CHAPTER 4: EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The project aimed to identify best practices for training working-class priests who will lead new urban worshipping communities in the Church of England.

This Chapter describes the participants in the study and their demographic make-up. In the analysis of the data, the researcher denoted the individuals by their sigla and the first letter of their Christian name to de-identify the data; for example, Candidate C or Priest B.

Next, the Chapter presents the quantitative data from the online survey and the coded qualitative data from the focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The data collected from the research instruments is presented as it relates to each of the research questions.

Chapter Four concludes with a list of major findings emerging from the presented data.

Participants

In this study, four distinct sets of participants were used: online survey candidates, candidates in the selection process, new priests, and expert trainers.

Profile of the Candidate Survey Participants

The initial working-class survey had 434 respondents with 349 self-identifying as working-class and 292 having been in the Church of England discernment process within the past fifteen years (See fig 4.1).

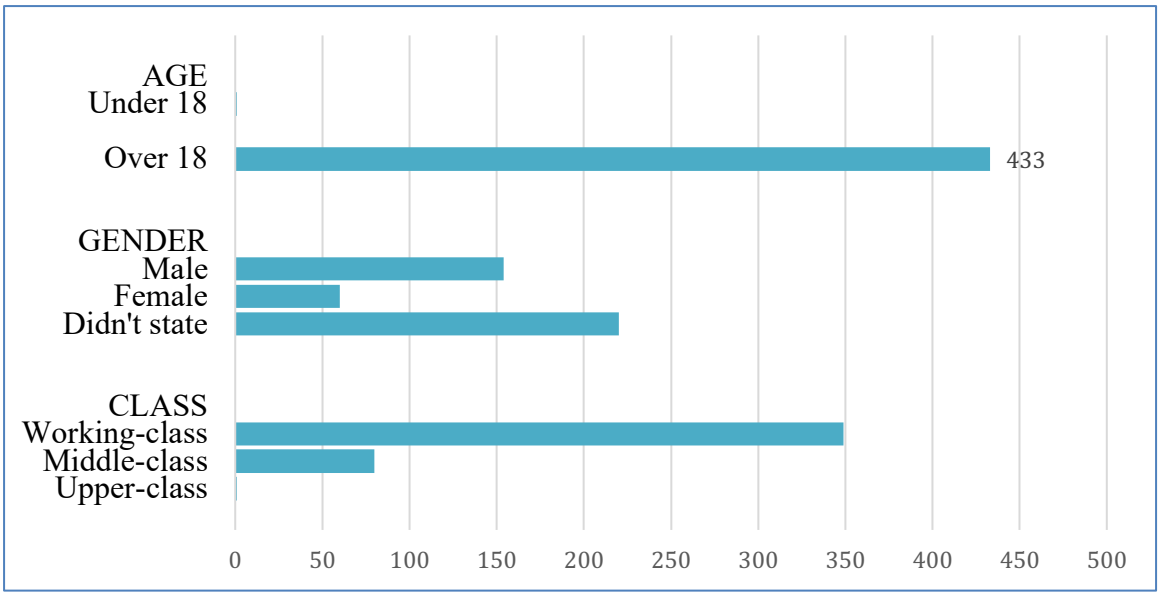

Fig 4.1 Social Class of Candidates

In survey question 4, 292 individuals identified themselves to be working-class and also stated they had been in the Church of England discernment process at some point within the last fifteen years. This included starting but not completing the full process (see Fig 4.2). From the data, one can see that 38.7 percent of responders identified as over eighteen, working-class, and have been accepted for training or are currently in some form of parish ministry within five years. This will become our key group for the survey.

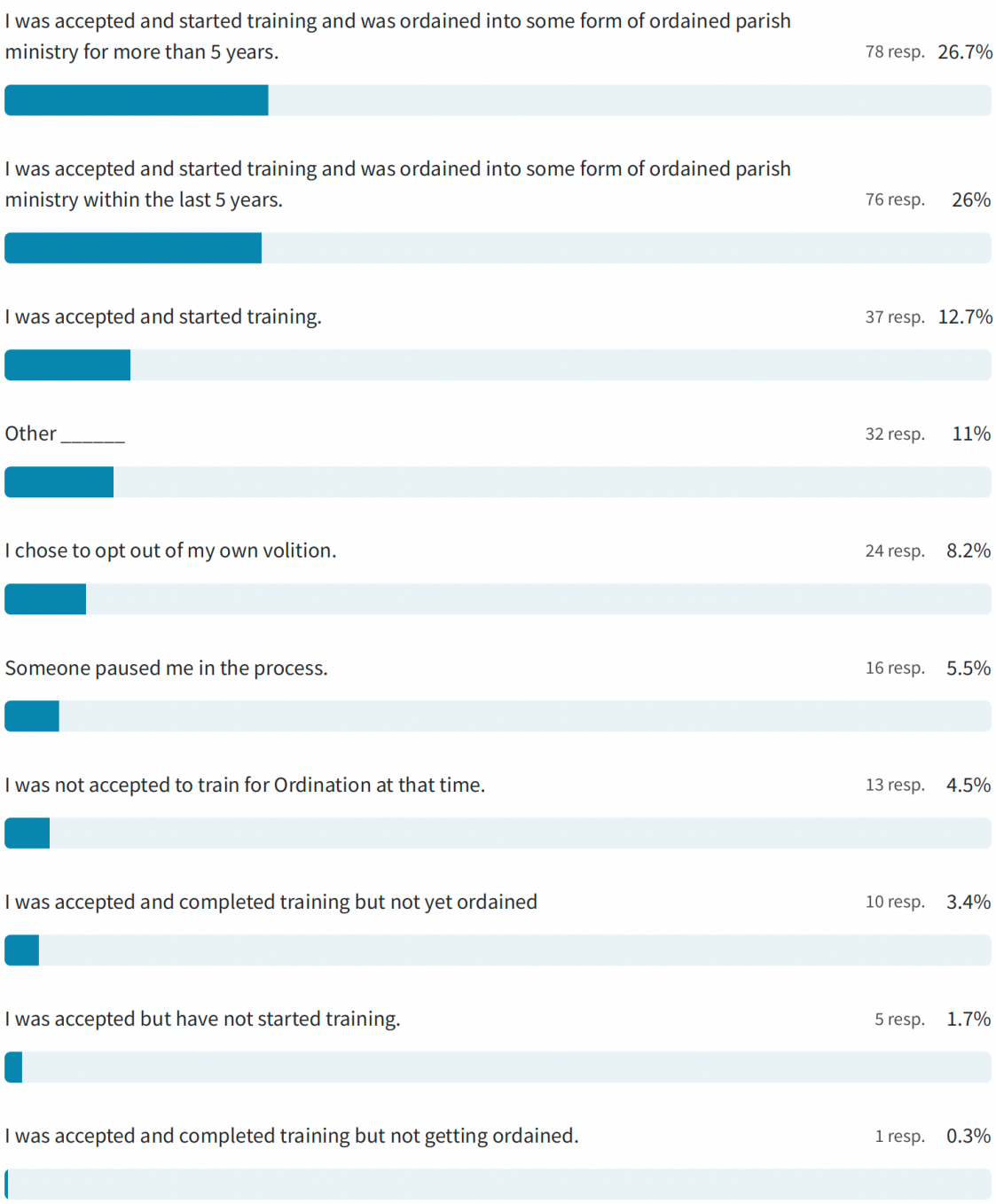

Fig 4.2 Experiences in the Discernment Process

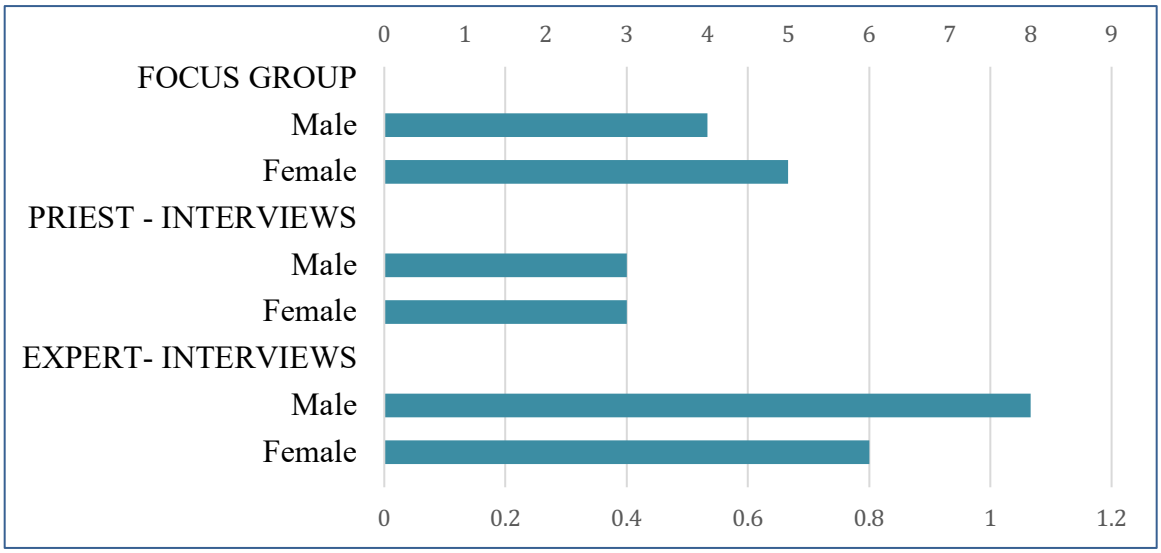

Fig 4.3 Demographics of Focus Group and Interview Participants

Profile of the Participants in the Candidate Focus Groups

Focus groups were comprised of the nine individuals who had first responded to the online survey. Ten participants were randomly selected from survey respondents for two one hour focus groups, but only nine participated consisting of five women and four men (see Fig 4.3). The three non-attenders showed interest but did not appear on the day stating family or work emergencies. All the participants were over the age of eighteen. One participant was in the selection process at the time, one had been selected but only completed one year of training due to family issues, and five of the participants were now in training. One Candidate was on residential training and four were on mixed mode.

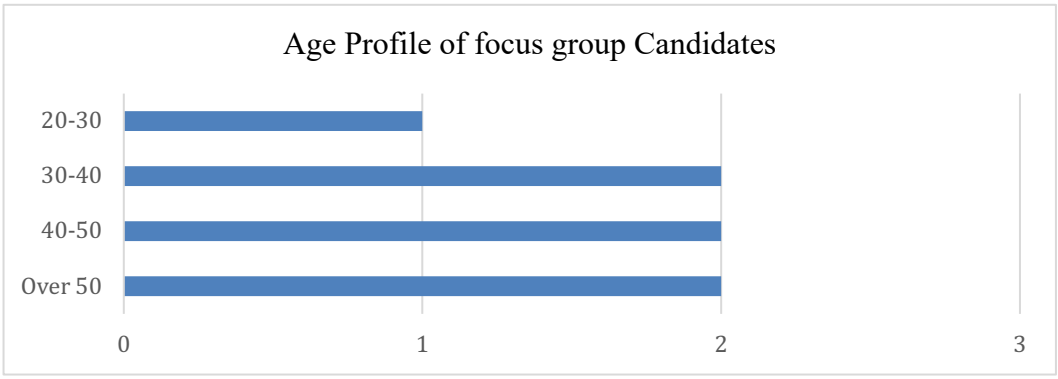

Fig 4.4 Age profile of Candidate Participants

Profile of the new Priests in the Semi-Structured Interviews

Six priests were randomly selected from the 154 survey respondents indicating ordination. This group consisted of three men and three women ordained in the past five years (see Fig 4.3). This proportion of male and female subjects ensured the fulfilment of the research instrument protocol that at least one-third of the participants were male and one-third of the participants were female. One female priest withdrew prior to the interview due to health issues.

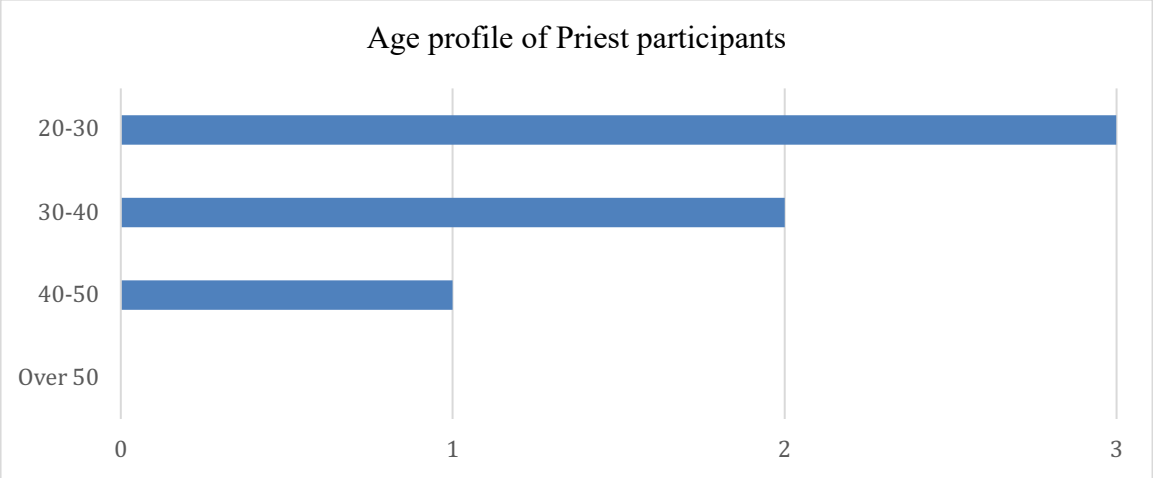

Fig 4.5 Age profile of Priest Participants

Profile of the Experts in the Semi-Structured Interviews

Fourteen experts were identified through survey recommendations or researcher selection as key informants. These were six females and eight males (see Fig 4.3). These individuals participated in semi-structured interviews with one not responding to the invitation (this individual was male).

Prior to the interview, an initial question was asked about the experiences of the interviewees in training working-class people. Only three Experts identified as working in this field directly for more than five years. One of the interviewees was from a secular apprenticeship context, which meant the questions had to be tailored to this environment to make them applicable. This was achieved by removing the word Priests from the questions. Five of the

Experts were from institutions that educate priests presently and five were from new programs developing alternative training programs for lay leaders, church planters, or pioneers. One of the Experts was from the Aston Training Scheme from the 1980's which no longer runs but was able to bring clear learning from vast past experience.

In summary, the research incorporated quantitative survey data from 349 discernment candidates and qualitative data from multiple Candidate focus groups and interviews with ordained Priests and subject matter Experts.

The data comprising the evidentiary basis for this study was gathered through a mixed-methods approach utilising both quantitative and qualitative instruments. Quantitative data were collected through an online survey conducted with a sample of 434 participants, incorporating multiple-choice responses as well as open-ended fields for subjective explanations. Qualitative evidence was obtained through two focus group sessions with seven intentionally selected participants each, employing a semi-structured protocol of open-ended questions and prompts. Additionally, individual in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom video conferencing with twenty-one key informants identified through criterion sampling then video recorded and transcribed. This mixed methodology allowed insights through the integration of generalised survey trends, group perspectives from collective discussions, and in-depth details from personal experience during one-on-one interviews. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data sources enabled a robust examination of the research problem by converging evidence from multiple investigative viewpoints.

The following section reports the findings of the online survey and interviews conducted as part of this study; the four research questions summarise the results.

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

What are the distinctive challenges, experiences, and opportunities associated with working-class urban contexts that are relevant to the better understanding of the training needs of working-class church leaders who will lead new urban worshipping communities in the Church of England?

