

BASE REPORT 2

SUMMARY OF STAFF REVIEW MEETING

THE VALUE OF THE COURSE

1. It is essentially formational in character. It demonstrates clearly that formation is a lifelong process, in which questioning, doubt, reflection and knowledge lead to ongoing self-awareness, conversion and a call to discipleship.
2. It aims to provide inspiration and challenge, both in its formational aspects and in the experience of *communio* it provides. Participants come to know God, scripture, community, Church, sacraments and liturgy from new and experiential perspectives.
3. It provides opportunities for participants to grapple intellectually with their faith.
4. It is systematic at its core, with a deliberate focus on structure and development over time.
5. Its voluntary nature results in a demonstrable and strong commitment of participants and presenters.
6. It encourages mutuality in the teaching/learning process, witnessing to the recognition that participants and presenters are both teachers and learners.
7. It develops strong community-building networks. The group becomes in microcosm the Church that is taught and explored, modelling the *communio*, formation, worship and reflection presented in the courses.
8. It provides ongoing opportunities to engage in self-reflection and critique in a safe environment
 - raising questions and doubts encountered on the journey
 - sharing one's personal responses to the gospel
 - examining life decisions in the light of new insights
 - analysing Church and societal structures.
9. The face-to-face, communal dimension of the course provides experiences not possible in distance or on-line education.
10. It includes opportunities for prayer, reflection, retreat and spiritual direction.
11. It demonstrates the significant contribution that has been made by the Lochinvar Josephites, and those who have worked with them in partnership, to adult faith development in the Diocese.

FOR ONGOING DELIBERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

WITHIN THE PROGRAM ITSELF

1. To continue to search for, and develop, effective adult faith education opportunities and models, which promote Christian formation, life and ministry in the Ecclesial community
 - acknowledging new and developing paradigms around spirituality and formation,
 - providing an appropriate range of models that speak to the life experiences of participants
 - maintaining relevant and up-to-date course components (content, formational emphasis, faith adult education processes, complementarity of courses),
 - recognising the danger of creating false expectations among participants, given the reality of life in imperfect and vulnerable parish and Church communities;
2. To engage in deliberate futures planning (keeping in mind diminishing numbers, ageing, limited availability of course presenters);
3. To focus on modelling inclusivity and collaboration (among team members, and with the Board and Diocese), in building new and effective networks of support and dialogue;
4. To continue to develop processes, which address diverse levels of support across the diocese.

WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE DIOCESAN PASTORAL PLAN

5. To take advantage of this time of transition to engage in ongoing conversation with the Diocese regarding the nature of the *Christian Formation and Ministry Course* and its place in ongoing diocesan planning
 - the relationship of the *Christian Formation and Ministry Course* with the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, C.S.O. courses, R.E. Certificate, catechist courses, Beginning Theology, Stepping Stones, practicum experience
 - diverse expectations across the diocese, especially those related to the balance between the formation at the core of the course, and the skills training seen as necessary for formal ministry in the Diocese
 - the ongoing involvement of the Lochinvar Sisters of St Joseph, both in the administration of the course and in the provision of presenters

Within the vision of adult faith formation, which is seen to be at the heart of the *Christian Formation and Ministry Course*, staff emphasised the importance of exploring possibilities for the future. Acceptance of chaos and a fundamental attitude of collaboration, inclusivity and service were seen as the seeds from which new creative visions and programs will emerge.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

1. Nurturing the growing networks of support, particularly from those who have been involved in the program.
2. Communicating widely and engaging proactively (within and beyond congregational and diocesan structures) to explore new possibilities and new partnerships
3. Planning short courses to meet needs as they arise
4. Identifying, supporting and sponsoring people with potential who could be called forth to work with the group as presenters or team members
5. Recognising the place of the *Christian Formation and Ministry Course* in the wider Diocesan and Church structures, utilising its strengths, and maximising opportunities to become involved at wider levels, so that the collective wisdom and the gifts that have been received might be authentically shared.

BASE REPORT 3

PRACTICUM TEAM SUMMARY OF REVIEW MEETING

THE VALUE OF THE PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE

1. It enables participants to put into practice the theology learnt in the *Christian Formation and Ministry Program*.
2. In providing practical experience in pastoral ministry, it both prepares participants for formal ministry and affords opportunities for personal enrichment.
3. It promotes self-reflection on ministry experiences.
4. It incorporates opportunities for faith-sharing and prayer.
5. It provides opportunities for those individuals already involved in formal pastoral ministry to depth both their knowledge and their experience.
6. It generally attracts a group of similarly committed individuals, who have already formed strong communal bonds within the *Christian Formation and Ministry Program*.

