



# Gilcomston Church

## – TRAINING IN MINISTRY –

### INTRODUCTION

The acronym ACTS highlights the four ‘compass points’ which give direction to our life as a fellowship committed to serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

- **A**ttracting people to Jesus.
- **C**onsolidating believers in their faith.
- **T**raining them for ministry.
- **S**ending them out in the work of the gospel.

As a key part of that commitment to **train** our people for ministry (and in particular to train and equip the next generation of those who will minister God’s Word and provide leadership for His church) our ministry training programme is integral to what we are about as a church.

This is a two-year programme through which trainees are given an exposure to full-time Christian ministry. Throughout this 2-year period they receive a solid theological grounding in the Scriptures; they are helped to develop the core skills involved in rightly handling the Bible and communicating it faithfully and fruitfully to others; they gain practical experience of the demands and disciplines of ministry; and not least the programme seeks carefully to cultivate in trainees real growth in their walk with the Lord.

The 2-year programme enables those considering full-time gospel ministry to discover and develop their gifts, to explore their calling under God, and to grow in both character and competence – while all the time investing their energies in the service of Christ’s church and channelling their enthusiasm into the life and work of a vibrant fellowship.

### CORE COMPONENTS

Our training programme majors on 3 core aspects of ministry, and through the 2-year period seeks to ensure that each receives due weight in the training afforded.

#### **Academic study**

Basic to all Christian ministry is the discipline involved in learning rightly to handle the Word of God ([2 Tim.2.15](#)).

Ezra provides a good model of what this involves, for we read of him that he *“had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel”* ([Ezra 7.10](#)).

That statement underlines the disciplines involved in getting to grips with the text of Scripture, understanding its application to the living of life, and learning how to teach it to others. And it well illustrates what the ‘academic’ component of our training programme encompasses.

#### **Character formation**

*Who you are*, in terms of godliness of character, is always primary in ministry and takes precedence over *what you do* in His service.

*'A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God,'* wrote R M McCheyne, a noted Scottish minister from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He insisted from the Scriptures that it is not 'great talents' that God blesses so much as 'great likeness to Jesus' – and he, perhaps as well as any, demonstrated the truth of that in his own short life.

This biblical emphasis is central to our training programme. We major on this with trainees through a pattern of 'mentoring' which is geared to nurturing their knowledge of God and their likeness to Christ.

### **Practical experience**

On his first missionary journey, the apostle Paul, accompanied by Barnabas, took John Mark with them "as their helper" ([Acts 13.5](#)): and one of the first things Paul did on his next missionary journey (accompanied this time by Silas) was to "take (the young man Timothy) along on the journey" ([Acts 16.1-3](#)).

This approach of the apostle points to the importance of the next generation of leaders being given practical experience of ministry under the supervision of more experienced 'practitioners'.

Our training programme, therefore, ensures that each week trainees have ample 'hands-on' experience, in a supervised and supportive context, of a range of ministry activities, responsibilities and tasks.

## **ACADEMIC STUDY: THE MTA**

A foundational part of our training programme is the discipline of sustained academic study, centred round a rigorous course provided by the [Ministry Training Academy](#) (MTA) here in Aberdeen.

Born out of a shared commitment on the part of a number of like-minded congregations to equip the next generation of Christian leaders, the MTA "has the primary aim of training men for preaching: the 2-year course is open, however, to both men and women keen to pursue excellence in the study and understanding of the Scriptures in order to deepen love for God and His gospel; it aims to prepare men and women for works of service in the church and the world through a demanding course of biblical and theological study."

The MTA course comprises 2 'terms' each year, each of 16 weeks' duration, and those participating in our training programme will spend a full day a week at the MTA through each 'term'.

## **CHARACTER FORMATION: 'MENTORING'**

Central to our training programme is the cultivation of a genuine Christ-likeness of character.

Paul exhorted his younger colleague Timothy to "*watch your life and doctrine closely*" ([1 Tim.4.16](#)): and this aspect of the programme thus provides an important complement to the academic study in which trainees are engaged.