Research question one set out to identify the specific needs of working-class candidates in the process of discernment and the challenges of the context that need to be considered for the most successful training pathway. The question aimed to identify those Candidates who had opted out of the discernment process by their own volition and to ascertain the reasons for this occurring. The research question also examined the opportunities associated with the urban context for wider church learning. In the following collected data, there are at least two working-class groups, being those with unrealised academic potential, who perhaps just need additional and initial help, and those who will never be academically inclined, who need a different system.

Expert J illustrated a problematic contradiction in the Church of England's approach to discerning and developing working-class candidates for the priesthood. He asserted that "The Church of England [selectors of priests] see ordination in affirming the gift that is in you [the candidate] and then sending you away to change." Expert J gives weight to Candidate and Priest interviewees' experiences of profound identity fragmentation and loss of authentic self during priestly formation. The Experts recommended resolving this central tension as being imperative for training systems to progress beyond superficial inclusion rhetoric to enact meaningful transformation.

The responses of the subjects who were surveyed and interviewed provided several observations on the challenges for working-class individuals in the Church of England discernment process and education. The evidence is categorised below under four main

headings: the distinctive challenges, working-class life and experience barriers, working-class experience in higher education, and the opportunities associated with working-class urban contexts.

The Distinctive Challenges

Several distinctive challenges were identified for the working-class. These challenges were about how they felt perceived, challenges around the selection process and education, and challenges around the clash of life values within the working-class community.

Perception of the Working-class within the Church of England. The survey participants were asked how they felt they were perceived in the Church of England's discernment process. The following ten top results (seen in Fig 4.6) are in order of selection with indication of the percentage of responders.

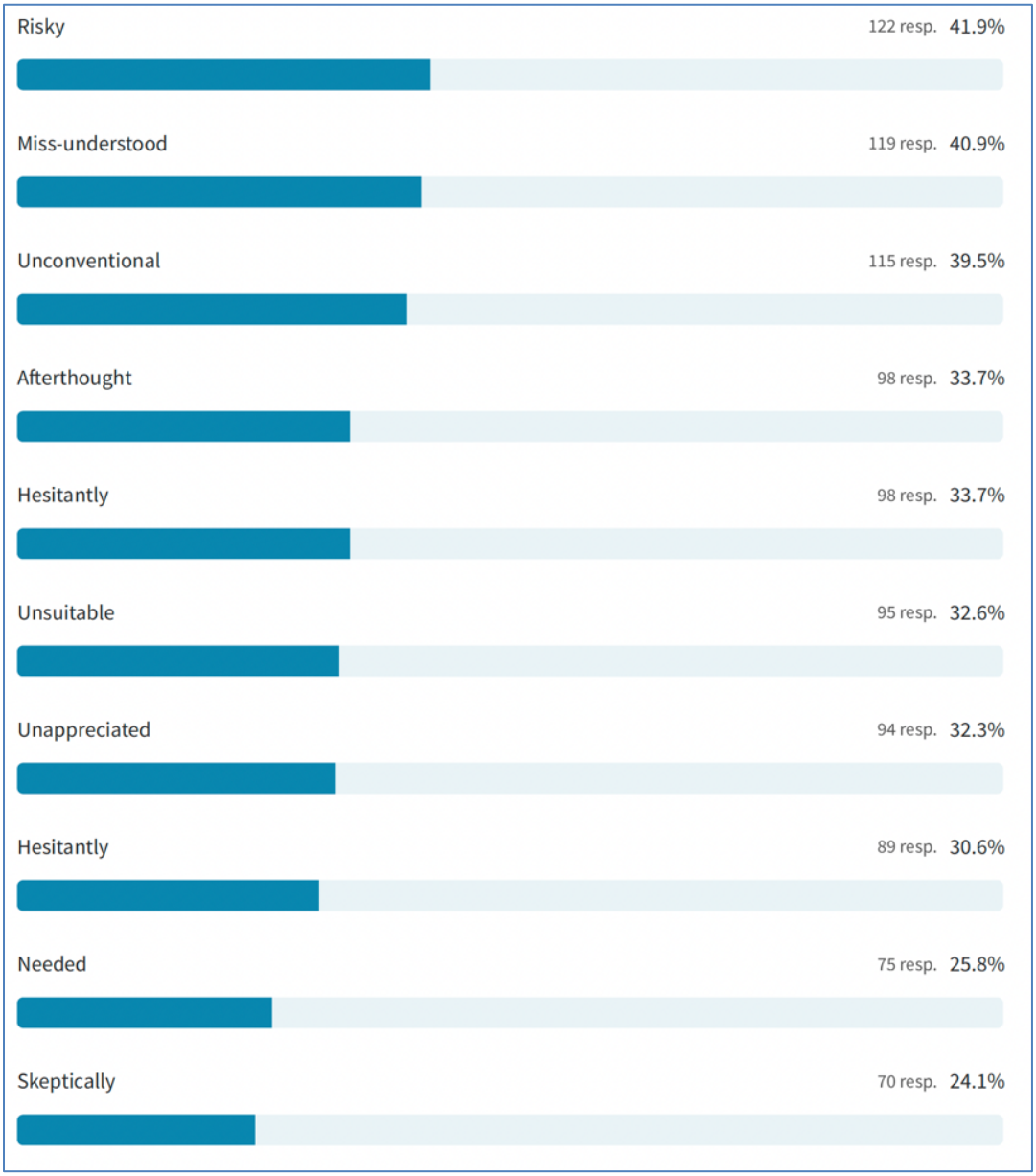

Fig 4.6 Words Candidates most associated with how they felt seen by the Church of England.

The most frequent responses were “Risky,” “Misunderstood,” and “Unconventional,” while positive perceptions like “Valued,” “Understood,” and “Trusted” received very few responses.

Based on the survey data, out of the thirty-eight total words to describe perceptions of working-class people in discernment, the top nineteen words (the top 50 percent) accounted for 82.3 percent of total responses. Of those top nineteen words, fifteen were negative perceptions

(Risky, Miss-understood, Unconventional, Afterthought, Hesitantly, Unsuitable, Unappreciated, Skeptically, Ambivalently, Difficult, Unfavourably, Critically, Negatively, Suspiciously). The fifteen negative words in the top 50 percent accounted for 68.7 percent of total responses.

Therefore, fifteen (79 percent) out of the top nineteen (50 percent) words were negative, accounting for almost 69 percent of total responses. This indicates that a significant majority of the most frequent perceptions of working-class people in discernment were negative. This helps us understand how working-class people feel they are often viewed negatively in the discernment process.

Asking for any additional words they would like to add, the summary of these echoed the same results and question 9.a. The most common suggestions were related to feeling patronized, with words like “Patronisingly,” “Patronized,” and “Condescendingly” suggested multiple times. Many other suggestions conveyed similar sentiments of being looked down upon or judged unfairly, including “Discriminated against,” “Second Class,” “Inferior,” and “Unworthy.” Several words highlighted feeling dismissed or side-lined, like “Dismissively,” “Unimportant,” and “Side-lined.” The suggestions “Token” and “Tick box” point to a feeling of only being included superficially or for appearance’s sake. Several responses mentioned assumptions of being uneducated, unintelligent, or incompetent. Three individuals noted being pigeonholed or pressured to conform to expectations. Seven percent conveyed a sense of not belonging or being an outsider.

Only four offered positive suggestions like “Strong vocation,” “Essential,” or “Welcomed.” Overall, the additional suggested words reinforce the survey’s finding that working-class people overwhelmingly feel misperceived and judged negatively during discernment. The words provide richer detail on the nature of those perceptions from

condescension to dismissal to assumptions of inferiority. This data reveals that the working-class interviewees desire to be taken more seriously, seen for their gifts, and genuinely included.

Challenges in the Selection Process. The online survey identified that clear challenges exist for the working-class in the present Church of England discernment process. The most common reasons working-class individuals cited for dropping out of the Church of England's ordination discernment process centred around feeling they did not fit an expected middle-class mould for a candidate (mentioned by fifteen respondents). Many felt pressured to conform to pre-set notions of what a candidate should be like rather than accepted for who they authentically are. Struggles with academic requirements also posed barriers (cited by eight respondents), especially for those without prior higher education who found the needed theological knowledge and academic skills difficult to attain. The significant time commitment and opaque, confusing steps proved challenging as well, particularly when juggling other responsibilities (noted by five respondents). Some also faced discrimination based on gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, class, or personality differences (mentioned by six respondents) and combatted disillusionment with the institution itself (four respondents). Mental health impacts like burnout, depression, and stress from the demands were referenced by four respondents, which led several people to withdraw for self-care purposes.

Candidates shared their experiences of having to change themselves to become ideal candidates for the selection process and fit the institutions where they are now being trained. This adaptation came in terms of personal presentation as well as how they spoke and what they spoke about. For example. Candidate A said,

> I have had to adapt in so many ways to fit the system. I've changed my clothing from T-shirts with big prints on the front to plain T-shirts. I've had to learn to speak with less of an accent. I've had to tone down my humour and laugh a little quieter. I've had to learn

> to talk about the weather rather than Game of Thrones or the latest Marvel Movie. All of this just to fit the college.

Likewise, Candidate H said, "I had to buy a dress to fit in. I was invited to a garden party with the Bishop at the college. I had no idea what to wear and felt I needed to come dressed 'posh.'" A similar comment was made by Candidate S:

> I worked as a plumber when I was training; it's been my whole life career. I went to work 6am until 6pm and then went on to the training centre for the evening. I was so self-conscious about my workwear that I would have a wash in the back of my van with baby wipes and get changed surrounded by all my gear. I didn't want people to see me in my work gear. When I walked into the room, I was always conscious about how well-presented others were. I also had to pull back my accent.

Candidate A shared a lengthy experience she had regarding how she had to adapt her life to go to selection meetings. The location of the meeting was not convenient to reach by public transport as it required her to travel on three buses from her home to the Diocese office. Returning home by public transport was problematic as the finishing time of the meetings meant that she could not return by the three buses and be home before midnight. As she started work at 6:00 am, she opted to sleep in the Leeds bus station overnight to make it work, leaving her daughter with her mother. When she was asked by a fellow focus group member if the Diocese could have helped put her up for the night, Candidate A responded, "I didn't feel I could ask, and if I did that it would be showing I was incapable of managing my life."

In summary, the lack of vocational fit (fifteen times), academic barriers (eight times), time commitment (five times), discrimination (six times), and mental health toll (four times) proved the most common factors that caused working-class individuals to drop out of a process

that did not adequately understand or embrace them holistically. Supportive structures were often inadequate, leaving many feeling uncared for.

The Church of England's ordination process was widely seen as off-putting for its overly academic nature (mentioned by seventy-nine respondents) and assumptions catering to middle/upper-class backgrounds (18 percent of respondents). Many struggled with essays, theological language, and extensive reading requirements, often lacking support for learning differences. Some explicitly stated the process felt unwelcoming of the working-class. The lengthy process' slow pace and repetitive nature, cited by 15 percent of respondents, made the process difficult with work and life responsibilities. Components were described as impersonal and intrusive by 11 percent of respondents, leaving some feeling pressured to conform. Unclear expectations and opaque steps (referenced by 8 percent of respondents) proved frustrating. Sixteen percent of respondents felt pre-judged or discriminated against based on gender, orientation, disability, class, and other factors. Financial barriers, such as lack of support, were mentioned by 7 percent of respondents, adding challenges for working-class individuals.

In summary, critical problematic themes were the academic demands, cultural misalignment, lack of clarity, difficult pace, and impersonal approach which left many feeling misunderstood, patronised, and unsupported.

Challenges in the Training Process. In the online survey, the most frequently cited challenges impacting the training of working-class leaders were the academic demands of training (fifty-one times), lack of proper financial support (forty-two times), feelings of inadequacy/not being good enough (thirty-two times), classism and lack of understanding from middle-class trainers (thirty-one times), balancing training with work and family commitments (twenty-four times), access to education and prior education level (twenty-three times), cultural differences (eighteen times), lack of relatable role models (seventeen times), length and pace of

training (fifteen times), imposter syndrome (fourteen times), lack of support systems (twelve times), bias in the selection process (twelve times), pressure to conform/assimilate to middle-class culture (eleven times), and location and travel requirements for training (eleven times).

In summary, academic rigour, financial barriers, self-doubt, class divides, work-life balance, educational background, cultural disconnects, relatability issues, training demands, feeling like an imposter, insufficient support, selective bias, conformity pressures, and location/travel for training/access difficulties were frequently cited as challenges impacting working-class leader training.

Working-Class Life and Experience Barriers

The qualitative data gathered from the two Candidate focus groups and Priest interviews sheds light on the unique challenges for working-class ministry candidates in urban settings. Through coding and analysing the interview transcripts, several key themes emerged around the distinct obstacles these individuals repeatedly described facing.

Financial Limitations. A recurring theme in the focus groups was the worry about finances. Several participants discussed the financial barriers of ministry training, including giving up full-time work and the pay drop, paying for courses and materials, and uncertainty about funding retirement housing. Candidate C had made the point that training for her had been prohibitive without family financial support and no historical savings to fall back on. Candidate H shared her experience as someone over fifty years old; she was told she had to stay in work and study at the same time as no financial support existed. For the candidate, this was unworkable as employment had inflexible or irregular work hours that were not controllable.

Family and Caregiving Responsibilities. Some focus group members mentioned how caregiving duties affected their ability to pursue training, including looking after children or elderly parents. These responsibilities caused delays in starting courses or required special

accommodations like distance learning options. For example, Candidate S argued that he thought "time demands, family demands and the general demands on our lives, is the biggest challenge. Because a lot of us are having to deal with training alongside very stressful family and work dynamics. I am also my wife's primary carer, so I am training part-time because I have to work."

A similar comment was made by Candidate H, "I'm forty-three and technically I shouldn't really be doing residential training anyway because I'm old but the reason for me being forty-three is because I couldn't have done this a few years ago because I was caring for my grandmother".

Feeling like an Outsider with no Social Capital. Several people described feeling like they did not fit the expectations of middle/upper-class church culture. This included dress codes, unspoken social norms, academic expectations, and stereotypes about their backgrounds. Fitting in required code-switching.

Candidate A said, "I already have to dress smarter than most people. I already have to tone down my makeup. I already have to look a different way before I even walk through the door."

The focus group participants highlighted that for working-class individuals, their home, neighborhood, and local community are core to their identity and status. Within these familiar urban settings, the focus group participants have built up "social credit" over the years based on their reputation, relationships, and belonging. They are known and trusted figures who have credibility in their contexts. This transition can create a sense of displacement and loss of status for working-class students. Their qualifications, speech patterns, background knowledge, and ways of interacting may be viewed as deficient compared to the middle-class norms of higher education. As a result, everything that gave them social legitimacy in their own community gets stripped away or devalued in the college environment.

Candidate C commented that,

> I realised when I first went to College that all that I had and worked hard to gain in terms of credibility was worthless in this new environment. On the Estate, I am recognised and thought well of. My family have been there for generations. I arrived at this new place and realised that everything I held high and admired was worth nothing here and knowledge, information, how many books you could read and who you know now is what gives you the social status.

Education Style is a Barrier. Some participants without previous higher education discussed challenges like learning to write essays and keeping up with academic reading. Unlike those with university backgrounds, they lacked study skills and faced a much steeper learning curve. The candidates talked about the large leap in higher education from their early years of experience. They talked about not having the study skills or writing abilities that those with university backgrounds possessed. Coming from families without a history of attending university, some lacked mentorship or even encouragement. One candidate mentioned that their family had mocked them for wanting to make themselves more 'posh.' This meant the pressure was on from all sides to fit in. Candidate A, H, S and H all talked about struggling with literacy and specific subjects like English in school making learning harder. Candidate C identified that they "failed GCSE's outright, failed it, and my mum tried to help me pass by cheating in some of my essays, and I still failed. No one around me had ever taught me to write an essay." Higher education was also a struggle for Candidate S as they were "diagnosed dyslexic when I was (like) eight years old and the thought of just writing essays for three years was really terrifying."