CHALLENGES

1. The transition from the 'ideal world' of the formation course to the 'real world' of the practicum is difficult for some.
2. Parish priests have differing expectations of pastoral ministers. For participants from parishes with no opportunities for pastoral involvement, the difficulties in obtaining pastoral experience in other parishes can be unduly challenging.
3. There is a danger of overloading parishes willing to be involved in the practicum experience.
4. Some participants engage in the practicum for personal enrichment and communal support rather than as specific preparation for formal pastoral ministry.
5. A number of participants begin the practicum with limited awareness of what pastoral ministry actually involves.
6. There is sometimes an expectation by participants that practicum leaders will find positions for graduates.
7. For people in full-time positions (both practicum leaders and participants) time constraints can create real pressures.

8. Finding the resources (both human and financial) are difficult in a world of diminishing numbers and limited finances.

POSSIBLE FUTURE DIRECTIONS

1. Deliberate promotion of the program to ensure its continuation:
 - advertising and marketing
 - pre-course gathering of participants, diocesan representatives and parish priests – to introduce the practicum and explain expectations and parameters
 - targeting of prospective participants
 - the possibility of using a user-pay concept for part of the course
2. Allocation of resources (human and financial) to ensure the continuation of the program
3. Ongoing discussion with adult faith formation groups within and beyond the diocese to discern future possibilities
4. Lateral (as well as linear) planning by interested groups to search for options suited to the needs of the diocese and the needs of participants

BASE REPORT 4

SUMMARY OF MEETING WITH BISHOP MALONE

THE VALUE OF THE COURSE

1. *The Christian Formation and Ministry Course* has maintained a consistently high standard in
 - content
 - structure
 - processes
 - staffing
2. Throughout its operation, the course has been effectively adapted to the needs of the participants and to developing theological thinking.
3. It has been well equipped and effectively maintained.
4. It has modelled for participants and for the wider diocese the mutuality of baptismal commitment and the equality of believers.
5. It promotes the spirit and principles of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, providing personal, scriptural and theological formation, which enriches the spiritual life of parishes and the diocese.
6. It also fits well into the program of reform introduced into the diocese through the Diocesan Synod, which aims to represent all aspects of life within the diocese.
7. It supports parish life in its efforts to further the mission of Christ.
8. It recognises and utilises the diversity of gifts, experience and knowledge of participants.
9. The development of lay ministry is regarded as an essential component of diocesan planning. And while not many participants have taken up formal ministry within the diocese, the presence of graduates in parishes inevitably enriches the life of the parish community, and affords a significant foundation from which future lay ministries can be nurtured and developed.
10. In establishing and continuing this ministry within the diocese, the Sisters of St Joseph have provided a valuable resource, not available in many other areas.
11. The diocese provides financial support for the program, and as well allocates funds each year to assist parishes who wish to employ pastoral assistants, but do not have the financial means to do so. This significant contribution indicates the importance that the diocese places on the program.

AREAS NEEDING FUTURE DISCUSSION AND DEVELOPMENT

A number of areas have been identified as important for ongoing conversation:

1. The place of the *Christian Formation and Ministry Course* within the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, and its relationship to current and future programs and structures
2. The nurturing of graduates who might take up formal positions in pastoral ministry within the diocese
3. The discussion of strategies for making the program better known throughout the diocese, recognising the differing levels of support, which currently operate.
4. The identification of individuals who might be encouraged and trained to run the practicum program
5. Collaboration with TWEC and with all adult faith formation groups within the diocese
 - to discern emerging pastoral priorities.
 - to work together in the development of programs, which meet rapidly changing pastoral situations
 - to explore new possibilities and new partnerships within and beyond the diocese
 - to establish a more overt Adult Faith Education Centre within the diocese.

BASE REPORT 5

PARISH RESPONSES

A survey form was sent to 28 parish units in the Maitland/Newcastle Diocese, thus covering all 48 parishes in the Diocese. The covering letter invited participation in the survey by way of a Fax-back response.

A copy of the Parishes Survey form is included in the Appendices

RESULTS

Twelve (12) responses were received, covering 16 parishes (33%).

Promotion of the course

Have you heard of the Christian Formation and Ministry Course?

No	Yes	no response
0	12	0

Is it well advertised?

No	Yes	no response
1	10	1

How would you rate the information provided about the course?

Inadequate	Limited	Reasonable	Comprehensive
0	0	9	3

What other ways could the course be promoted?

