

# 2009 Convention

Having completed their four years of study, nineteen students received their EfM awards in the context of the 2009 Convention held in Birmingham Cathedral on Saturday 3rd October 2009



These students came from seven groups scattered over various regions in England.

Canon Nigel Hand, Canon Missioner at Birmingham Cathedral, led the morning discussions. His address was, 'The Word of God is living and active.' He challenged those present to become excited by the Bible. He spoke of the need to listen to scripture in relationship to the voices around us in the world, and not to become isolationists in our attitude towards scripture. He described scripture as the 'gossip about God'. Nigel encouraged us to live biblically in the world and to put into action the vocation that scripture points us towards. He emphasized the importance to systematically read the Bible and to develop a response to it like those first disciples on the road to Emmaus whose hearts burned when the risen Lord Jesus unpacked its meaning. One of the most valuable metaphors Nigel used described the general attitude many Christians have towards the Bible as like visiting London! We might travel on a regular basis to say Waterloo and travel on the underground to our place of work or visit the City to see a show. It is easy to say that I've been to London by that regular journey and yet we've ignored a great wealth of experience by not familiarizing ourselves with the vast majority of its treasures because no one has guided us to them. So too with the Bible, yes we may have our favourite passages and we know parts of it well but we need to be guided to read with integrity and understanding the vast majority that has been neglected.



In his later sermon he continued his reflections on scripture, reminding us that it shaped our practice and is the means by which our church communities establish their conviction to worship God and serve his world.

## Fees

The student fees for those enrolling for an EfM Group are now:

**EfM students (full year) £195**

The fee for mentor training inclusive of residential accommodation costs has been increased to contribute to a fee for the trainer.

**Accreditation Training for those seeking to be mentors £200**

**On-going training for active mentors £165**

## The mustard seed

*The kingdom of God is like  
a bush grown from a seed:  
not very big  
not grand like the lofty cedar  
in danger of being toppled  
but big enough to provide shelter  
for many kinds of birds,  
an eco-system supporting the life of  
robins, blackbirds, woodpeckers,  
pigeons, sparrows, tits,  
beetles, spiders, caterpillars, ants -  
and growing more seeds for planting.  
Every year, it gets hacked back  
to the ground,  
and it never grows bigger than it grows.*

Question: when does the mustard bush  
become the fig tree growing no figs  
which should be cursed and chopped down?

14.xi.09 Nicola Slee

## Calendar

*If you want to enrol for mentor training or make an advanced booking for the Convention please email the Administrator:*

*administrator@efmuk.org.uk*

### Basic Mentor Training

**25th – 27th June 2010**

*Stanton House, Stanton St. John, Oxford*

### 2010 Convention and Award Ceremony

**Saturday 2nd October 2010**

*from 10.30 a.m. - 2 p.m. in Birmingham Cathedral*

*'To see a world in a grain of sand... Poetry as a means of theological reflection',*

Led by Nicola Slee

Nicola Slee is Research Fellow and MA Team Leader at the Queen's Foundation for Theological Education, Birmingham, and author of many books and articles, particularly on feminist theology. She is also a published poet and a trustee of EfM.



### EfM UK Management Group next meets:

**Saturday 17th April 2010**

*9.45am - 12.45pm*

*Undercroft, Birmingham Cathedral*

If you have any issues that you wished to be discussed by the Management Group then e-mail Joanna Hobart on:  
joanna@efmuk.org.uk

The smallest of things

# EfM

exploring faith matters

Issue 13 - Spring 2010

The newsletter for EfM UK

## The smallest of things

As we approached the end of the noughties it seemed good to the EfM Management Group to review progress so far and make plans for 2010 and beyond. Recalling the important part that mentors play in the encouragement and stimulation of our groups, it also seemed good for someone to facilitate the Management Group's thinking. So on a very cold and rainy day in November we met in Birmingham's Carrs Lane Church to conduct our review. The last time I can remember EfM using an external consultant was way back in 1993 when Hilary Ineson, one of Joanna Cox's predecessors, worked with EfM as we tried to get the organisation off the ground (Joanna is the National Adviser in Lay Discipleship and Shared Ministry in the C of E). This time we enlisted the help of Jennifer Tann, one of our trustees.

As often happens, when a group of people are intentional in their reflection, several interesting things emerged.

There was a reaffirmation that EfM is not for everyone; we have been aware for sometime and indeed research in the States suggests that the average EfM student is in their early 40s, a mature person ready to reflect on life's big questions. However, what was new this time was the insight that EfM may be best targeted at people who are at more mature stages of faith and in particular those associated with stages three and four of James Fowler's stages of faith.

Two scriptural images emerged which merit further theological reflection. The first comes from Psalm 34.8: "O taste and see that the Lord is good". How can we create opportunities for people to taste what we have to offer?

The second is captured in a poem written on the day by another of our trustees, Nicola Slee - *The Mustard Seed* (on back page). Is EfM a mustard seed or a fruitless fig tree?