Issues of support for working-class candidates also existed. Many come from families where they are surrounded by those who have never studied themselves and do not have a desire to champion the candidate in the work. Candidate H acknowledged this issue,

> Even if you put more in place for people, their families cannot support them at home because they've not been in education and not had a good experience. Coming from a background where I was the 1st person in my family to even think about getting a degree, nobody else had done that. They could offer me nothing in support.

The Priests identified similar issues and recognised that a disconnect emerged between academic qualifications versus the needs of actual ministry. Priests A and H felt they were "just ticking boxes" on assessments rather than gaining applicable learning for their contexts. Priest H argued "the focus should be tailoring teaching to students' learning styles versus meeting outside accreditation standards."

Class creating Culture Conflict. A major theme that emerged is a clash of cultures between working-class candidates and the middle/upper-class norms of church leadership and academic institutions. Candidates described that coming from Estates, they felt excluded and unworthy due to this feeling of being outsiders and facing doubts over their worthiness due to ingrained perceptions about council estate backgrounds. They noted vast differences in life experience that made connecting with classmates difficult at times.

Priest H gave a clear diagnosis of issues and challenges for those coming from working-class contexts. She argued that working-class candidates often come from less book-based backgrounds without academic role models in their families or communities. Time is spent learning the academic environment versus more applicable ministry skills. She saw that for working-class people, success and worth comes from local family, friends, and community connections. Leaving this familiar environment for unfamiliar training settings lacks value and worth. "I arrived at college to feel like I had no value there. I was very well liked by the people of the estate and proven what I could do in my church. I arrived into a middle-class setting where I then was left feeling I knew nothing." Practical obstacles like accommodation without study

space and poor internet access on estates also impede working-class candidates. When the living room is the only space with a table, study time can only happen when the kids were in bed and everyone else out of the house.

Priest H argued that middle-class norms of compartmentalising life does not fit the working-class experience of dealing with precarious situations and interruptible ministries. She felt training systems need to better understand these dynamics. In summary, Priest H emphasised misalignment between working-class culture/needs and academic training environments which lacks awareness and accommodation of socioeconomic differences.

The academic environment itself posed significant obstacles. Candidates without previous higher education found learning and assessment methods like reading academic texts and writing long essays very difficult, especially those with learning disabilities. Priest R felt frustrated that promised accommodations were not actually provided by his college. Priest R said he "was forced to stay in classes for way too long when my memory is not that large and that wasn't helpful so that was definitely one of the challenges." The unfamiliar college environment and academic expectations around writing, sources, extensions, etc. required a steep learning curve. Priest E said "I felt like I was dropped to sink or swim without much support or help transitioning to this new alien culture."

Priest R further commented,

> I don't think the college was or is prepared to actually help people with learning disabilities like myself. Overall, it was like starting with people very different from me - culturally, socially, they lived a very different life. I felt I couldn't relate to people most of the time and they couldn't relate to me. The teaching style never worked for me. I spoke to them about it and they kept saying they would implement changes but nothing happened. All the assessments were essays… for somebody with dyslexia, ADHD and

everything else I have this was a major problem. I did them, I passed with probably the lowest grade possible. But a lot of it was just ticking boxes, doing it because I had no choice, not because it was helpful. I'm not the kind of person who can just read books and absorb them. It takes me a month to read a book with a lot of effort. So I think their assessments are for academics, [was] not for people like me. This was a major mental obstacle and impacted my confidence. It told me there was something seriously wrong with me because everyone else had no problems.

Culture Adaption is required. Priests also emphasised that cultural adaptation was required, including changing speech patterns, dress, and suppressing personality and humour to conform to middle-class norms. Both Priest A and R stated that this pressure to assimilate brought a sense of loss of identity. Priest A stated, "[I am] not sure I was allowed to be me but had to find a middle-class voice in discussions to fit".

The Candidates mentioned several other issues which are worth noting.

a. Participants felt there was an issue with their appearance. Either the color of their hair, the presence of tattoos, or the wearing of T-shirts with logos on the front. Candidate A stated, "Before my selection, we were told by my advisor to wear clothing I was comfortable in. Arriving on selection with a Marvel Avengers T-shirt it was commented upon by 2 candidates and an examiner. This made me feel like I should not be wearing comfortable clothing or that there was something wrong with me." Another candidate spoke about being questioned about the meaning of their tattoo leaving them to feel like this was something wrong.
b. Four of the candidates spoke about imposter syndrome and the feeling they were going to get caught and should not be there.

c. Candidates felt challenged when people asked them what they did before selection and had to say they worked at Tesco.
d. An awareness existed of the issue of having to adapt to the Church of England authority when historically this had not been a good experience.
e. A repeated note was given by the candidates that the life skills they brought were not valued by the middle class.

Working-Class Experiences in Higher Education

Qualitative data collected from the two focus groups provides some answers to what worked and did not work in higher education for working-class candidates. The data analysis shows that the interviewees repeatedly identified the following elements as key.

Hands-on Learning is Effective. Several members of the focus group emphasised that they learn best through hands-on, practical methods like watching others then trying it themselves. Each of the candidates identified that they struggled in a quiet classroom where learning was done didactically. Candidate C gave examples of learning to print textiles by working in the workshop and watching the technician, noting that this was far more helpful for her. Candidate S also preferred creative, kinaesthetic learning over just reading books. Hands-on methods allow working-class students to engage with the material in an active way that fits their learning style.

Candidate S made the point that for him that hands-on was the way he learnt his first career:

> I don't have much experience in higher education. From 16 went into plumbing as an apprentice for a small firm. They took me under their wings and got me trained up as a boiler repair guy. I didn't see the point in school but the apprenticeship

> program gave me something practical to learn and I could see the difference it was making. I never could engage with books, it just wasn't my thing.

Adapting to fit the Higher Education Culture can be Challenging. Both Candidate C and H discussed feeling like they had to adapt to fit into the higher education environment. For Candidate C, she had to change perceptions about her previous job. Candidate H disliked having to study theories rather than gaining on-the-job training. They felt pressure to conform to academic norms. This point will come up again in Question 3 but is still applicable here. Candidate A made the point that, "Very often we have to learn to adapt to fit in that new environment. But we also recognise that that adapting can have an effect on us. It can make us feel like we don't fit or we have to feel like we have to be something we, we don't want to be".

Financial Constraints are a significant Barrier.

The candidates each recognized the financial struggles. Some take unpaid time out of work to attend selection meetings, having to find the money for travel and eat out as they could not get home for food after work. Candidate C shared how going on Universal Credit enabled her to pursue education yet also revealed stark income disparities with other students. Financial limitations impacted her ability to afford materials, social activities, and educational opportunities. Candidate C said that she:

> …didn't have a well-paid paid job before I started training, which meant that I had little to fall back on. I realised that the way the system works by paying students grants mid-term very easily creates an environment where those of us who have never earned very much feel alienated or weren't able to take up the opportunities for outings or placements.

Having a Champion is Invaluable. Both Candidate C and H discussed specific individuals who championed and encouraged them as working-class students. For C, the

technician who showed her techniques and boosted her confidence to try them herself was her champion. H mentioned surrounding herself with skilled people who modelled that ability to her. Having someone believe in you and cheer you on makes a big difference in persisting in higher education as a working-class student. Candidate C observed that she:

> …had a teacher in the print industry when I was an apprentice that would cheer us on. They called the girls to 'come one' and 'go for it girls' and that is how I learned in a positive environment. They also showed me that these people were the best to watch and see how it's done as they encouraged and were open to share the knowledge and then being encouraged to have a go myself.

A common theme was the vital support and inspiration provided by individual champions who motivate working-class students as they navigate the challenges of higher education.

The Opportunities associated with Working-Class Urban Contexts. The online survey provided insight into the opportunities associated with working-class urban contexts. Frequently mentioned themes were having working-class leaders who can relate to and understand the context (thirty-four times), community engagement and development (thirty times), meeting practical needs through social action (twenty-three times), a focus on schools, youth and families (twenty-two times), and raising up indigenous leaders from within the community (twenty times). An emphasis was also placed on incarnational ministry (eighteen times), being authentic (fifteen times), empowering lay leadership (thirteen times), being present/building relationships (thirteen times), clergy living in the community (twelve times), and valuing people as they are (eleven times).

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

What do working-class leaders—in their first few years of ministry, or when training for ministry—who do not thrive in traditional academic systems identify as obstacles to effective theological and ministry training?

The second research question aimed to identify the issues that emerged for working-class leaders in their training. The aim was to identify key factors that made the training inaccessible or nonapplicable. The evidence is categorised below under three main headings: identifying the obstacles, the needs of the working-class in training, and the education preferences identified.

Identifying the Obstacles

A number of themes emerged from the data which can be broadly broken into six themes. A major theme was feeling like an outsider and struggling to relate to the majority middle/upper-class peer group. Candidates described vast differences in life experience that made connecting difficult at times. Priest R said that, “I felt isolated as part of a small minority group at the college. I felt they [the college] couldn't relate to anyone who wasn’t the young, white, academically-gifted majority.”

The academic environment. The academic environment itself was unfamiliar and daunting for all the Priests interviewed. They struggled with no prior experience writing essays or using academic sources. Both Priest E and H felt that this was a major problem that was never resolved and caused mental strain on them both. These rigid academic assessments did not match well with the practical abilities and contextual gifts they felt they had to share. Priest H stated, “Rather than assessments that showed off my spiritual gifting and church planting talent, I had assessments that showed how poorly my written skills were.”

Cultural Adaptation Pressure was Intense. Candidates felt forced to change speech patterns and dress, suppress personality and humour to conform to middle-class norms. Priest H

said that, “The college environment was unfamiliar, and the language differences made connecting to others challenging at times.” The Priests that did not change found it led to some isolation from other students. For those that assimilated, they found that changing brought a sense of losing one’s authentic working-class identity and ability to relate to one’s home context. Priest E realised that this also brought a concern for her about losing the ability to connect with the outside world. “I did have such concern that conforming to this college culture would cause me to lose abilities to connect with young people that I had previously reached.”

Poor Support Systems. Support systems were lacking. Candidates could not get family support for essay feedback or emotional encouragement in the unfamiliar academic environment. Priest A stated, “I had no family members to read my essays for me. I had never written [an essay] before and struggled to find people who were able to read them critically. None of my family had ever done anything like this so they were no support”.

Priest R brought attention to the problem that the older, middle-class college counsellors also seemed unapproachable to working-class students and their life experience. Priest R stated, “I certainly didn't feel comfortable talking to some of those people in college for support for fear of being judged, you know. Something that for me is normal and I’ve had to navigate in life as a recovering drug addict for them is a massive deal and a red flag just because they didn't go through the things that I went through. This stopped me from being open with them”.

Overall, candidates emphasised feeling like outsiders and facing immense cultural, academic, and emotional obstacles navigating an educational system that caters to the majority middle-class demographic. Greater accommodation for the minority working-class experience is needed.

The Pressure to become Academic and Middle-Class. A consistent theme across all interviews was intense pressure to change aspects of oneself to conform to middle-class cultural norms. Priests E, A, G and H all described modifying communication style and accent, humor, dress, and even spiritual expressions. Priest E reported, “I changed how I talked - I got criticised for how I talked until I changed. I tried to be something I wasn't. I changed how I dressed, lots of things about me to get through the hoops and live in their middle class world.” This need to adapt speech and suppress personality was echoed by others.

Priest R described looking around at his primarily young, white, academically gifted peers and feeling like he was back in school as an outsider. He felt the need to compensate significantly to fit in. He recognised the pressure this put on his mental health. Priest A “had to hold back” his naturally extroverted personality at times when it didn't fit the environment. Priest G felt his working-class humor had to be “dialed down” to avoid judgment.

Overall, a strong theme emerges of working-class candidates facing immense pressure to minimise or mask parts of their identity, communication style, and interests to assimilate to a middle-class-dominated training culture. This forced adaptation left priests feeling inauthentic and like outsiders in their own training. The evidence found that greater acceptance of diverse backgrounds is needed.

Negative Effects of Compensation. The most commonly described effect was damage to the candidates’ self-confidence and sense of self-worth. Priest H stated college life, "compounded [poor self-worth] what was already there from schooling - that got worse." Candidates internalised a sense of inferiority to their middle-class peers. Priest A said, “Well, I suppose there's two effects really that I can think of one, one was it kind of fed into that inferiority complex that I already spoken about. And so that that has an effect in terms [of]

stress.” Increased stress, anxiety, and feelings of not belonging also resulted from the assimilation pressures.

Related was intense questioning of whether they could be authentically themselves or had to become someone else to succeed. Candidates felt inauthentic and doubtful about their true identity. Priest G said, “I think there's an element of feeling like am I being authentically who I am? And does that mean I cannot be authentically who I am to get through this.”

Becoming an excessively work driven person, determined by the need to prove themselves, emerged. Priest E became a "workaholic, continually trying to prove I was as good as others.” Priests worked relentlessly to compensate for perceived deficiencies.

In summary, the key effects were erosion of self-confidence, authentic self, and well-being. They experienced imposter syndrome, isolation, loss of identity, and burnout from overwork. Allowing diverse backgrounds without forced assimilation could mitigate these harmful consequences.

The Needs of the Working-Class in Training

A significant theme was the need for more practical ministry training versus academic theory. Priest R argued, “ministry skills are best learned through modelling and apprenticeship not theory in the classroom.” Priest A also highlighted the “nuts and bolts” were missing from the classroom, as the academics can't prepare you fully for on-the-ground ministry.

The interviewees strongly emphasised the need for training programs to incorporate more flexible and creative assessments tailored to evaluate candidates’ real-life ministry abilities, rather than relying solely on traditional academic essays. Priest E highlighted the limitations of constant academic writing in capturing working-class candidates’ gifts, noting “More creative assignment options would have helped me talk about my abilities against constant academic writing.” She advocated for alternatives to traditional essays that would allow candidates like her

to demonstrate their skills and talents in formats aligned with ministry realities. For example, Priest E suggested assignments that create practical resources usable in ministry contexts, which would have much more value than theoretical essays promptly forgotten after submission. Other interviewees envisioned assessments like filmed presentations, mentored ministry projects, group discussions evaluating ability to integrate learnings, and boards observing candidates' counselling skills in simulated scenarios.

The consensus was that excessive focus on academic essay writing fails to assess critical ministry capabilities working-class candidates may possess, such as connecting with youth, designing accessible worship services, effectively communicating to non-church audiences, and demonstrating pastoral sensitivity. Flexibility in training assessments is vital to making space for diverse talents to contribute to church leadership according to their unique strengths.

Priest G argued for "being more upfront with people" about the realities of ministry. He noted peers dropping out after ordination, highlighting a need to better set expectations and prepare candidates for challenges ahead. Mentorship and apprenticeship programs arose repeatedly as key needs. Priest H advocated for "true apprenticeship - shoulder-to-shoulder learning in context." Priest H agreed that mentor and apprenticeships could fill gaps in practical knowledge.

In summary, working-class leaders require less theory, more practice; customised assessments; honest expectations; and mentored experiential learning focused on real-world ministry skills versus rigid academic milestones. Contextual preparation is vital. The researcher had thought that Priests would bring up struggles with managing finances, charity law, and report writing but this did not come up at any point nor did the need to know how to manage a building or how to go about doing quinquennial reports. All the Priests focused on the training around academia and essays.

The Educational Preferences identified

Pedagogy. Analysis of Fig 4.7 from the online survey revealed that the most preferred training method was mixed-mode with some classroom and some placements (135 respondents). The second most preferred was placement-based or experience-based training (eighty-six respondents). Discussion groups were the third most preferred option (seventy-six respondents). Eighty respondents preferred in-person lecture room-based teaching as their fourth choice. Online lecture room-based teaching was the fifth preference, selected by sixty-six respondents. Eighty-four respondents chose book-based learning as their sixth preference. Independent learning was the least preferred training method, chosen by only ten respondents.