'speak in parishes', 'as a prime necessary requirement for anyone who wishes to be employed as a Pastoral Associate (Diocesan)', 'Aurora; contact Parish Pastoral Councils direct', 'provide bite size Bulletin inserts', 'October/November is the wrong time of year [to seek enrolments]. People are tired, the Christmas & holiday expense time is drawing near.'

Parishioners' participation

Has anyone in your parish enrolled in the course?

No	Yes	no response
3	9	0

(In the case of one parish, two separate responses were received, one from the Pastoral Associate (whose responsibilities covered a group of parishes), the other from the Chair of the Parish Pastoral Council. The former answered 'No' to this question; the latter 'Yes'. The responses from the Parish Pastoral Council Chair to this and other relevant questions have been recorded for this parish.)

If so, approximately how many?

5 people or more	4 people	3 people	2 people	1 person	Not sure	no response
2	2	0	1	2	1	1

How do parishioners come to do the course? (tick as many alternatives as relevant)

Personal initiative	Parish initiative			No idea / no response
	Discernment	Ministry need	Other	
9	0	2	2	2

Other: 'personal suggestion from a friend'; 'personal approach of pastoral ministers'

Comment: 'one didn't persevere'

Does the parish offer financial support to those wanting to do the course?

No	Yes	no response / not applicable
7	1	4

Comment:

'not sure!', 'but can & will through the Practicum year', 'no situation has arisen but we would consider financial support', 'no but would be prepared if person enrolled through parish initiative'.

Impact of the course

How has participants' involvement in parish changed since doing the course?

More involved	Less involved	Not changed	no response
3	0	6	3

Comment: 'my experience at Muswellbrook, Forster, East Gresford would indicate greater participation in parish ministries', 'already well motivated parishioners'

How would you rate the course as a preparation for parish ministry?

No use	A little help	Useful	Good Preparation	Undecided	No response
1	1	2	4	1	3

What is essential in any preparation for parish ministry?

'hands on experience', 'a "gentleness" in relating to people; good listening skills', 'know yourself', 'combination of team/self-starter ability', 'in this parish I believe "how to" courses tailored to specific ministries are best eg, Stepping Stones', 'participants feel the need to', 'solid practical base' [attached comment: '. . . You have presented

(& still are) to the Diocese an excellent tool whereby personal faith can be deepened and then (if desired) could be shared practically through Parish (paid) Pastoral Ministry. In the future I feel that graduates will be needed more than ever. Sadly, this year, there seems to be no-one fronting the Practicum Year & this has caused some disquiet with some graduates – Is there someone, at T.W.E.C. who could oversee this? Keep up the excellent work.].

What does the course do well?

Responses	no response
7	3

‘it gives information’, ‘gives solid theological basis’, ‘grounds them in good theology’, ‘theological grounding for pastoral ministry’, ‘good broad areas of study’, ‘feedback very positive’, ‘invites involvement and leadership’.

What could the course do better?

Responses	no response
4	8

‘give practical help & continue to encourage & follow up’, ‘guest speakers in parishes to promote benefits’, ‘not able to offer an informed opinion’, ‘don’t know’.

What ministry needs are a priority for your parish?

Responses	no response
8	4

‘practical everyday needs’, ‘all (well rounded in all aspects of Parish PASTORAL)’, ‘multiplicity of pastoral needs’, ‘bereavement ministry; outreach to both involved and “lapsed” Catholics’, ‘funerals & bereavement, liturgy of Word/Communion Ministers’, ‘confidence building for persons who are willing to consider a specific ministry’, ‘liturgy’, ‘Special Religious Education’.

Parish Contact

Role in the parish:

PP/Administrator	Pastoral Associate/ Religious Sister	Parish Co-ordinator	Pastoral Council Chair	Parish Secretary/ Other
5	3	1	1	2

Willing to be contacted in relation to providing further input?

No#	Yes	no response*
1	9	2

Comment: ‘haven’t anything to contribute!’
 * In both cases, a contact phone number was provided.

BASE REPORT 6

SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS SURVEY

BACKGROUND:

People who completed the Christian Formation and Ministry Course and proceeded to the Practicum were required to see an accredited Spiritual Director twice during the six months of the Practicum experience (at the expense of the Diocese). A list of seven accredited Spiritual Directors was provided to participants in the 2004 cohort.

These Spiritual Directors were identified as 'stake holders' in the outcomes of the Christian Formation and Ministry Course.