This part of the training given is as demanding and challenging as it is significant in preparation for ministry; and integral to it is a pattern of regular one-to-one 'mentoring' built on a relationship of mutual trust. The 'mentoring' provides a healthy framework of both support and accountability, through which trainees are helped to learn about themselves, to develop an

integrity in their walk with the Lord, and to embrace spiritual ‘disciplines’ which will sustain them through a lifetime of ministry.

Alongside that ‘mentoring’, over the 2-year period trainees attend, on a roughly monthly basis, a series of seminars through which key ingredients of character formation and godly living are addressed. Based on the exhortation of the apostle Peter to “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*” ([2 Pet.3.18](#)) and structured round the themes to which Peter himself alludes ([2 Pet.1.5-9](#)), these seminars oblige trainees to work at vital areas of their walk with the Lord in pursuit of true holiness of life.

Areas covered by the seminars over the 2 years are as follows –

- Self-discipline
- Goodness
- Knowledge
- Guarding the heart
- Self-control
- Perseverance
- Spiritual stamina
- Rhythms of rest and work
- Stewarding time
- Godliness
- Self-examination
- Bible reading and prayer
- Developing mutual affection
- Cultivating a forgiving spirit
- Friendship
- Living in love/Brotherly love

## **PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE: ‘HANDS-ON’ INVOLVEMENT**

We learn by doing. Built into the 2-year training programme is a significant element of practical experience. This practical experience is (a) tailored to the particular circumstances of trainees, (b) carefully supervised, and (c) buttressed by appropriate levels of both preparation beforehand and feedback afterwards. Broadly speaking, this practical experience will fall under four main heads.

### ***Clear communication***

Communicating clearly and well is a key ministry skill, and a major part of the practical experience given to trainees is, accordingly, that of ‘out-front’ communication, whether in the context of leading some part of our worship, or teaching the Bible in a range of different settings.

As indicated, appropriate help preparatory to such opportunities and appropriate feedback afterwards will be given, concentrating on content, language, elocution, and relevance.

### ***Pastoring people***

Ministry involves us with people – all sorts of different individuals, ranging from avowed unbelievers, on the one hand, through to mature and well-taught saints, on the other, and every point between! Trainees, therefore, will get hands-on experience of the challenges and privileges of pastoral ministry: in a ‘safe’ and supported environment they

will learn how to bring the truths of Scripture to bear on the lives of individuals across a spectrum of needs and circumstances.

### ***Learning leadership***

We recognise the importance of ensuring that trainees gain insight into what leadership in a fellowship involves: trainees are thus given opportunities to 'sit in' on the deliberations of Deacons, Elders and the Leadership Team at appropriate meetings of these bodies.

### ***Simple service***

Trainees spend a portion of their weekly time involved, as well, in specific practical tasks around the church: these include setting up rooms and areas for meetings, cleaning, and performing administrative tasks through the church office.

Their undertaking such routine, practical tasks helps the smooth running of the church, of course, but it also enables trainees to see what is involved in a church functioning well, helps cultivate in them a servant heart, and gives them vital experience of working as part of a team.

## **Practicalities**

Participation in our ministry training programme is undertaken on a voluntary basis, and funding is clearly an important issue for anyone considering this 2-year commitment: we are keen to facilitate that as much as we can.

- As a fellowship committed to training, Gilcomston Church has a 'Training Fund' to enable us as a church, at the discretion of the Leadership Team along with the Deacons, to contribute significantly to the funding required by trainees in order to meet their MTA fees and their living expenses: such 'living expenses' include a 'housing allowance' since as a fellowship we do not have premises to make available to trainees – although we may be able to help potential trainees find appropriate accommodation.
- The [Bonar Trust](#) is keen to support churches in their commitment to this sort of training and timely application should be made to the Trust for a grant, which again can be significant.
- There are various other charitable trusts and organisations to which trainees may also apply for grants: details of these will be given to successful applicants.
- Trainees are also expected to raise a portion of their funding themselves seeking support from family and friends and churches with which they have an association.

Our ministry training programme runs for 2 years from mid-August. Our concern is to provide this training for those, male and female, who as followers of the Lord Jesus

- are committed to the authority of the Bible as God's Word;
- are eager to share the good news of Jesus with others;
- have shown some aptitude in teaching the Bible;
- are able and keen to work as part of a team; and
- have the support of their own church leadership in pursuing this programme.