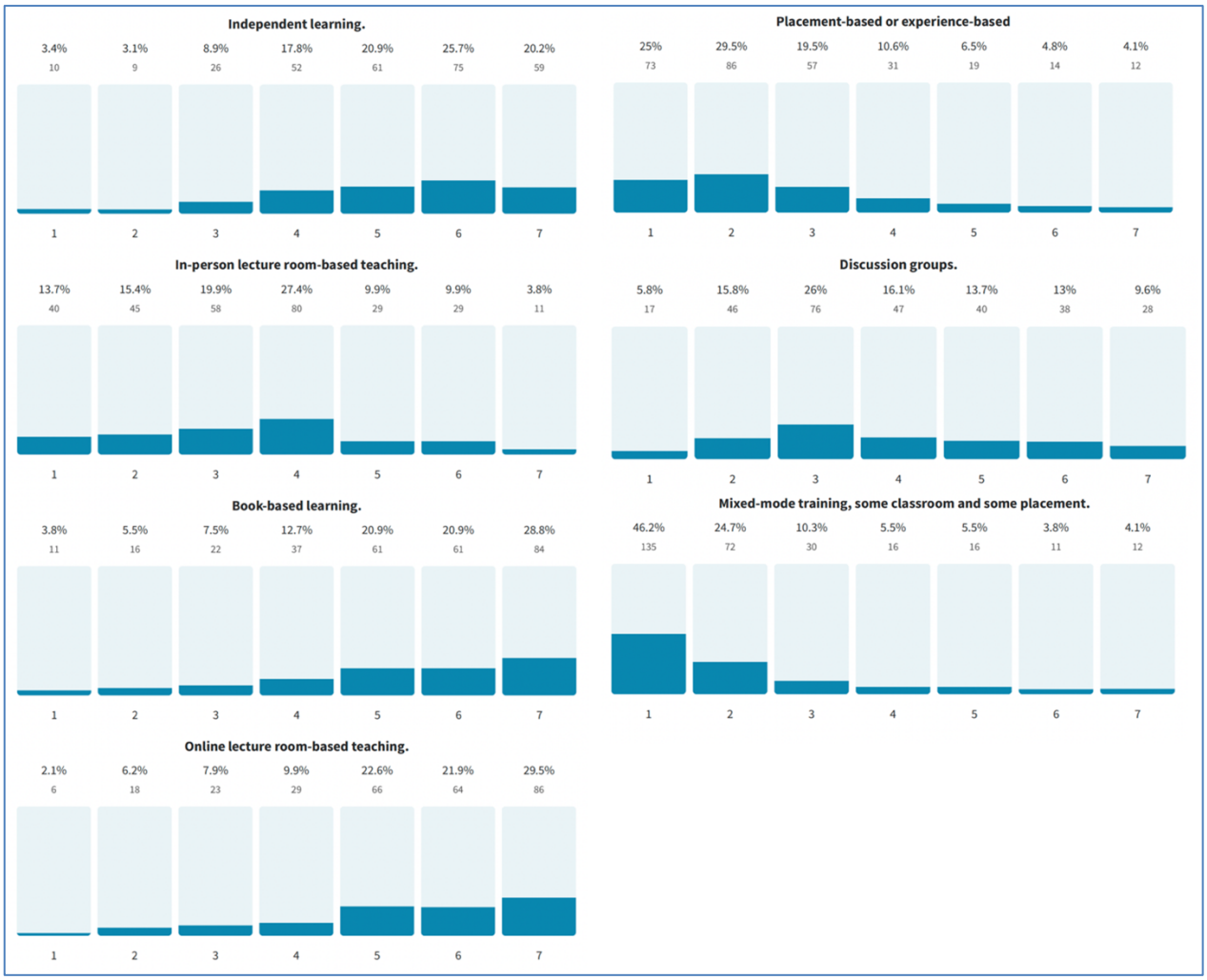

Fig 4.7 Preferred Learning Environments

In summary, a mix of placement and classroom learning was overwhelmingly the preferred method, followed by other interactive and experiential options. Self-directed independent learning was by far the least favoured training method based on the survey responses.

During the interviews with Priests, the most commonly recommended approach was practical, contextual training through apprenticeships and mixed-mode programs focused on developing real-world ministry skills. Priest A favoured mixed-mode training incorporating hands-on learning, noting his positive prior experience with apprenticeships in trade work.

> I feel an apprenticeship style is something I'm familiar with and would work well. The mixed mode CMS offers is helpful, although still quite middle-class which can cause issues. But at least they're attempting it. The pressure from Dioceses and Bishops to go full-time residential is such a problem, because that's the traditional way.

Priest H asserted, “the training should be ‘true apprenticeship - shoulder-to-shoulder learning in context where you are serving.’” She envisioned apprentices observing mentors closely, then trying skills themselves, receiving feedback, and progressively taking ownership of tasks under supervision. Priest R also implied elements of apprenticeship in his advocacy for eliminating passive lectures and academic essays in favour of real-life scenarios, group discussions, simulations, and learning-by-doing. He learns best through practical application versus academic theory.

The interviewees highlighted the benefit of contextualised learning through extended mentorship from experienced priests invested in the candidates’ growth. This facilitates the development of tangible skills and knowledge directly applicable to future ministry versus

excessive academics. The argument was that apprenticeship programs allow working-class candidates to learn by doing in an environment better suited to their practical strengths and needs. Hands-on ministry preparation under individualised guidance emerged as a key training reform. Priest E envisioned partnerships between colleges and practical trainers who know candidates' strengths. She called for creative assignments over rigid academic writing to better showcase abilities. Recommendations were also made for mentorship by experienced priests who can guide contextual learning.

Overall, the interviewees emphasised experiential, skills-based training focused on ministry competencies versus academic achievement alone. Hands-on apprenticeship models, creative assessments, mixed-mode programs incorporating practical experience, mentoring, and congregational inclusion training could better serve working-class candidates. None of the Priests mentioned the use of portfolios in their assessments or training; this was a surprising outcome as portfolios were previously identified as a good way of assessing apprenticeships.

Assessments. The top preference in the online survey was mixed-mode training (45.8 percent #1 choice). The second preference was placement-based training (29.5 percent #2 choice). Classroom-based options were least popular (#6 and #7 preferences). Preferred assessments were ministry projects and continuous assessment over exams.

As far as assessment preferences, the majority wanted ministry projects with hands-on experience (59.2 percent) followed by portfolio work with continued assessment (52.7 percent).

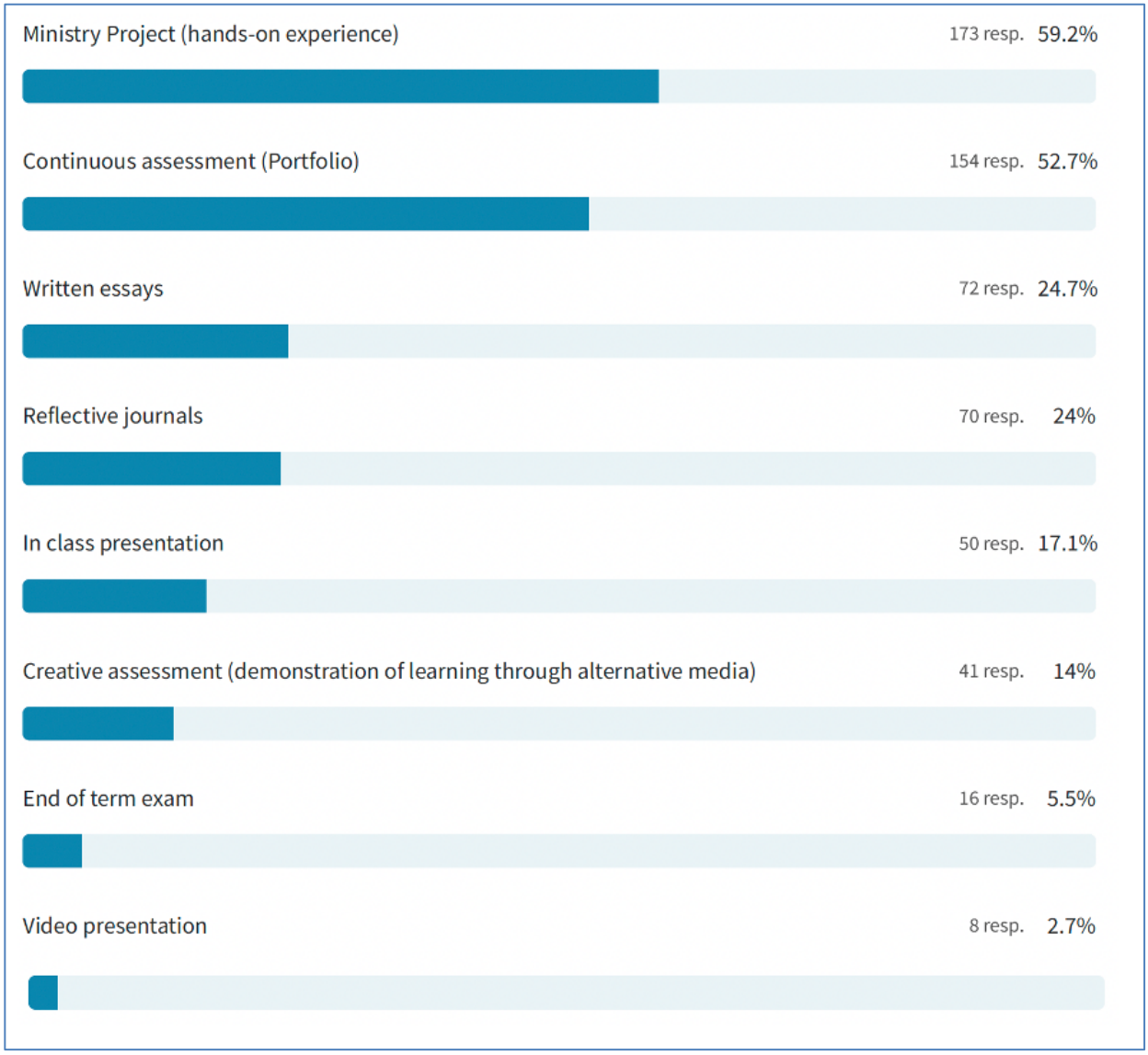

Fig 4.8 Preferred Assessment Type

The most preferred assessment type was Ministry Projects involving hands-on experience, selected by 173 respondents as seen in Fig 4.8. The second most preferred was Continuous Assessment through a portfolio, chosen by 154 respondents. Written essays were the third most preferred, selected by seventy-two respondents, followed closely by Reflective Journals, chosen by seventy respondents. Fifty respondents preferred in-class Presentations. Creative Assessments using alternative media were favoured by forty-one respondents. End of

Term Exams were preferred by sixteen respondents. Finally, Video Presentations were the least favoured assessment method, chosen by only eight respondents.

In summary, hands-on Ministry Projects and Continuous Assessment were overwhelmingly preferred while Exams and Video Presentations were the least preferred assessment methods according to the survey responses.

Mentorship, Apprenticeship, and Working-Class Inclusion. In addition, the Priests added several valuable points. Priest H emphasised the need for quality mentorship and reflection in apprenticeship models, noting the Church of England must properly train leaders to guide working-class candidates through contextual learning. She advocates listening to candidates to build "training fit for purpose" versus forcing them into ill-suited systems.

Priest A wanted to see greater working-class inclusion throughout church leadership, not just grassroots roles. Priest E believes contextualised training is needed to reach diverse cultures without forced assimilation to middle-class norms. Priest G highlighted the relational, communal gifts of working-class culture that, if valued, could greatly benefit ministry training.

Priest R argued the Church of England lacks true understanding of the working-class and must listen to needs rather than forcing change. He stated colleges should exist to serve candidates for mission rather than self-preservation.

> The Church of England needs more diversity and people with lived experience leading and representing their communities versus older white leaders trying to speak on issues and groups they cannot relate to. The Church of England think they understand the working-class but in fact, have no clue. Rather than listening to the needs we get talked at and nothing changes. The colleges need to wake up. They don't exist for their own existence but to help us reach people for Jesus. They need to start to help us not change us.

In summary, key recommendations were improving mentorship quality, designing contextualised training focused on real needs, increasing working-class leadership representation, and listening to candidates versus top-down imposition of ineffective programs. Interviewees desire meaningful reform guided by working-class insights and the gifts the working-class alone can bring.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

What do educators and other experts identify as obstacles to effective theological and ministry training for people who do not thrive in traditional academic systems?

The third research question aimed to identify the issues that emerged for educators while training working-class leaders in theology and ministry. The aim was to identify specific key factors that made the training inaccessible or nonapplicable for working-class candidates. The question also aimed to identify any progress that had been made in developing training for those who did not thrive in traditional academic systems.

The evidence is categorised below under two main headings: identifying the key obstacles to effective training of working-class Priests and the key needs for working-class candidates.

Identifying the Key Obstacles to effective Training of Working-Class Priests

Issues of Academia. A predominant theme shared was the rigid degree requirements coming from the Common Awards accreditation from Durham University that all the training colleges use to progress candidates through their courses. These requirements form barriers rather than flexible, competency-based pathways. This poses barriers versus more flexible, competency-based routes that could be worked out. Expert SA argued that “For a long time I've felt the university route isn't fully necessary for ministry. When I started 30 years ago, Baptist

pastors were scholars, but now churches don't allow that same academic focus. Pastors must be practical." Expert SA has tried to give practical input to the training of working-class leadership,

> I've suggested our college ditch the university requirement and use portfolio-based training focused on theological and ministry competencies, not academic hoops. Placements and reflection would be key - multiple mentors contribute to a portfolio, not just college staff. But that proposal didn't move forward.

She argues that with the changing landscape, practical competencies and hands-on experience are now more relevant than heavy academic study but are still not being utilised by training colleges. According to Expert L, "The whole system is biased to an academic person with essay writing as the central assessment type. If you have not done higher education, then you are going to seriously struggle." A story was shared from the 1980's where one working-class candidate was an expert evangelist and church planter but could not put down academic content on paper. In the end, he left the Church of England to develop in leadership in a free church where he was supported in a greater capacity after being told he would not pass a degree.

The academic requirements and assessment methods posed significant hurdles. Expert C named the cost barriers of learning, academic prerequisites, discipline, and time commitments all as practical obstacles for working-class candidates. The typical emphasis on reading and essay writing does not suit diverse learning styles. As Expert J explained, "The feedback can be crushing if you get comments on English. It can make people feel stupid when actually your content is good."

Cultural Mismatch. Two Experts also recognized a sense of cultural mismatch and not fitting established leadership norms. Expert A highlighted issues with the "performative, hierarchical, male-dominated, white, and middle-class" leadership culture, which can deter

working-class individuals from seeing leadership as an option. They also noted that an emphasis on top-down authority rather than participatory leadership posing a barrier. Expert A stated, "Class compounds these cultural divides, as working-class people may feel 'that's not for me' when leaders are unlike them."

Expert C identified an expectation issue over candidates having to become something they aren't.

> One of my friends [name] - when she came to train, someone sat down with her quite early on and said, 'if you're going to train for ordination in the C of E you need to be able to speak not just to peers but to Bishops and Archdeacons, so you're gonna need to change the way that you talk and dress more professionally.' I think some of that advice was well-intentioned because the person wanted her to do well, but it made her feel like scum; that's literally the word she used. For the first few weeks of training, she felt like that.