The one page survey form sent to Spiritual Directors explained:

"Because of the emphasis placed, in the Christian Formation and Ministry course, on participants being helped to reflect on their own life journey, we are asking you to contribute your insights into the impact of the course on people with whom you may have come in contact. In doing so, we in no way intend to compromise the relationship between yourself and anyone who has come to you for spiritual direction. However, an overall indication of YOUR perception would be invaluable. The purpose of these questions is to collect your perception of the formative role of the course for graduates."

THE SURVEY:

Survey forms were sent to the seven people named as accredited Spiritual Directors, inviting them to Fax back a response.

Spiritual Directors were asked:

Among the people who have come to you for spiritual direction, are you aware of any who have completed the three-year Christian Formation and Ministry course? If yes, approximately how many?

If 'YES', using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=uncertain, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree,

Would you say that, in your opinion –

- the participant(s) came with a readiness for spiritual direction*
- the participant(s) have developed a capacity to reflect on their life's journey*
- the participant(s) have a capacity to connect spiritual direction with ministry*
- the participant(s) have developed a capacity to apply their learnings in scripture and theology to their own spiritual life and ministry*

Any comments you would care to make?

RESULTS

Five (5) responses were received (71%).

These are tabulated in summary as follows:

Respondent No.	Aware any graduates?	How many graduates?	Readiness scale	Reflect scale	Connect scale	Apply scale
1	N					
2	Y	15	4	5	3	4
3	Y	3	4	5	4	5
4	Y	3	5	5	4	4
5	Y	3	3	3	2	2

COMMENTS

'I was not involved with any of the participants in the programme. I was unaware that you folk had nominated me.' [1]

'The participants are aware that God/Jesus/Spirit is in an active and personal relating with them that makes them thrive.' [2]

'Three is a small sample. Of these, one would have prompted a response of 5 for each question.' [3]

'My initial observation is that the people who have chosen to do the Formation and Ministry Course are people already reflecting on their journey through life. I have spoken with people other than those who have chosen to come to me for Spiritual Direction.

The people from the course, who do come to see me are among the most consistent and most prepared of all my directees. Some have been coming along for almost twelve months – they did not conclude Spiritual Direction sessions when the course finished.

Each directee has shown a willingness and capacity for this kind of sharing. They have told me that Spiritual Direction is more than just helpful – that it gives them a opportunity to share at the deepest level in a way that is impossible elsewhere. They continue to reflect on present and past events and experiences.

In my opinion that the Christian Formation and Ministry Course has helped to form participants as reflective people who are well prepared for a contemplative style of spiritual direction.' [4]

'To my knowledge none of the students who came to me for SD were able to gain employment in terms of ministry in a parish. Only one person continued SD in the long term. Two others continued for about 18 mths.' [5]

BASE REPORT 7

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

The focus group came together to respond to the written reviews, to clarify and critique similarities and differences, and to offer reflections on the suggestions made. Participants in the focus Group represented all stakeholders involved in the **Christian Formation and Ministry Course**.

Written reports discussed by this group included:

- 1. PARTICIPANTS OBJECTIVES SURVEY RESULTS**
- 2. PARTICIPANTS REFLECTIVE RESPONSES**
- 3. STAFF REVIEW SUMMARY**
- 4. PRACTICUM TEAM SUMMARY**
- 5. MEETING WITH BISHOP**
- 6. PARISH RESPONSES**

Participants responded in two clear ways. In the first place, they affirmed the direction and emphases of the review documents. Secondly, as they developed themes already raised, they explored five specific directions, which they named as important:

1. Ongoing analysis of what is already regarded as a highly effective program. Continuing critique of programs, structures, processes, administration, and program promotion, particularly in the light of changing parish and diocesan structures and needs, will enable it to retain its effectiveness;
2. The desirability of breaking the nexus between the **Christian Formation and Ministry Course** and the **Practicum** in its current form;
3. Proactive initiation of meetings with key diocesan personnel to discuss the ongoing relationship of the course with planned faith development programs for the diocese;

4. Review of links with related programs, within and beyond the Catholic and broader Christian communities, so that networks might be strengthened and the sharing of gifts optimised;
5. A reconsideration of accreditation procedures, so that progression into tertiary accredited courses might be facilitated for graduates of this program.

Throughout the discussions, the focus group spoke of the need to rethink current structures in a way that utilises the strong commitment of those involved in the course, while at the same time, taking into account the changing paradigm shifts (e.g. new understandings of knowledge, the spirituality revolution, how to deal with 'the other') evident in society and Church. The focus group recommendations then, covered the call for creative re-dreaming, side-by-side with the need for structures that are sustained and developmental.