An important insight for the Management Group was the extent to which we have become tired, and in some ways quite distant from the excellent work being undertaken in our groups across the country; only one member is currently an active mentor. With this in mind we resolved to bring the 2010 elections forward. The following weekend, together with Joanna Hobart, I was facilitating the training of several of our more experienced mentors at the newly refurbished St Columba's House in Woking. In taking forward the work from the Management Group we undertook a series of theological reflections using the microscope, issue and kinetic methods. Each reflection took as its

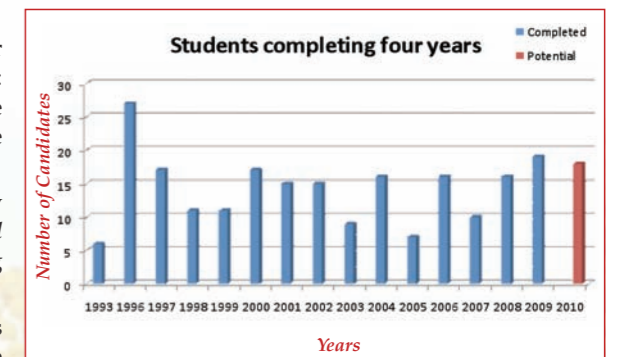
inspiration work done in the previous reflection so that our TRs spiralled through the weekend.



### What insights and implications for action did we discover?

The good news is that our active mentors are certainly energetic, enthusiastic and optimistic about the work of EfM.

We revisited the actual number of students completing the four-year course since 1993 and were pleasantly surprised. It certainly *feels* that numbers are dropping at the moment, but the *actual* figures show that our current situation is one that has been familiar to us over the last decade and the potential numbers for 2010 are in fact the highest for a decade with the *exception* of 2009 (see chart).



We spent some time exploring the potential differences between a Movement and an Organisation. Whilst we came to the conclusion that EfM could not completely shed all the characteristics of an organisation we did recognise that we should worry less about numbers and be encouraged more by the quality of the work we do, particularly in the field of theological reflection. If you know of anyone who would like to hear more about how to design and train theological reflection groups, please do be in touch with either Haydon Wilcox, our Administrator, or me.

*continued on inside page.....*

Please contact our administrator if you would like more information about EfM

Haydon Wilcox  
EfM UK Administrator  
Telephone: 01252 621639  
E-mail: haydonwilcox@mac.com

visit our website - [www.efmuk.org.uk](http://www.efmuk.org.uk)

It feels to me that after the glorious celebrations of the Convention in 2008 some of us who are involved with the operational side of EfM have flagged a little. This is perhaps not surprising since we are a small voluntary organisation. However, I take great heart from the passion of our mentors and students and am deeply moved by the Management Group's desire to bring forward elections to positively hand over the baton to a new group.

As is our custom, elections will be by colleges; voting for representatives from among our students, mentor and trainers. (Those of you who are eligible to stand and vote should have details accompanying this newsletter).

Coming from the College of Trainers I intend to stand once again. The first meeting of the new group will be on Saturday 17 April and I am suggesting it should be a full day meeting. The outgoing Management Group are bequeathing a sound financial base and a variety of suggestions and ideas to start the ball rolling for the new group.

Please do consider standing in the elections and encourage others to do so. The pattern has been to meet four times a year on a Saturday but this can be reviewed depending on the commitments of the new members.

We should never underestimate the importance or power of small changes and at the same time we might consider some modest targets. The review of numbers in the accompanying chart shows that we have only managed to climb over twenty completing students in a year once, and that was in 1996. I would set the new Management Group a target of achieving successive years of twenty students or over beginning in three years time, the 2013 Convention.

**I end with a small change in my own life**

During the Autumn I read Terry Veling's book *Practical Theology* which has the subtitle "On Earth as It Is in Heaven". This

passage caught both my eye and heart:

In the Christian tradition, the scriptures are usually placed on a lectern as an open book. This is a very symbolic gesture, and I have taken to practicing it myself. At home on my bookshelves are rows and rows of tidily shelved books, all lined up one against another with only their spines showing. However, I always clear a space on one of the shelves where I place the scriptures as an open book. It is a wonderful sight, the sight of this open book - its pages looking out, its words exposed, its unfolded gaze that is like a beautiful invitation: "take and read." Amidst all those closed books lined up on my shelves, this one book stands in its rightly assumed posture - open and invitational. It reminds me that all life and learning is about this openness, this invitation, this desire to learn and to love.

(Veling 2005, 38)

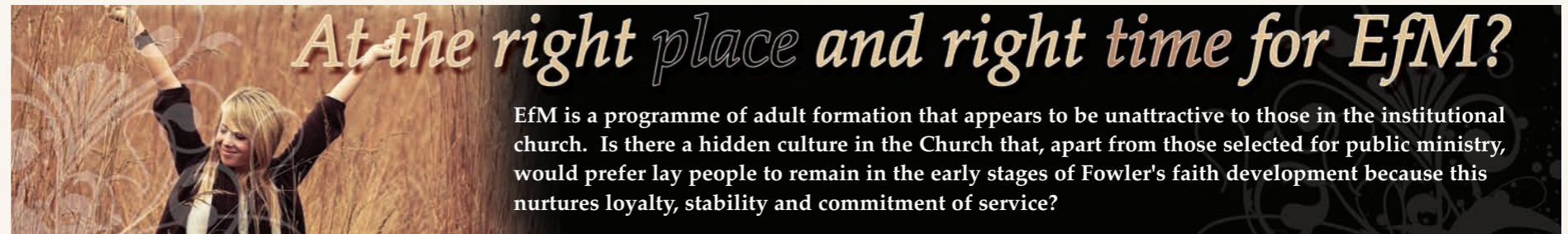


As you can see from this photo of my study I have taken this idea to heart. It is a small gesture, but who knows where it might lead? I commend to you both Terry's book and his lived example.