Self-Confidence. Related were issues of confidence, as working-class individuals often "feel stupid and lack confidence in leading or speaking out" when the culture does not reflect their experience (Expert J). Expert S noticed an apparent problem for people: Comparing oneself to peers with more opportunities [that] can exacerbate self-doubt. Expert E pointed out that individuals from working-class backgrounds may have lower confidence in their learning abilities due to less investment in education but also not having working-class role models. Expert R also argued for "the importance of representation and community for working-class individuals up front not only in the church but also in the theological education setting."

Ordained issues of Leadership. Expert B argued the obstacle is ordained leadership itself, advocating for alternative lay leadership pathways better suited for working-class giftings. He proposed part-time paid roles to enable contribution without sacrificing jobs. He also

suggested “mixed-mode programs” combining classroom and fieldwork learning allowing people to learn theological reflection while still in the Estate.

Margin. Expert M emphasised the concept of “margin” in life. This margin relates to finances, education, and emotional margin. M noticed that working-class people often have no financial savings, do not have spare time for extra study when things go amiss or more work is required, and that they already live emotionally demanding lives, leaving little capacity for additional stress. “I have noticed that emotional margin and conflict resolution can also be challenging in certain cultural contexts.” Expert M noted one lecture relating to the topic of taking a day off and blocking out time for essay writing. He noticed “you could see there were certain people in the room who are working-class struggling to see how would I have a day off? So, I mean, that sounds [like] a really good thing to do and you’re telling me actually essential, but I don't have the margin to do that.”

Poor Life Skills. Expert S, who has experience in a secular apprenticeship environment, noted a set of obstacles for the working-class at the commencement of their training. Poor budgeting of finances leads to running out of money before the end of the month for travel to the program. Struggling with poor diary management when trying to manage a variety of meetings in different locations and for different times was due to previously working consistent set hours which made keeping a diary redundant. She also noted a struggle to manage one’s self in a non-boundaried environment when coming from a structured working-class environment. Expert S, “I have noticed a struggle in the soft skills like professional conduct under stress, customer service, and cultural awareness are often lacking in those without prior work experience.” She also recognised that “Some apprentices lack the support needed at home to enable success in the program. Family members may not understand the demands or encourage the apprentice’s development”.

Emotional Maturity. Four of the Experts also noted an obstacle around emotional maturity or well-being linking this to problems of consistency. Expert C stated,

> There's an issue of emotional maturity dealing with background rejection and transference which is massive. You've got to put a lot of support systems around people if you're going to raise up leaders - it's very demanding. I think winning people to Christ is easy comparatively. Raising leaders is the biggest challenge, or you just bring in middle-class people who perpetuate the problem.

Expert C also recognised that working-class can come from broken contexts, where people are not used to carrying the weight of responsibility and accountability for decisions. They are not trained for that kind of maturity. He observes that working-class people can be "very explosive and react instantly without emotional discipline." With this in mind, he says a lack of focus on the emotional maturity needed exists, with too much focus just on academic requirements. Expert C notes that in the area where he works, issues like autism, low IQ, and rejection by society contribute to emotional immaturity. "You can build emotional robustness and maturity but it is a painful journey requiring extensive support systems around people." Expert C states that background rejection and transference issues are massive and acute, fuelling emotional volatility which needs to be recognised as an obstacle to overcome.

In examining the perspectives shared across interviews, several predominant obstacles emerge as consistently hindering working-class participation and success in traditional ministry training models. A recurring theme is the cultural mismatch between working-class norms and the middle/upper-class leadership expectations in the church and academy. Lack of confidence and role models, rigorously academic curricula and assessments, and pressure to conform also frequently arose as barriers. Additionally, emotional maturity, margin, and self-management

skills were cited as potential gaps for some coming from complex backgrounds. Collectively, these obstacles span systemic and cultural realms, reflecting insufficient tailoring to the socioeconomic realities facing many working-class candidates. A possible strategy would be for a greater understanding of and accommodation for the distinctive needs of this demographic. This strategy is imperative if training systems aim to widen accessibility and gifts within church leadership.

Important needs for Working-Class Candidates in their Training

Keeping it local and in community. A significant theme emphasised was the importance of contextual training rooted in community. As Expert A argued, "Education should stay rooted in a place and people. There should be two-way learning between training and ministry" Expert A alongside C, E, L and H recognised how important it is to keep working-class people in the setting where they feel safe, valued, and understood to get the best leadership growth. A localised, interdisciplinary, experience-based approach drawing from the candidates' communities was advised. Expert L advocated training in local community: "It must be local to the learner and group-based. The individual focus stems from Greek philosophy, not Jesus."

Several Experts highlighted the need for participatory, communal learning addressing power imbalances and honoring the existing wisdom of students. Expert A advocated starting with students' questions, while L emphasised group-based training following Jesus' model. M noted, "the teaching is effective because it's done together in a locality where people feel safe." This locality did not necessarily mean within a mile of their home but within a context that is similar to their own and easily accessible.

Expert A suggested a learning philosophy that could be easily replicated. She believes that learning together as whole people is vital. In her context, they try to shape their pedagogy around a few key pieces:

a) Rooted in context - even if people move, education should stay rooted in a place and people. There should be two-way learning between training and ministry.

b) Interdisciplinary - drawing on various disciplines based on experiences.

c) Learning in community – which involve learners to bring their whole selves in group conversations where they pay attention to missing voices and look for where God's liberating power is needed in the dynamics.

d) Participatory and liberative - address and undermine power imbalances as an educator and give power to participants.

e) Start with students' questions and honor their existing wisdom. Address imbalances proactively. They have the insight that you need to learn from.

Expert A argued that doing this well takes willingness on both sides but is what working-class candidates need in training.

Character formation. Formation of character, practical skills, and accountability were highlighted. Expert B argued training should encompass "the mechanics, the nuts and bolts of church leadership but also the formation of the leader's character" with an active faith demonstration. Expert B had found that even when someone had been educated in Theology and the Bible, their character and integrity was not necessarily formed. Additionally, differing unspoken character expectations exist between the working-class and middle to upper-class, such as work-ethic, consumption, social etiquette, when something is borrowed and when something is taken without permission. Expert C argued working-class people need help developing character, tolerance, and understanding how others see the world. Expert SA advised "taking time for inner formation to deal with personal issues before rushing into ministry, to avoid harming those they're called to serve."

Key characteristics emphasised by Expert B, C, J and S are as follows:

1. Inner formation and dealing with personal issues.
2. Self-awareness, measured responses to conflict, confidence.
3. Patience, resilience, emotional maturity.
4. Tolerance, cultural understanding.
5. Ability to handle conflict, taking responsibility.
6. Integrity, living out virtues and values.

Relational learning. Recognizing the relational nature of working-class culture is needed to improve learning outcomes. Expert C stated, "Relationship is a key dynamic in the working-class communities. They gain social credit not by what they know but who they know and are in a relationship with. Therefore, training needs to be relational, not academic." This was corroborated by Expert L, "They gain social credit not by what they know but who they know." Experts emphasised relationships and community as transformative for the working-class.

Expert S expanded on this, arguing "Working-class candidates need much more one on one time, this is due to the training needing to be relational and not didactic. Working-class candidates value relational aspects of learning." She highlighted the "biggest failure of the church is to train priests in the classroom for a role that is people-facing and relational. Being a priest is not a head role but a heart role." This view was reinforced by Experts A, B and L.

Proactive Affirmation. Several Experts identified the need for affirmation, encouragement, and support, especially academically. Expert S suggested ongoing one-on-one support, while Expert M noted training together enhances dignity. Expert R argued working-class candidates should see peers as equals, not 'token apology cases.'

Expert S emphasised the need for ongoing encouragement, stating “I remind all students that everyone has different abilities - you're here because of God's call, not to be a professor. Just focus on passing.” She argued working-class students particularly need affirmation, noting “We must keep affirming them constantly because they probably have few people at home able to do so.” Expert L advocated training that makes people “feel affirmed in their gifts as Spirit-inspired leaders” is the only way to see people stepping up into who they are called to be; they don’t need more criticism, he argued. He wanted teaching methods that recognise and empower diverse talents.

Ministry Experience. Providing opportunities for frontline ministry experience and theological reflection was also advised as was teaching practical skills like time management. The key arguments focused on context, community, formation, relationships, support, and applied learning as crucial needs. Expert S recognised that “The biggest failure of the church is to train priests in the classroom for a role that is people-facing and relational. Therefore, working-class candidates need the time to experience this front-facing ministry while also learning to theologically reflect.” Expert C argued for a “[s]low, incremental increase in hands-on responsibility” as part of the training process.

Expert B recognised that only in this ministry experience will someone learn the “the nuts and bolts of church leadership which is often missing in our theological sort of training institutions.”

Expert L emphasised that “contextual apprenticeship models” were needed, saying “ministry is learned by doing, not being told how.”

Expert H stated apprenticeship should involve “shoulder-to-shoulder learning in context where you are serving.”

Seven of the Experts noted that alongside this ministry experience, theological reflection was essential which was something that would need to be learnt. Expert S advocated candidates having “time to experience this front-facing ministry while also learning to theologically reflect” with A calling this an “Interdisciplinary approach” relating experiences to theological knowledge. Expert J did warn that working-class candidates did need to “theologically reflect in a safe place where they can expect theological homelessness,” where things that once added up may now shift as they are learning.

The Experts advocated balancing practical experience with opportunities to reflect critically on that experience, considering theological concepts and spiritual development. They saw theological reflection as crucial for contextualising and integrating ministry experiences. This model contrasts with traditional models overly focused on imparting abstract theory.

Research Question #4: Description of Evidence

What alternative models of leadership training exist for those who do not thrive in traditional academic systems and what are best practices for this?

The purpose of this question was to establish models of training that are already available and take into consideration the needs of the working-class and their context as set out in the literature review or at the early stages of development. The aim was to identify those models that were seeing some success in training and identify their best practices.

The evidence is categorised below under three main headings: What is needed to be understood about the training of the working-class, evidence of good practice and effective methods and alternative models.

What is needed to be understood about the Training of the Working-Class

Context-based with Mentoring. The Expert responses revealed a diversity of perspectives and proposals regarding the effective training of working-class candidates for ministry. A prevalent theme amongst Experts A, B and C was the need for contextualised pedagogical approaches that integrate theoretical learning with practical ministry.

Related to this was the need for local mentoring relationships and support systems being proposed as essential scaffolding for contextual training by Experts B, C and M.

Accessible Entry Points. Several Experts highlighted the importance of adapting institutional training systems to provide accessible academic entry points and flexible pacing attuned to working-class students' needs. Both M and S argued "For training working-class priests, I think we need to start them at a lower academic level like Level 3 which is A-level before moving to the standard Level 4 training. This has to be essential" (Expert M).

Tutors need to Realise they know Nothing.

Expert E believed that "If you are not from a working-class background then you have to realise you know nothing. You have to understand your own lack of understanding and that you have some work to do first." According to Expert E, some key things those from non-working-class backgrounds need to learn when teaching working-class students are:

- Take time to understand your own lack of understanding and unconscious biases. Do the work to examine your assumptions.
- Be willing to be taught by your students - listen and have the humility to learn from them.
- Put student priorities and realities first, even if it means adjusting the standard educational model.

- Sit with the discomfort when your teaching methods don't fit student needs. Don't just brush it aside.
- Recognise that your experiences as an educator are not universal - be open to other perspectives.
- Properly resourcing contextualised training and support is costly, but is worth it to equip students for their ministries.

The main emphasis is on educators humbly listening, learning, and adapting to meet the real needs of working-class students even when it's uncomfortable or does not align with the status quo. Letting go of assumptions and being taught by the students is seen as crucial.

Customised Journeys. Expert C challenges academics to recognise individuals' gifts amidst cultural differences, and drawing on working-class wisdom, were advocated over one-size-fits-all models. "There is no 'one size fits all' training method - a blended approach is needed, including theological rigour but applied in context. Walking together in a relationship is key." Expert C emphasised that a customised, blended, differentiated approach is needed rather than taking a standardised approach. Expert M and E both championed a longer-term investment in training and mentoring; despite potentially higher operating costs, they endorsed considering identified needs where the relationship might last not three years but six to nine years.

The Importance of Interactive Learning. Although interactive learning was not directly mentioned, Expert A spoke about developing, "'Stories of Life' Bible groups combining methods from Janet Lee, Unlock Urban, and others focusing on context-based reflective learning." Expert B developed "Placements, offering hands-on experience;" he argued these were invaluable. These Bible study methods draw on students' life stories and contextual experiences to facilitate reflective learning points to discussion-based, participatory teaching that connects the material to students' realities. While limited, these quotes indicate the experts learned the importance of

interactive, context-based teaching approaches grounded in practical experience for effectively educating working-class leaders.

Though perspectives differed, core themes emerged around contextualisation, mentorship, educator humility, individual customisation, and interactive applied learning as crucial considerations in empowering working-class leaders through training.

Evidence of Good Practice and Effective Methods. The most commonly mentioned example was the Peter Stream at HTB/St Mellitus, cited by twelve respondents. They valued its accessibility for non-traditional candidates, cohort model, and blending of academics with experience.

Several other local contextual training schemes were named, like Aston Training Scheme (x2), MPower (x2), and Newbiggin Pioneering Hub (x1). Their on-the-job nature was appreciated.

Several residential colleges were noted as doing well in embracing working-class students like Mirfield (x2), Kelham (x2), and Sarum (x2). Mixed-mode college training was referred to positively for blending classroom and parish (x3). CMS Pioneer training was highlighted for its diversity and support (x2). Apprenticeship models and mentoring were suggested as helpful approaches.

However, the most common response by far was "No" or "None" — 104 out of 195 total responses said they were unaware of any good examples to recommend. Very few examples were named multiple times or described in much detail. Overall, a lack of widespread knowledge of proven training models for working-class leaders exists, though locally some initiatives are valued. Respondents desire more accessible, contextual training, but no clear consensus exists on where it is done well currently. Many were unfamiliar with any tailored approaches for this demographic.

A careful analysis of the expert interview responses reveals several predominant themes that emerged despite the breadth of perspectives represented. Through a process of close reading and thematic coding of the qualitative data, the researcher was able to sort the findings into six clear themes encapsulating the central insights and areas of consensus shared across participants regarding effective training for working-class ministry candidates. Based on the expert interview responses, the following are the most effective ways of training working-class people for ministry.

Contextual and Communal Learning. The Experts see contextual-based learning with communal reflection time as essential. Expert A argued that "education should stay rooted in a place and people. There should be two-way learning between training and ministry." Expert L also argues that "It must be local to the learner and group-based. The individual focus stems from Greek philosophy, not Jesus." L championed the idea of students being locally placed and gathering regularly together for learning and reflection. These cohorts must be pooled together in areas and then gathered into a larger group less often. The Experts emphasised training that is embedded in students' communities and peer-based, with practical ministry experience tied to the learning.

Apprenticeship Models. Expert L, H and S all championed the apprenticeship model of leadership development. "Jesus apprenticed his disciples and taught them through enacted parables and mysteries…. ministry is learned by doing, not being told how" (Expert L). Expert H also championed this approach: "The training should be this 'true apprenticeship' not some pseudo apprenticeship. The importance here is having an incumbent who will really let you get into the nitty gritty with them." These hands-on apprenticeships focused on developing practical ministry skills through mentoring, observation, gradual responsibility, and guided experience. Expert L also states that this approach stops us from deculturising people, "Apprenticeship avoids

deculturising people then sending them back to minister in unfamiliar ways. Their cultural wisdom is retained." This is certainly seen as a huge benefit for those serving in culturally narrow environments. L argues apprenticeship training, rooted in students' communities and guided by gifted mentors, empowers working-class leaders by affirming their contextual gifts and developing real-world ministry skills in action. This aligns with Jesus' training method and avoids imposing foreign cultural assumptions.

