
THE NATIONAL ORIENTATION COURSE FOR PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS FROM OVERSEAS

Introduction

In 2016 the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales asked Missio to continue organising and offering an orientation course for overseas priests entering the country, in collaboration with the Catholic Missionary Union.

Learning from past experience we redesigned the course to make it more experiential and relevant. Since 2017 we have offered three five-day orientation courses for approximately 75 Priests and Religious from abroad. The general feedback from former participants has been very positive.

We had planned to repeat this course in January 2021 but due to the pandemic, we had to postpone it. However, this has offered us the opportunity to reflect upon previous courses and it is now clear to me that one five-day course is woefully inadequate and does not do justice to the participants or the Local Church. Hence this proposal for a new and extended programme.

Needless to say, in this uncertain and constantly changing situation due to the Coronavirus, we may need to adapt the timing of this course to suit the availability and safety of future participants.

Target Group

Diocesan *fidei donum* priests, and Religious Priests, Brothers and Sisters who have entered the UK within two years of the course.

We advertise this through the Bishops of England and Wales and Religious Superiors.

Objectives

We intend to target the needs of Priests and Religious entering this country, intercultural agents from whom we must expect a high degree of professional competence in terms of experiential learning, safeguarding, interpersonal relationships, empathy, social analysis, pastoral-theological reflection, communication, liturgy, and financial administration.

The perils of not being well-prepared for living and working in a radically different culture are well-documented and still evidenced.

This programme intends to help participants:

- To value their own cultures as well as to be open to the culture in which they are serving,
- To be willing to share their unique personal gifts in the service of the Church here,
- To be able to cope with the complexity of ministry in a cross-cultural setting,
- To be available to others so that they can be approached with trust and confidence, without fear of being judged,
- To understand the vital need for Safeguarding structures to protect children and vulnerable adults and to follow the current guidelines strictly,
- To be friends, in the host culture, to those whom God loves in a special way: the outcast, the stranger, the poor and the sinner,
- To possess a profound respect for other people, cultures and religions, discerning the presence of God in their midst and willing to listen to and learn from them, and adapt accordingly,
- To reflect on how they can support the Church here to grow in its appreciation of diversity and include other cultures and traditions,
- To communicate something of the freshness and vitality of the Church from which they come,
- To value collaboration with priests, deacons and pastoral agents in the Local Church, and
- To equip them with the means to become effective and fulfilled servants of the Local Church.

This programme is designed to provide the impetus and a framework for future prayer, reflection and self-evaluation leading to a healthy and effective approach to ministry in this Church.

Methodology

The Holy Spirit is always the prime agent in forming us all in missionary discipleship. The Spirit leads us in paths of growth and maturity, and gradually configures and conforms us to Jesus Christ. Our formation is a life-long process of conversion, commitment and growth.

The dynamics of formation employed in this course are to bring about a change of heart and mind, where necessary, in order to grow in genuine and effective service. Presentations are interactive followed by processes of integration.

Facilitators will accompany the process to aid and encourage the participants to dig deep into their past experiences, their prejudices and the richness of their own cultures in order to adapt to the pastoral and social challenges they will meet in this Church.

A six-month period between the workshops will be a time for ongoing guided reflection and experiential learning. Midway a day of facilitated group sharing intends to reinforce this process.

Major Themes

- Cultural Issues and Social Challenges - Diversity and Inclusion
- Safeguarding
- Sexuality and Psychosexual Development
- Financial Accountability
- Communication including Homiletics and Elocution
- Leadership Styles and Models of Church
- Pastoral Challenges and Missionary Discipleship - Gospel Witness
- Ecumenism and the history of the Church in England and Wales

Potential Course Structure

- 25 Participants
- Opening Workshop in April 2021 of four full days (Monday pm – Friday pm)
- Regional one-day integration meetings of participants with facilitator in July 2021
- Final Workshop in November 2021 of four full days (Monday pm to Friday pm)