Here's to EfM and another decade of life.

Gary O'Neill

Director of EfM UK



When I first encountered EfM, some 18 years ago, it seemed to be a gift to the Churches in the UK, a proven resource from our brothers and sisters in the Episcopal Church. As the then Chair of the Adult Education Committee in the Anglican Diocese of Southwell, I became convinced that EfM filled a niche for mature Christians, who wanted to grow in the understanding of their faith. The EfM programme gives people the resources of knowledge; encourages them to become skilled reflectors about the challenging issues in society; develops faithfulness in a culture of conflicting voices and builds a confidence to live out their Christian ministry in the world.

In light of post-modern research it appears that many people no longer feel connected with institutional religion. The old norms are now being challenged and people are becoming empowered to choose alternative places to find value and meaning. The Church's response to this has been expressed in areas such as the development of liturgy, challenging established attitudes towards children, making a new commitment to work among young people and pioneering fresh expressions of evangelism to the 'unchurched'. These and many more initiatives have given new momentum to the Church but have left a core need among many established members.

James Fowler's stages of faith refers to the operation of knowing and valuing. Just as a human being develops physically, emotionally and intellectually, so too there is a progressive pattern of development that occurs in our faith where truth is explored and new values formed. The Church has placed great emphasis on attracting people to belong to a faith community in order to explore the issues of truth and values. Alpha, Emmaus and Saints Alive are just an examples of how different traditions have attempted to do this. Recent developments of Fresh Expressions and Pioneering Ministries have continued on this path. They have encouraged the process of reflection upon truth and values to take place in secular places where people feel more comfortable or with culturally relevant approaches that for many are more accessible.

Fowler appreciates that the early stages of faith development involve the ordering of personal chaos through the discovery of order, beauty and meaning. When the narrative of our life journey resonates with the symbols, stories and actions of those in a faith community, then there is a great desire to belong. The example of significant people can also be inspirational to those in these early stages of faith. The human need to belong and be valued encourages a modification of behaviour, so much so that others notice this transformation. It is a time when the newly converted possess a contagious enthusiasm that attracts others to explore issues of faith. Faith communities can often be seduced to concentrate on this process because of the many positive and immediate benefits of sustaining growth and stability.

In the early years of faith development the expression of belonging is often manifested in the taking on of roles. A role in a faith community brings about a corporate valuing and acceptance. This is a time when so much is taken at face value. Very quickly people learn that to question publically within a faith community can have consequences that could affect their belonging and value.

My experience as a mentor of an EfM group for many years is that the people who join feel they want to grow. They have many questions that remain unanswered. They often feel disloyal about undertaking Christian studies that are not offered from within their local church. Many feel that their minister doesn't understand them, as their questions have been received as personal criticism. There is a sense that the leadership doesn't know how to satisfy this need to learn at a depth that is currently unavailable in a local setting. Many students find that their ministers remain uninterested in their ongoing development, especially if study time replaces former commitments at the local church. Students become more critical of sermons and liturgy, wanting to question teaching or biblical assumptions. Slowly they develop their own positions on issues, which they want to test and discuss. Learning to live with diversity and difference is a key feature of EfM and students yearn for open debate in their own church but are often frustrated when conformity is usually the accepted norm. Students become aware that passion and difference can be expressed in domestic or practical issues like reordering a church building, but find that few people are happy to debate theological issues and their application in the world through ministry.

Why? Because the Church has not given lay people the knowledge and tools to do this work.

It isn't surprising that the 40's - 50's age group are attracted to EfM, because as Fowler infers it is often at this period of life that people are "making critical choices about the defining elements of their identity and faith." Frequently people become self sufficient at this stage in their faith development and this can often result in people leaving their faith community - feeling that to remain will only limit their quest. EfM works hard at not becoming a substitute congregation. EfM encourages people to remain in relationship with a faith community, though often this might involve transferring their allegiance from one tradition to another.

EfM has so much to offer the Church. It is not a competitor but a partner. EfM is a resource to help lay people who want to have equity of learning and the freedom to practise their Christian ministry in the world, without the recognition of public office in the Church. There is a minority of people in our congregations (one day may they be the majority), with whom the leadership struggle. Their independent thought, challenging questions, passion for spiritual development, commitment to other value based movements and impatient attitude may well threaten those in authority. EfM can be the resource that meets their need and enables them to remain faithful to their faith community without denying the value system and wisdom they have developed through systematic study, reflective processes and the unique group dynamic of the programme.

The Revd. Haydon Wilcox

### Fowler's Stages of Faith