Asset-based Approach. The asset-based approach was championed by Expert L and E for training working-class leaders. This training starts with students' own experiences, questions, and wisdom rather than imposing abstract academic theory. Students' lived experiences are treated as valid sources of theological insight and knowledge themselves. The goal is to affirm these contextual gifts and talents already present. Expert E describes this as "Teaching from a position of gifting, wisdom and education rather than a deficit" (Expert E). In this approach group learning and participatory teaching methods recognise communal assets and give agency to students versus lecture-driven education. Assessments aim to draw out potential rather than fit individuals into predefined roles. This "takes experience seriously as a focus of theology - allow that to come into dialogue with what you are teaching" (Expert E). Expert L argued that through this practical theology emerges organically by relating students' experiences to biblical texts. Power imbalances are levelled by beginning with students' expertise, not the educators. In essence, this approach focuses on identifying and nurturing the gifts, experiences, and communal wisdom already present within working-class contexts as the foundation for empowering contextual leadership.

Customised and Flexible Pacing. The interviewed Experts consistently emphasised the need for training pathways customised to each individual working-class candidate rather than taking a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach. Expert C argued forcefully against standardised

methods, stating that a blended training program tailored to each person's context and needs is required. This method involves focusing on the relationship and journey with each candidate, not imposing set requirements. Expert S similarly advocated for training "at their speed" even if it takes longer than typical timeframes. She proposed using "portfolios focused on competencies and character rather than standardised assessments to allow flexibility."

Expert M noted that working-class individuals often lack the margin in their lives to meet present academic expectations and pacing. "Training systems must be adapted to match their realities." Expert SA suggested spreading programs over a longer time through pay-as-you-go type module working toward a final portfolio. She insisted the priority should be tailored training focused on the individual's growth, not maintaining institutional colleges. She proposed that, "starting people at their current level and then ramping up" through a customisation approach. This recommendation reflects a student-centred approach focused on each individual's journey rather than institutional convenience.

Mentorship and Mentoring Support Systems

The interviewed Experts strongly stressed the vital role of mentorship and support systems in training working-class candidates for ministry. Mentoring and apprenticeship can often be viewed as very similar. However, the Experts spoke of them as two separate things that are interlinked. They approached apprenticeships with a focus on imparting skills, knowledge, and wisdom for a specific role with apprenticeships teaching through on-the-job training, observation, and supervised practice. Mentors use coaching conversations, modelling, and feedback. The mentee is not required to be physically alongside the mentor in order to receive feedback.

Expert C stated that, "building up leaders from disadvantaged contexts is very demanding work that requires extensive support structures, with individual mentoring relationships being

particularly crucial." Expert M asserted that "effective training of working-class leaders fundamentally requires either an apprenticeship model or close mentoring." He provided an example where a couple made profound progress mainly thanks to a church leader's personal investment in mentoring them and addressing needs beyond formal training. Expert S advocated for intentional one-on-one support and encouragement for working-class students, stressing that the "relational dimension is essential given their cultural context." Experts A, B, and L echoed that relationships and community are key learning environments for this demographic. Expert S noted, "working-class students likely lack affirmation and support at home, making mentors' guidance indispensable." Expert H argued quality mentoring is "imperative for contextual apprenticeships to succeed." Experts C and J mentioned support to develop emotional maturity and process personal issues as another key need.

Portfolio-Based Assessment. The interviewed Experts consistently highlighted the potential value of portfolio-based assessments as a flexible alternative to traditional academic requirements for working-class candidates. Expert S gave an example of one college using portfolios focused on demonstrated competencies with inputs from multiple mentors to provide well-rounded perspectives on students' development. Expert SA envisioned "portfolio-based training centred on building key ministry skills, documented through placements, reflections, and skills assessments." Rather than rigidly requiring a university degree, portfolios could demonstrate competencies in applied contexts. S advised having mentors from the ministry context contribute to portfolios, not just college staff, to incorporate insights from the Estate. Expert J advocated for "portfolios as alternatives to essays that can better capture working-class abilities." Expert R saw portfolio-based assessment as an important and creative option that gives candidates flexibility, though he acknowledged adoption may be gradual. While formal

accreditation limits room for alternatives, it would take another accreditation model for portfolios to be permitted as a demonstration of contextual learning.

Across the board, the Experts in residential colleges all acknowledged the inflexibility of the Church of England's assessment framework through the Durham University accreditation (also known as Common Awards). The assessment framework did not allow the colleges any ability to negotiate teaching and assessment methods. Expert R recognised that in his institution creative options are offered, but only 10-15 percent of students engage in them. This is due, in part, to the students enrolled. He also noted that, "costs are higher for creative assessment" due to the particular skill-set required from assessors. "We outsource accreditation to Durham which limits creativity in accredited courses. More could be done, and places like Durham are increasingly open to it." Durham may be increasingly open, but this openness has yet to be seen by the Experts. R recognised that context-based training allows for more informal assessment in practice. R says that, "What [he] would like to see is a Co-designed course and deliver training with working-class practitioners." Expert M echoed this by advocating strongly for "creating an accredited Level 3 theology course that Ministry Division would validate as an approved pathway into training." Currently, Level 3 access routes are not formally recognised, so candidates must enter at Level 4. Colleges can only get exceptions on a case-by-case basis and not for a whole people group. M sees national consistency on approved Level 3 entry points as essential for working-class access rather than relying on each diocese's willingness to make exceptions.

Alternative Models

The discourse on alternative training methodologies yielded varied yet cohesive themes centred around experiential learning, diversified assessment modalities, contextualised education, and placing value upon lived experience from working-class perspectives. The Experts were not aware of other training options for working-class people other than the ones they were either

leading or connected to. This limited awareness was acknowledged, and their focus was on critiquing traditional academic programs. They unanimously agreed work had to be done on new models of training that moved away from the Common Awards, Durham Accreditation. The key issue emerged regarding the present Common Awards certification required by training institutions. Participants widely proposed replacing this narrowly defined assessment with a more versatile ministry diploma program. Candidate S proposed training that matched the method used in his first career.

> I was trained as a plumber in an apprenticeship program that worked so well for lads like me. One day learning at the depot and then 4 days out with someone watching what they were doing and getting to give it a go. I did my qualifications while learning on the job. I just wish something like this could work for folk in the church.

Contextual. Experts A, J, L strongly advocated for contextual, experience-based training rooted in community. They highlighted past models like Joe Hasler's locally embedded apprenticeships and Laurie Green's Aston Training Scheme from the 1980's with participatory methods that challenge elitism (see Appendix A). An argued theological education should be accessible, combining simplicity with depth. Expert B proposed urban monasticism and daily spiritual rules could provide structure to a form of localised training. B recognised that some working-class people feel judged by formal church traditions like this but wanted to see contextualised models tailored to urban life.

Experimental learning. Expert J looked to art schools and youth ministry training for experiential learning ideas, linking these learning environments with a practical apprenticeship approach with hands-on mentoring and experience. Expert J articulated the Art School as a place where students learn new techniques under supervision in the studio and then students get to

experiment personally. Students can critique your own work and then explore concepts. Students learn some art history that informs the art you produce today. “Many art colleges offer opportunities for students to gain real-world experience through internships, exhibitions, and collaborations with other artists and institutions.” He went on to argue that, “Art colleges typically foster an environment where students are encouraged to take risks, experiment, and think creatively. There is often an emphasis on pushing boundaries and challenging conventions.” He also noted that Art colleges often help students build a strong portfolio of their work, which is essential for future career opportunities, graduate school applications, or gallery exhibitions. Expert S mentioned one college using portfolio-based assessments focused on competencies versus academics. She noted multiple mentors contribute, blending contextual placements with college learning. J felt Joe Hastler’s apprenticeship model expressed in Bristol Diocese in the 1980’s and the craft guild concept in a similar vein and were exciting and worth exploring further. A also made this case: “Joe Hastler devised an ordination program that was entirely apprentice-based [with] local learning groups, pathways within a diocese. He argued people are called to ordination in a place, not universally. He advocated theology emerging from the ground up, not imposed from above. I'm sad his ideas weren’t embraced more widely.”

Long-term investment. Expert C critiqued the lack of alternative training coming from the established church which often trains people before seeing their capabilities. He advocated the non-denominational model of investing in people over time based on demonstrated calling, character, and competence. He argued that investment should only occur after they have shown the ability to evangelise and make disciples.

> When it comes to investing, it's crucial to have a long-term mindset. Trying to rush people and seek quick returns is a risky strategy that often fails. Backing people before you have

seen fruit seems ludicrous to me but the main denominations seem to do this and then wonder why they don't turn into dynamic leaders.

Aston Training Scheme (ATS). Four of the Experts mentioned the Aston Training Scheme (ATS). ATS was a contextualised approach to training working-class candidates for ordained ministry in the Church of England in the early 1980's. Some key points from Expert L about the Aston program are:

- ATS involved intensive group work focused on relating theological reflection to the student's own experiences and passions.
- Theological education was grounded in practice first, not abstract theory.
- Students' gifts were affirmed rather than patronised.
- Constant in-depth assessment existed aimed at opening up students' potential rather than fitting them into preconceived roles.
- The training took place in the students' home context and supported their existing ministry there, rather than removing them.
- ATS was focused on discerning and forming gifts, not just preparing people for traditional parish roles.
- A focus existed on character and inner life rather than just knowledge transmission.
- The working-class culture and experiences of the students were treated as valid sources of wisdom and theology in themselves.

Expert A identified an issue with ATS being that it exists as a prerequisite to theological college and degrees. Working-class people were sent on this before they were sent to residential college. Expert A proposed a renewed model where training like ATS was amalgamated with a full training course which could be done in whole in three years.

Antioch Network (AN). The Antioch network (AN) was mentioned by two of the Experts who recognised the localised training approach was a successful one which is based in the Manchester Diocese.

AN have focused on a clear apprenticeship model that they believe to be replicable based on gathering and training-up local leaders. The AN leadership apprentices working-class leaders through weekly groups and relational approaches.

- Weekly meetings with the leader for mentoring and discipleship.
- They join a REAP Church Planting Course.
- Training is less classroom-based and more workshop-based.
- Projects are given to expand thinking but also experiment with ideas.
- A small diverse team is recruited to gather around this leader.
- The incarnational mission is focused on a desired Estate.
- Assistance is given to the leader to find a building to use.
- A slow launch is activated. Mercy ministry is used for evangelistic purposes.

Antioch has yet to train up a working-class leader towards ordination. Candidates become lay leaders planting churches with the oversite of an ordained Priest. AN have been told that the Church of England would not, at this time, see AN as an ordination training scheme, but the principles of local, workshop-based based and apprenticeship can be applied to the ordination route.

Rev Joe Hasler / Northern Ark Bristol (NAB). One EXPERT spoke about the work of Rev. Joe Hasler in the Bristol Diocese that had inspired them due to its alternative approach. The NAB program pioneered by Rev. Joe Hasler focused on contextualised training for working-class church leaders rooted in their own communities. Rather than an academic model, the curriculum integrated practical ministry experience with guided reflection. Students underwent immersive

placements learning urban ministry while maintaining existing jobs. Classroom topics aligned with practical needs like liturgy, preaching, and discerning God's activity. Seasoned clergy mentored students, providing wisdom forged in similar working-class settings. Assessment emphasised demonstrated competencies not traditional essays.

- Students learned in their existing home context, remaining in their current jobs.
- Students attended some classroom lectures and workshops that focused on practical ministry topics.
- Mentoring from clergy occurred in similar working-class contexts.
- Classroom streams were:
    - Practical ministry skills.
    - Personal spirituality.
    - Topics like discerning God’s activity and history.
- Students went on immersive urban ministry placements.
- Learning was a combination of classroom and practical experience.
- Hands-on training existed in outreach like food banks.
- Assessments were based on ministry competencies, not academic essays.
- The program was focused on presenting Christianity within students’ own working-class culture.
- Learning outcomes were tailored towards ministry skills in local urban contexts.

This training was never for ordained ministry as the Bristol Diocese believed it was not theologically rigorous enough for training. Candidates would become lay leaders or planters in the local church. Expert A recognized that the program did not train Priests but appreciated the

unique way it apprenticed working-class leaders while also investing into theological reflection and character development.

Overall, the Experts focused on creating training pathways rooted in community, centered on experiential learning, competency growth, spiritual formation, and gradual mentorship. Customising training to urban contexts and individual development needs was emphasised rather than one-size-fits-all academic requirements.

Summary of Major Findings

Five major findings emerged from the analysis of the data produced from the study. These findings are noted in the summary below and are analysed and discussed more fully in Chapter Five.

The major findings of this study were as follows.

1. Apprenticeship and contextual learning are strongly preferred. Hands-on ministry training and location-based education were repeatedly advocated as optimal for working-class candidates.
2. Mentoring and spiritual formation are vital but overlooked areas. Experts emphasised the need for affirming mentors and leadership character development, which traditional training often minimises.
3. Academia remains a major barrier. Experts consistently critiqued rigid academic requirements and pacing as misaligned with working-class realities. Workshops often worked better than block teaching sessions.
4. Customisation and flexibility are essential. Tailoring training to individuals' capabilities and realities was urged through varied assessment, pacing, and entry requirements.

5. Cultural humility enables inclusion which means educators must further their understanding of the cultural dynamics of the working-class. Educators were exhorted to examine biases, adapt methods, and empower working-class gifts and wisdom.

CHAPTER 5: LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This Chapter presents the five key findings that emerged from this research project. Chapter Five explains how each finding connects to my personal observations, the literature review, and the biblical and theological framework underpinning the study. The ministerial and practical implications of the findings are discussed, along with an acknowledgement of the study's limitations. Some unexpected observations that arose during the research process are also noted. Finally, recommendations for further research are proposed based on the insights gained from this initial study.

Major Findings

First Finding: Apprenticeship and Contextual Learning Models are preferred.

Hands-on ministry training and location-based education were repeatedly advocated as optimal for working-class candidates, by the candidates themselves, the literature, and my personal observations in my current setting.

A significant theme highlighted in the interviews was the need for apprenticeships with hands-on ministry training with masters or mentors through observation, supervised practice, and gradual development of responsibility. Apprenticeship immerses the working-class person in practical, tailored learning without removing them from their community context. This style makes for teaching which acknowledges the apprentice's prior knowledge, skills, networks, and peers as strengths to be embraced rather than areas to be accommodated and over time diminished. Avoiding dislocation from community is a strength of the apprenticeship model.

The literature review also demonstrated a strong working-class preference for apprenticeship and contextual learning models when training working-class Christian leaders and ministers for ministry. Apprenticeship training reduces the barriers presented by formal,

classroom-centric education models as it allows hands-on coaching and mentoring in real-world ministry contexts, learning practically by doing tasks, and tailoring the training approach to individuals' needs and learning styles. This suits working-class tendencies identified in this project for concrete thinking, learning best by observation and group participation, and preference to immediately apply knowledge.

Apprenticeships provide a more supportive and tailored learning environment compared to traditional classroom education, which can help improve wellbeing for working-class students who have previously struggled or had negative experiences in school. By placing value upon life experience and existing knowledge, apprenticeships affirm the working-class experience. The literature review demonstrated a consistent affirmation and recommendation of contextual and apprenticeship approaches as preferable over purely academic models of study when preparing working-class leaders for ministry service.

This finding aligns with the biblical review. The Gospels describe Peter as an ordinary, unschooled, working-class fisherman from Galilee who spoke with a noticeable accent who Jesus trained through modelling and participation (see Matt. 26.73; Acts 4.13). Jesus called Peter to follow him and become a “fisher of men” alongside the “come and follow me” is a traditional rabbinical invitation indicating that training and equipping would occur (Matt. 4.19). Their master-disciple relationship aligns with ancient Jewish models where disciples learnt by observing and imitating a rabbi in daily life. The Gospels show Jesus’ preference for contextual, apprenticeship-based development to prepare Peter and the other disciples for kingdom service, suiting their working-class background.

