn't have been able to do it in the daytime, as I work as a school cook in Froxfield in the day.

"It is good to share worship together, so I'm glad we can do that. James is a great tutor to have in charge. He listens if you have worries.

"Meeting together each week, and eating and worshipping together, as well as studying means we are really growing as a team. It is lovely to be on a course with people you can trust and learn from."

Philippa Good, from St Peter's Church, Petersfield, who is in the second year of training to be a Reader



"I'm also doing an Open University degree in Humanities and French, which I'll finish in 2017.

"It's hard to balance both courses together with family life, but I'm managing somehow!

"Being here for the course is great, because last year when I was a Cuddesdon, I had to stay overnight every Tuesday.

"Now I am home by 10pm and see the children for breakfast on Wednesday morning, which is important for family life."

Samantha Martell, from St Peter's Church, Petersfield, who is in the second year of ordination training.



"The journey here is obviously much easier than the journey to Cuddesdon, where we were last year. It's good to see the facilities coming on here at St Luke's and I must say that pastorally and tutorially, James Grenfell has been a star.

"I still work for the Navy in Whale Island, and it's a challenge to balance work and study. The Navy have been really good, in terms of creating the stability and space I have needed to do my training. I intend to do a curacy in Portsmouth and the prospect of parish ministry is really exciting."

Richard Hutchins, from Christ Church, Portsdown, a second-year ordination student

So far, the first year students have studied Study Skills and Formation, the Gospels and the first five books of the Old Testament. The second year students have explored Christian doctrine, ethics and pastoral care.

There is a coffee break in between the two academic sessions which enables students to mull over some of the issues they are discussing. The evening finishes at 9.15pm.

Students are then expected to read up on each subject between sessions and submit essays or other forms of written work each term.

Gill Clarke, who is churchwarden at St Andrew's, Hayling Island, is in her first year training as a Reader.

"It has been brilliant," she said. "Having the meal together is important, as what you are learning is ridiculously intensive!"

"James is helpful, humble, approachable and supportive, so he's the right person to lead the course.

"And it's lovely being based in a parish, especially here as it is like starting with a clean slate."

And Wendy May Jacobs, who works in the university library, goes to St Mary's Church in Fratton and is training to be a priest, said: "We have been given a great welcome here at St Luke's.

"We eat together each week at the start of the evening and this has really helped us to get to know each other and feel like we belong together – it's actually quite unusual to eat with anyone so regularly other than immediate family, and it is significant!

"The teaching is really interesting. Producing essays can be stressful, of course, but there is loads of support and care at every stage if we need it.

"The residential weekends at Cuddesdon are great too, and remind us that we are part of something much bigger. It feels like such a privilege to be part of the Portsmouth Pathway from the very start!"

Portsmouth Pathway is a partnership between our diocese, Ripon College Cuddesdon, where Bishop Christopher is chairman of the board of trustees, and Durham University.

Modules are taught in five-week terms throughout the year with breaks for half term, Christmas, Easter and the summer.

In addition to the teaching at St Luke's, ordinands also have residential training weekends at Cuddesdon at least twice a term, where they can experience more intensive tuition away from the pressures of daily life.

Trainee Readers have residential training weekends at Park Place in Wickham a few times a year.



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