The Nature of the Course

Exploring Faith: Theology for Life is a programme of theological study undertaken in small groups meeting eight times a term and in Diocesan seminars twice a term. It is designed both to enable church members to deepen their understanding and discover the insights of academic study for themselves and to be a component of training for those preparing for Reader, Pastor, Evangelist, Youth and Children’s and Ordained ministries. It exists to help the whole church learn collaboratively together, valuing the insights that each person brings. A number of our students have begun the course as disciples, deepening their understanding, and have then gone on to reflect on their vocation and the roles they play in the church. Others have simply found that the course has enabled them to better understand their faith and the witness they have in daily life.

Who is it for?

The course is open to all and offers anyone who wishes the chance to study for a recognised University qualification, or perhaps to attend groups without doing assessed work. There is no minimum academic qualification needed to enrol and no age limit. The course will take approximately 6 hours a week (including group meetings and preparatory reading) for non-assessed students and 12+ hours for assessed students (including further reading and assignment work) and so a degree of commitment and dedication from each group member is required to benefit from taking part.

It is designed for those who want to take part in serious (but also, fun, relevant and rewarding!) study and those who are training for licensed or ordained ministry or who are exploring their calling.

What does the course consist of?

Each term, students come together at Glyndwr University for an introductory half day Saturday seminar which will examine the subject of the term’s study. Then students will meet in local small groups with a facilitator for 8 sessions. These are resourced by a textbook, a reading block of optional sources for those who want to read more widely, and a handbook containing everything needed for the group sessions.

In the middle of each term, another half Saturday seminar looks at practical aspects of the topic and the connection between it and church and daily life.
For students working towards a University qualification, there are 3 or 4 short written assignments each term.

Modules are subject to change but are currently:

Year 1
Doing Theology
Introduction to the Old Testament
Introduction to Christian Mission

Year 2
Exploring Anglican Worship
Introduction to the New Testament
Pastoral Practice
Year 3
Exploring Paul: Romans
Pioneer Mission
Ethics

Year 4
Jonah: Prophet for Today
Exploring the Creeds
The Anglican Tradition

Studying for 2 years results in a Certificate in Theology and Discipleship from Trinity St David’s University and 4 years results in a Diploma. It is possible to continue to full degree level if desired. You can also join at Diploma level if you already have a Certificate or Degree level if you already hold a Diploma in Theology.

**Academic study? That sounds hard!**

While academic study does not appeal to everyone, we find that students gain and grow through the hard work that they put in and benefit from the rigour of studying in this way. Many students may not have done any formal education for up to 50 years before they start the course, but help, training and support are given to enable everyone to take part and build their skills and confidence. No-one has failed yet in three years and nearly 100 students!

The course material is designed to be relevant to the life and faith of church members and is not ‘ivory tower’ theology with no connection to the real world. The number of angels on a pin-head is not on the syllabus. The course is also intended to stimulate, challenge and ask questions. It does not seek to give definite answers or enforce a particular dogmatic stance. It is open to, and enriched by, all believers of differing churchmanship and theological opinion.

It is possible for students to take part and attend group sessions without doing assessed work if they wish. However, because it is difficult to change to become an assessed student once the course is already underway, but easy to start as an assessed student and then move to being unassessed later, we would recommend that most students try the assessed route and see how they feel. This route is compulsory for ministry candidates and strongly advised for anyone who thinks they may explore a licensed ministry as the course progresses.

Students who sign up for assessed work become Trinity St David’s University students, but facilities at Glyndwr will be used so there is no need to travel to Carmarthen!

**To find out more contact Rev Dr Richard Hainsworth**

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There will be an Introductory Seminar Day at Glyndwr University (meet inside the main entrance by the William Aston Hall) on Saturday 30th July 2016 at 10:00am to 12:30pm which will be a chance to find out more and to join a group.

The first seminar of the new academic year will be at 10:00am again in Glyndwr on Saturday 17th September.
Setting up an Exploring Faith Group

Individuals can sign up to join EF and we will find a group for them where possible. But we also strongly encourage emerging Mission Areas and local churches to consider taking a group of their members on this journey together.

Exploring Faith is designed to be flexible but also needs to work with the University and coordinate with other groups in the Diocese. The Course is designed to be studied by a group of church members who share a similar context and are connected with each other through their involvement in the church.

1. Identify the area that the group will serve. Should you bring together a group from the Parish, the Deanery or the Mission Area? Should more than one Mission Area work together?

2. Appoint a facilitator for the group. This person does not need to be a cleric, nor do they need any specialist knowledge, although there is no harm in them being either. They are not there to be a teacher or lecturer but are there to help everyone take part. The concept of the course is that each participant has the chance to speak and express a view, and that everyone learns from each other. The facilitator must be someone who will let this happen, and not someone who will dominate the sessions with their own input. Some groups have found it works for them to have a new facilitator each term, for example with Deanery clergy taking a term each. But continuity is important for the groups and we would encourage no more than two facilitators sharing the role in any given term.

3. Reflect on how people will join the group. You may wish to offer an open invitation to church members or you may also wish to involve the PCC etc in identifying and inviting particular people to join it. These people may need to include those who already play an active role in the life of the church as well as people that you would like to encourage to take up a new role or be a new voice in the conversation. We would recommend groups of 4-10 people.

4. Ask - are people ready? The course assumes a degree of knowledge of the bible, the story and beliefs of Christianity and the life of the Church. Doing an introductory course like, START, Alpha or Emmaus might be a good first step in some places as might completing the foundation modules of Living and Learning. The course also assumes that group members are comfortable discussing their beliefs and experiences with each other and having these gently challenged and examined. The course is also the usual method for training for Reader and Ordained ministries. Students can begin the course while in the vocational discernment or selection processes and can explore or discover a calling along the way, but these students will ideally need to study for assessment from the beginning. It will also be a matter of local discernment as to whether the time is right for these students to begin the course.

5. Timing - each module has eight sessions, run locally in small groups, who should meet once a week for roughly 1 ½ to 2 hours at a time convenient to them. One module is studied each academic term and the course is open to new students each September. Each module also includes an opening and a midterm seminar on a Saturday in Glyndwr University in Wrexham. Because there are university deadlines for assessments, groups should try to start promptly at the beginning of each term and aim to complete the eight sessions promptly, although groups may decide not to meet during school holidays.

6. Venue -Sessions should all be run in a comfortable venue that allows participants to sit round a table, to be able to write in workbooks, to be able to separate into pairs or small groups and to be able to pray together.

7. Accessing materials - each module has a handbook, which contains most of what you need for each session (sometimes students will need to bring a bible or service book themselves) a textbook and a block of additional reading. These are provided each term at the opening seminar in printed form and are emailed to students and made available online.