My personal experience has been that in my time as a (working-class) priest, I had to learn to fit the present education structures to succeed in ministry. From high school through higher education, I experienced forms of teaching and training that centred on classroom

experience which felt disconnected from my learning style. As I have started to train a new generation of working-class priests in my current setting, I have found it hard watching emerging leaders struggle with the training required of them, such as essay writing and extensive reading lists. I have seen first-hand the emotional and mental health challenges which are exacerbated by this format of education and which candidates can feel undermines their own unique personality.

This study has confirmed with little doubt that working-class individuals can thrive in environments that are apprenticeship-based. The overwhelming conclusion of the survey, focus group, and interviews with priests was that training needs to be taken out of the classroom and replaced with an apprenticeship model of training.

Second Finding: Mentoring and Spiritual Formation are vital but overlooked areas in existing Training Models.

Experts emphasised the need for affirming mentors and leadership character development, which traditional training often minimises. Whilst clearly of potential benefit to any priest that is training, the provision of mentors and an active focus during training on leadership development and character development was highlighted in this study as important. This focus was not an area expected to be notable in the study or as something specifically needed for the working-class but one that has been demonstrated as essential. The mentoring aspect of training connects with the first finding in this chapter, the need for strong apprenticeship training, but also further notes [or maybe illustrates] the need for direct character development not just skill development. From my own experience, having trained at an undergraduate level at a Church of England residential training college for three years followed by an additional two-year MA degree program, I noticed little emphasis existed on character development or development of effective leadership behavior. It was not until I chose to be a part of a subsequent two-year leadership program delivered by the Church Pastoral Aid Society (CPAS) that I received significant character formation and

leadership ‘dark-side’ analysis. Character formation was not pro-actively addressed by the Church of England training, only if seen as a major issue. The expert interviews noted that character development is commonly overlooked in traditional training programs in part because students are only observed in classroom settings. Mentoring to develop emotional maturity, ministerial integrity, cultural awareness, resilience, self-awareness, and tolerance were highlighted in the study as crucial foundations and common weaknesses of the working-class.

A summary of my reflections based on the experts’ contributions to the study is that there appears to be differing unspoken character expectations that exist in different social classes. For example, working-class leaders typically need support in developing qualities like tolerance, cultural understanding, emotional maturity, integrity, and how to live out virtues and values consistently. The importance of “inner formation to deal with personal issues before rushing into ministry, to avoid harming those they’re called to serve” has also been highlighted. Considering that investment in spiritual formation or dealing with past trauma should not be rushed or minimized is wise since the nurture of Christlike virtues and emotional health contributes to the emotional stability of the priest and should undergird ministry skills training.

With or without apprenticeship models, mentors and support systems were identified as crucial for growth and formation, providing affirmation, coaching in life skills, spiritual guidance, and emotional support. The student’s experience and knowledge of estate culture should be treated as containing valid insights and knowledge to build on rather than deficiencies.

The review of the Early British Methodists found that John Wesley recognised the importance of emphasising consistent character and ethical conduct in the working-class leaders he developed. Wesley focused on personally modelling exemplary leadership for his followers to replicate by establishing clear rules and accountability mechanisms to shape the integrity and

behaviour of the working-class men and women he empowered for ministry leadership. This deliberate method which combined modelling and a system of accountability provided spiritual mentoring on integrity issues tailored to the specific needs of the working-classes.

Furthermore, ministry training programs targeted at the working-class should make spiritual character formation a priority over the acquisition of theological *information*. Apprenticeship's emphasis on master-disciple character modelling also suggests that transmitting leadership knowledge divorced from godly wisdom and integrity development is an incomplete approach.

As seen in the literary review, the Gospels show how Jesus' mentoring relationship with Peter went beyond just imparting information to profoundly shape his leadership identity and develop Christlike character through intimate modelling and guidance. Peter was apprenticed by observing and imitating Jesus' practice of ministry and godly lifestyle. Through debriefing experiences, Jesus molded Peter's character and invested in his spiritual formation, not just his knowledge. The priority Jesus placed on character development rather than Torah study alone is evident in how he took time to shape uneducated followers like Peter into kingdom leaders through contextual mentoring that transformed their integrity and identity. Peter was an apprentice to Jesus as a master craftsman of godly kingdom living, not just preaching techniques.

One also sees how this character development of Peter influenced his leadership in 1 Peter 5.1-3 where he exhorted leaders to be "examples to the flock" based on his own experience being mentored by Jesus. Peter emphasises the importance of leaders demonstrating Christlike character through their motivation, integrity, and service. He challenges elders not to lead simply out of obligation or for dishonest gain but to willingly and eagerly shepherd God's people by setting a godly example for others to follow.

Third Finding: Academia remains a major Barrier

Experts consistently critiqued rigid academic requirements and pacing as misaligned with working-class realities. It was noted that workshops worked better than block teaching sessions.

To summarise the research study, the major issue outlined in Chapter One of this project (the training for entry to the Church of England priesthood was a strictly academic one) was affirmed. The Experts were consistent that the present system is constrained by the assessment framework administered by Durham University accreditation (also known as Common Awards). During the focus group and semi-structured interviews with new priests, a frequent comment was that they felt the academic teaching and evaluation techniques left them feeling under pressure, unable, wanting to drop out, and left some of them with ongoing confidence issues. With this said, noting that there were at least two groups is important, being those with unrealised academic potential who perhaps need additional and initial help and those who will never be academically inclined who need a different system. I found this part of the research project the most heartbreaking as I heard about the trauma people had experienced which was often hidden because they did not want others to think they were failures.

Accessible entry points which adapt entry requirements to create more accessible training pathways tailored to working-class candidates' realities rather than rigid standards would dismantle barriers to success. Starting candidates at a lower level like Level 3 (A-Level) and then progressing to Level 4 (first year undergraduate) is a practical solution for those who lack prior higher education. A modular approach and meeting students at their initial capability levels before ramping up over time may also be beneficial. Assumptions that candidates can meet traditional academic prerequisites and timelines when their life experience often does not align with such standards are not helpful. Customising entry points and pacing is essential for increased accessibility.

The literature review revealed a consistent critique of traditional academic requirements as creating barriers for working-class ministry leadership development. Workshop-based active learning is endorsed over lectures, as evidenced in the Methodist class meetings that involved small groups for accountable discussion and discipleship, which was closer to participatory workshops than lectures.

From the biblical text, Jesus prioritised the selection of non-academic men to become learners and trained them with no formal academic examination. In the book of Acts chapter 4, Peter is described as unschooled and lacking formal rabbinical education, evidenced by his boldness despite his lack of academic training. Jesus' mobile, on-the-road ministry training school was well suited to equipping uneducated disciples like Peter in the craft of kingdom ministry. A clear biblical example is in the scene of Jesus feeding the five thousand (Matt. 14.13-21) which could be seen as Jesus 'workshopping' a problem with his disciples. Jesus got the disciples involved in problem-solving to produce solutions, engaging them interactively. While Jesus did some large-group teaching, he frequently used interactive, context-based methods drawing on demonstration, dialogue, reflection, and learning-by-doing. These workshop-style techniques allowed for participation and suited oral learning preferences.

Fourth Finding: Flexibility and Customisation of training Pathways are essential.

Tailoring training to individuals' capabilities and realities was urged through varied assessment, pacing, and entry requirements. Reflecting on my own leadership training experience, I felt frustrated and undervalued by the rigid programs that did not account for my personal context. The training institutions never identified my specific needs or gaps based on my life experience and background. Coming from an artistic background where the paintbrush was my communication tool of choice, having never needed to write an essay, I had no experience in essay writing before beginning academic training. Unfortunately, I was never offered alternative

assessment routes that matched my abilities or dyslexia diagnosis. This resulted in consistently low grades on written work, even though my capacity for theological reflection exceeded what the assignments captured. I knew I could engage thoughtfully in ministry but felt constrained by uniform assessment methods. More flexible, personalised training approaches could have nurtured my leadership gifts rather than hampering my perceived potential. My experience reveals the importance of incorporating working-class leaders' unique perspectives to develop customised development journeys. One-size-fits-all training often demotivates capable leaders whose aptitudes differ from conventional expectations.

The need for assessment flexibility and customised pacing emerged as a consistent finding across the study. Experts proposed incorporating alternative options such as portfolios or competencies that demonstrate skills in real-life ministry contexts alongside traditional essays. Standardising flexible assessment options would better adapt academic requirements to match working-class realities and learning preferences. This recognises the diversity of talents within a group often marginalised by formal education. Similarly, training should be tailored to each person's journey, meeting them at their current capability level and enabling them to progress at their own pace. Rather than rigid standardised timeframes like three years, flexible frameworks are needed to account for the limited 'margin' many working-class learners have to dedicate towards training. Accommodating authentic evaluation methods and individualised development timetables will make formal leadership education more accessible. Written assessments and common three year training often erect barriers excluding gifted leaders whose life circumstances and wiring differ from conventional middle-class norms.

The literature review highlights the need to customise training approaches to suit working-class realities and learning preferences rather than imposing standardised middle-class norms. Writers such as Altreiter and Hegna argued for portfolios demonstrating competencies as

an alternative assessment method rather than solely formal exams and essays. Altreiter reminded us that many working-class individuals do not meet the entry requirements for university and struggle with essay writing expected in formal education (Altreiter 8). Apprenticeships allow an alternate pathway as they involve competency-based, hands-on learning that can be adapted to different learning styles and paces.

Standardised testing and rigid academic expectations often fail to account for diverse talents and learning styles as backed up by the arguments of Hegna. From my own observations, this overlooks the capabilities of many, especially those discouraged by uniform systems. Apprenticeship training recognises that one advances best when assignments match their current skill levels and incrementally stretch us.

As seen in the research, working-class learners tend to thrive when the material connects concretely to real life through group practice rather than abstract theory alone. They appreciate gaining insights relationally from someone known and trusted more than isolated textbooks. Valuing communal assets, they often benefit from shared learning environments. This convinces me that flexibility beyond lectures, like portfolios demonstrating applied skills, allows more people to flourish. Customising training to nurture each person's gifts counteracts expectations that have constrained working-class leadership.

The biblical evidence aligns with the finding that customisation and flexibility are essential for working-class ministry training. As witnessed in Matthew 17.1-8, Jesus took only three disciples, Peter, James, and John up on the mountain with him for the transfiguration. In the same way, Jesus engaged with Peter one-on-one in John 21.15-19 for his reinstatement. Jesus presents the disciples with little to no entry criteria or academic prerequisites, simply calling them to “come and follow me” (Matt. 4.19). As oral learners, the disciples are taught through parables (Matt. 13.3-9), dialogue (Luke 9.18-22), and everyday examples they can relate to. Jesus meets

them at their spiritual and emotional starting point, restoring Peter (John 21.15-19) and building competence through hands-on ministry with coaching tailored to individual needs. Selvaratnam notes Jesus' interactive, collaborative model (Matthew 5.1-2), accommodating their relational learning style (Selvaratnam 40). Assessments arise from debriefing ministry experiences, not standardised testing (Luke 10.17-20). The training timeline adapts flexibly to teaching moments on the road rather than following a rigid schedule (Mark 6.6b-13). Furthermore, Jesus and the early church challenged assumptions that formal education was an essential prerequisite for working-class believers like Peter to become leaders (Acts 4.13). In summary, the Gospels reveal Jesus' willingness to develop uncredentialed disciples like Peter through customised approaches valuing spiritual readiness over academic requirements.

Fifth Finding: Educators need to understand working-class culture and context

Educators were exhorted by the Candidates and Priests to examine biases, adapt methods, and empower working-class gifts and wisdom. Having grown up in a working-class community, obvious differences in education needs and teaching styles exist which are not that obvious from the outside. I also recognise that the working-class does not always have the emotional maturity to articulate their needs in a way that is understood by the academic world. During this study, I have reflected on the role the working-class must play in expressing their needs appropriately and not taking offence when circumstances do not go as expected and their needs are not met. The working-class must be mature in expressing what works and what does not. In the same way, the academic world needs to understand what is needed and how best to communicate with a working-class student.

I echo the cry for educators from non-working-class backgrounds to humbly examine their own assumptions and biases when training working-class candidates. Willingness to learn from students and adapt methods to fit their needs, even if uncomfortable for the educators, was

stressed by the experts. Letting go of traditional teaching styles or historically crafted lectures for middle class students and approaching afresh the working-class students so to draw out gifts, rather than fitting students into rigid moulds, was advised. Experts cautioned educators not to impose abstract academic models without understanding students' realities. Active listening and starting from students' expertise and questions, rather than presumed deficiencies, was championed.

The literature review backed up this fifth finding and revealed that cultural humility is an essential, but often overlooked, aspect of effectively training working-class leaders. The label 'working-class' is often perceived negatively, but Sheppard observed that 'working-class' is a source of pride, not a deficiency for that community, and should be seen as such in academic circles. Vincent encouraged the understanding of urban communities and estates from God's perspective, not just human deficits. Both these views should, therefore, form and shape a positive approach to the working-class and their community.

The bias against the working class in formal education systems propagates middle-class culture and excludes working-class norms due to this imbalance in view towards the working-class and estate culture. Unfortunately, ministry training often reflects these biases rather than empowering diverse voices. The experts advocated the examining of cultural assumptions and adapting methods to resonate with working-class ways of thinking and learning. Humility requires educator awareness of biases and willingness to have existing perspectives expanded. Empowering indigenous leaders is vital to include working-class gifts such as relational wisdom. Overall, cultural humility enables working-class believers to contribute as co-creators, not just passive recipients, in leadership development.

The biblical argument for adapting teaching to connect with the working-class can be found in the model Jesus enacted. Jesus' selection of uneducated Galilean fishermen as disciples

like Peter displayed a humble willingness to equip those considered lower-class and unqualified by the religious establishment (Matt. 4.18-20). Despite cultural prejudices, Jesus empowered ordinary men for leadership, disrupting assumptions about who could be involved in ministry (Luke 6.12-16). Writers note Jesus' use of agricultural (Matt. 13.1-23) and fishing metaphors (Matt. 4.19), embedding teaching in working-class experience rather than elite literary references. His everyday language and willingness to touch lepers and other outcasts showed cultural humility (Luke 5.12-13). Rather than demanding disciples meet his cultural norms, Jesus adapted methods to resonate with their oral, concrete thinking through parables (Matt. 13.10-17). His patience and persistence in repeatedly restoring and re-commissioning impulsive disciples like Peter displayed a commitment to including and empowering the marginalized (John 21.15-19). Overall, Jesus' countercultural discipleship approach challenged prejudices by honouring the dignity and potential of working-class followers.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

Based on the findings from this research study, I recommend the following ministerial implications regarding enhancing the selection, training, and deployment of working-class church planters. While some suggestions aim to expand current initiatives, I also propose implementing new practices or amending existing programmes to better equip working-class leaders based on the evidence presented. These recommendations are organised under the categories of improving selection processes, transforming training systems, and optimising deployment models to present a comprehensive framework for empowering working-class planters emerging from this project's analysis.

Improving Selection Processes

(1) Long application forms should be changed to allow candidates from low literacy backgrounds to not stumble at the first point of entry. The application form should be divided

into shorter sections which they fill out over a year period when working with the DDO's rather than one, long process. This process is already being used in some Dioceses. Alternative options include:

a) the use of video/audio applications which would allow candidates to film or record video responses to questions instead of writing essays. This approach would also offer a useful way to assess non-written communication skills.

b) conversation-based application processes, rather than filling out forms, would allow candidates to meet with a discernment mentor for question-and-answer verbal form filling. This route would bring out longer answers and the discernment mentor can vet what is needed.

(2) To ensure accessibility for all candidates the following are needed,

a) first contact meetings between the candidate and The Diocesan Director of Ordinands or representative should be conducted in a local context, café, pub, or community space not only to relax the intensity but to also allow the candidate to show off their context.

b) financial assistance, pre-paid travel, or accommodations should be made available to those who need it. The research found some working-class candidates found getting to selection meetings with no car meant they could not get home on public transport in remote areas at night.

c) support in managing shift work and family commitments alongside the selection process, especially for people living in remote areas, is a clear need. Such assistance could include offering scheduling flexibility, covering, or subsidising travel costs to attend selection meetings and providing childcare support during discernment activities.

Making these resources available where required would help reduce practical obstacles that could preclude otherwise capable working-class candidates from fully participating in the discernment journey due to financial limitations or caregiving duties.

(3) It is essential that selectors receive training to recognise and value diverse types of intelligence, leadership potential, and ministry gifts rather than paying attention only to academic abilities. Selectors must also be pro-active about avoiding pre-judgments of candidates' suitability based on assumptions or unchecked biases. Additionally, selectors need an enhanced understanding of the immense pressures working-class candidates face to adapt their self-presentation and conform to perceived expectations of acceptability. Formal unconscious bias training is needed to equip selectors to look beyond academic performance and welcome candidates expressing their authentic selves.

(4) The Diocesan Director of Ordinands and vocational selectors needs to make the process more transparent and supportive with clear expectations communicated in plain language to encourage candidates. They also need to seek to reduce perceptions of intrusiveness and pressure to conform by ensuring the selection journey feels empowering rather than intimidating. This can be done by proactively communicating with the candidates, encouraging them to wear clothes they find comfortable, and to use their own style of speech to articulate themselves. This also includes being clear on the length of time for the selection process, how many times they will be expected to meet with chaplains, etc.

(5) The Church of England should intentionally recruit working-class chaplains to selection panels to add their insights and thereby reduce middle-class bias. Candidates should be assigned a working-class priest as an advocate to both to speak up for them and to reflect to them any misunderstandings in the process.

(6) To overcome the working-class perception that they are 'risky' and unwanted; cultivating a welcoming and inclusive discernment environment is essential, one where candidates can participate authentically without feeling forced to adapt unnecessarily. This environment will include getting the candidates to celebrate their own story at the beginning of

the process. Making introductions, helping them to make connections, and facilitating relationship building is imporant. How they feel about the clothes they wear, the language they use, and accepting their sense of humour is essential to them feeling welcome and wanted.

Transforming Training Systems

(7) The Church of England should develop and accredit an apprenticeship-based ordination training program. Working-class adults often learn best through hands-on, practical methods. Training should include interactive workshops, simulations, role-playing, mentoring, and on-the-job training through apprenticeship models. For example, a title focusing specifically on apprenticeship such as 'Apprenticeship Training for Priesthood' helps convey the value of this model for developing working-class leaders making it accessible, giving it weight, empowering education, showing flexibility and direct application. Any classroom-based learning needs to explicitly connect lessons to real-life experiences and struggles of the working-class. Any classroom learning should be designed around a workshop structure rather than a lecture format. Assessments should be varied and allow the candidate to show their wide range of gifts and skills alongside developing a portfolio for ministry.

(8) To adequately equip working-class candidates for effective priestly ministry, the training curriculum must incorporate learning across a diverse range of pastoral competencies and practical leadership skills beyond just academic biblical knowledge. Important topics and skills that should be covered within working-class training programs might include the following topics:

Becoming a priest and spiritual formation,

Biblical knowledge,

Pastoral care,

Counselling,

Conflict resolution,

Teaching/preaching,

Vision casting,

Strategic planning,

Volunteer recruitment/development,

Administration/management,

Anglican 101

Training should integrate both theological foundations and practical capabilities to ensure working-class priests are empowered to serve their communities. To fully embed working-class priests within the Church of England, training programs must incorporate robust orientation to the institutional operations, governance, and the unique vocabulary of the Church of England. Providing an "Anglican 101" primer early in training will equip less Anglicanised candidates of all backgrounds with a foundational knowledge of national and diocesan administration, governance bodies (like Synod and General Synod), leadership roles, and frequently used acronyms such as ABC, ABM, DSA, SSM, and PCC.

Coursework must move beyond strictly academic learning to build real-world ministry proficiency ending with portfolio building. The outworking of the training should leave the new priest with a portfolio filled with ministry ideas and designed projects to build from.

(9) Leadership development is a long-term investment so the CofE should plan for three years of intensive training as an ordinand followed by several more years of ongoing mentoring relationships. Although a standard curacy would last three years, the recommendation is that the candidate has a mentor committed to them for a period of seven to nine years. Furthermore, for consistency and support, another recommendation would be that the candidate stays in the same

context for the full six years of training; three years of direct learning and curacy for a further three years.

(10) Holding training sessions at times and locations convenient for working-class non-stipendiary participants, such as evenings and weekends, is essential. A recognition needs to occur that shift work may result in less consistent attendance, so alternate or repeated options may be needed for non-stipendiary candidates. For full-time candidates, this change is less essential. Training providers might consider hosting training not at theological colleges but at the local Estate churches or community centres as opposed to being in an intimidating academic building. By relocating training to places closer to candidates, rather than expecting them to come to the places of academia, the students' needs are considered and their engagement will increase.

(11) Training schemes should tailor the approach to each person's distinctive gifts, abilities, and growth areas. Provide coaching or mentoring as an active part of the training to help apply lessons to their specific leadership context. A strong suggestion would be to offer more models that participants can choose from. For example, if eight modules were run, candidates must sign up to five, meaning they feel the ability to opt out of something being aware that this would obviously also involve core modules.

(12) The gifting already present in the room should be recognised. Using the life learning of the participants shows that their life experience is valuable. By inviting previous students to bring their experience and voice to training, representation is achieved. Educators must take time to understand their gifts, passions, perspectives, and obstacles to participation. With creativity and commitment to developing indigenous leaders, churches can raise up generations of working-class leaders.

(13) For ministry training to effectively equip working-class leaders, educators must enhance their contextual awareness and be willing to modify traditional pedagogies to align with

students' realities. This requires humility in acknowledging middle-class norms pervading theological college curricula that may be unfamiliar and inaccessible for working-class learners. Rather than viewing differences as deficiencies in students, teachers should recognise their own lack of understanding and make needed adaptations. This would involve replacing passive lectures with interactive workshops, swapping theoretical essays for practical assessments, or providing extra coaching to support students in unfamiliar academic environments. Adjusting the training approach involves more listening to student needs, avoiding deficit narratives, and changing mindsets to see diversity as an asset, not a problem to fix. The onus is on instructors to adjust to students, not the reverse.

Key points that educators might cover include:

(1) enhance contextual awareness of working-class needs,

(2) adapt their methods when student realities do not fit curricula,

(3) have humility in acknowledging middle-class assumptions,

(4) listen to student needs versus imposing one approach, and

(5) make training truly accessible and empowering for all.

Optimising Deployment Models

(14) As considered in point 9 above, the recommendation is that in following the three year curacy, the structured relationship continues with the mentor until the ninth year supporting the new priest into church planting or incumbency. This final stage would hold people through the transition in leadership, help them to problem-solve new issues that arise, allow for the continued formation in the priesthood, allow the continued development of skills and wisdom, and allow the priest to feel a part of a wider ministry. Mentors help guide contextualisation and

affirm gifts. Candidates will, years later, be able to play this role for another, thereby repaying the significant investment of time.

(15) Curacy's first incumbencies and church planting opportunities should be matched to priests' personal giftings and community contexts rather than random allocation or gap-filling of parishes that would traditionally have a curate. This allows ministers to serve in environments where their abilities and experiences best equip them for organic kingdom impact. Working-class priests should be allowed to minister in areas where they culturally understand the setting and can be valued as they are. Whilst unrealistic to expect that the church is able to keep all such priest in their preferred estate, a comparable location should be found unless they desire to fully change context.

(16) Intentionally fostering ongoing peer connections between working-class priests to prevent isolation and create mutual support structures is vital. Often deployed as solo clergy, working-class ministers can feel alone without enough collegial fellowship. Forming communities of practice for cohorts of working-class priests provides regular opportunities for collaborative learning, resource sharing, mentorship, prayer partnership, and friendship. Thriving peer communities reinforce working-class clergy's cultural strengths of communal relationship and wisdom exchange.

Working-Class Engagement

(17) Peer mentoring of candidates: Working-class priests who have successfully navigated selection and training should make themselves available to mentor and guide other working-class candidates entering discernment. By drawing on their lived experience, they can provide insider coaching to demystify intimidating processes, help candidates avoid common pitfalls, and boost confidence that this path is achievable. Their presence can encourage those

who may feel like outsiders in unfamiliar middle-class environments. Intentional peer mentorship, where seasoned working-class priests walk with incoming candidates, creates a pay-it-forward model.

(18) Co-facilitating training: As part of the recommendation for educators to enhance contextual awareness in training programs, working-class priests who understand students' cultural realities must play an active role in delivery. They should be invited to co-facilitate sessions to model contextual ministry, contribute relevant case studies, and collaborate on adapting teaching methods to resonate with working-class pedagogy. By shifting from passive recipients of education designed for them to empowered co-creators of refreshed curricula, working-class priests can transform training for cultural relevance from the inside out. Their partnership ensures students' needs shape learning approaches in an ongoing way, preventing rigidity or disconnection. Working-class priests carry the responsibility to contribute their gifts and insights wherever training systems need to stretch to embrace inclusive excellence.

Limitations of the Study

This study outworked as expected at each stage of the planning and implementation. Nevertheless, three limitations to this study exist. First, a larger number of candidate respondents could have been achieved; secondly, longitudinal data could have been gained; and finally, more qualitative data by visiting projects.

Although the candidate online survey had 434 respondents, only 292 were within the criteria of the delimitations. With more respondents, a larger picture of people's experiences could be examined. Whilst this number of respondents was sufficient to draw general conclusions about the selection, training, and deployment of working-class priests, the number was not high enough for any accurate analysis of those responses by subgroup. Candidates were also not asked

to identify their age or their age group, which means that age-specific factors could not be identified, likewise, neither was I able to analyse data by UK region.

Secondly, because this study did not collect any longitudinal data, the survey did not allow us to track candidates as they went through the process of selection to the priesthood. The research captured a snapshot versus tracking subjects over an extended timeframe. Although this would not have changed the outcome of this research project, longitudinal data would have allowed us to see how Candidates changed during the process, how they felt going in and coming out, and at what points did they actually find the hardest rather than the danger of retrospective bias.

Finally, personal time constraints in the doctoral research process presented limitations regarding the direct, in-person investigation of promising training initiatives identified in the literature or survey. For example, the researcher was not able to conduct site visits and interviews on location with projects like the Antioch Network in order to make observations and gather data through an immersive experience of their working model. In-person visits could have allowed the researcher to move beyond self-reported descriptions from leadership and gain additional insights through observing operations first-hand as they unfold in situ. Experiential, observational data can uncover nuances not fully captured through interviews alone. However, as a sole researcher on a rigorous doctoral timeline, exploring every initiative in this direct manner was not feasible. While interviews provided helpful perspectives, the findings would be enriched by fieldwork incorporating qualitative observations from within training environments. This limitation could be addressed in future projects.

Unexpected Observations

More had been done for working-class clergy historically. The Worker Priests of Southwark, the work done by Joe Hestler in Bristol, or the Aston Training Scheme showed the

efforts of pioneering leaders who championed working-class ministry leadership long before this project (see appendix A). Hearing from working-class priests allowed me to see how some had been supported, often by a lone member of staff who went above and beyond to support the candidate through their training.

Through reviewing literature on early Methodism, I gained illuminating insights into Wesley's deep desire to reach and equip working-class individuals who the upper-class dominated Church of England overlooked. What surprised me was learning how John Wesley intentionally focused his evangelistic preaching on engaging the neglected working-classes working in fields and factories. I was struck by his willingness to subvert social customs and go out to the people in their context. Even more noteworthy was discovering how Wesley empowered working men and women to become leaders and preachers through innovative small group structures like the class meeting and band system. I gained deep appreciation for Wesley's commitment to making leadership accessible across class lines, training ordinary men and women through relationships, experience, and affirming their gifts. His example provides helpful principles to emulate in today's context.

In the biblical review, I came to the insightful realisation that the term *talmid* was not solely used to denote a disciple or apprentice in the religious context of rabbinical training. Rather, research revealed that *talmid* was a common term found across the broader Aramaic-speaking cultures to designate an apprentice learning any type of trade or craft. This realisation lead to the significance of Jesus choosing the metaphor of 'fishing for men' to encapsulate his calling of working-class fishermen like Peter and Andrew. Jesus positioned ministry as a skilled craft to be learned through hands-on mentoring, much like these new disciples were already familiar within their vocational training.

This etymological discovery inspired an expanded perspective: that training working-class priests today could be helpfully framed as equipping them in the ‘craft’ of contextual ministry. Just as trade apprentices learn from master's through imitation, guided practice, and incremental growth in abilities, working-class ministry leadership development may be optimised through contextual apprenticeship models. Reframing training as crafting priests through apprenticeship methods provides an exciting paradigm for equipping working-class leaders in the Church of England’s urban mission.

The review of literature for this project highlighted the dirth of writing on the topic of a positive theology of the working-class and the urban estates. So much is written that speaks of the estates as downtrodden and problematic rather than vibrant and filled with life. Even the books that championed mission to the estate communities had words in the title like “hard,” “concrete,” “poor,” or “chav.” Books often had images on the front of a lone teenager with a cigarette or the grey image of a tower block walkway rather than the joyful faces of a diverse and multicultural community.

During the research project, I was surprised to keep having working-class individuals reaching out to me to express their gratitude for the project. Many offered to be interviewed, which I did not have time for, but their enthusiasm was greatly appreciated. I was also moved to see so much interest from people who felt strongly that the working-class had been held back in the Church of England and hoped for a time when they would be fully integrated. At the end of one of the focus groups, one candidate was moved to tears that someone had listened to her problems in the selection process and another priest wrote to me following the interview expressing his gratitude in having someone simply listen to his experience and value it.

Recommendations

As the Church of England actively engages with its missional calling to reach the 950 under-served urban estates across the UK, this study's findings offer prominent insights regarding needed approaches for selecting, training, and deploying working-class priests to pioneer new worshipping communities in these contexts.

It is hoped that this project may contribute helpfully to ongoing conversations within the Church surrounding the development and empowerment of working-class leadership for this immense kingdom task. Moreover, much of this research holds broad relevance for other church networks similarly seeking to catalyse grassroots revitalisation. With so much work remaining to establish Christ's presence on every Estate, all denominations must collaborate in this transformative effort.

This project's identified limitations and unexpected observations surface several topics warranting potential further exploration. Additionally, building upon these findings, recommended avenues for supplemental research are proposed which could expand understanding of training frameworks to equip working-class leaders for frontline ministry.

This study predominantly focused on the selection, training, and deployment of working-class candidates. The researcher did cover church planting models in Chapter Two, where we briefly looked at examples of planting that could be fruitful in the urban estate setting. However, a further study specifically focusing on what models of church planting work on urban estates would allow future planters to be given more focused learned training. A research project evaluating models and their success would be beneficial and reward a more successful implementation.

By design, this project focused on the education and training of current UK working-class priests. A further study on global examples of effective training, and interviews with global

experts and church leaders in other settings would be favourable. With the exponential growth of the church in places like China, studying how they are exponentially multiplying leadership and how this might apply to the UK working-class setting would be interesting.

The candidate survey and the priest semi-structured interviews raised awareness of the mental health challenges of working-class clergy. Research on these challenges and their effect on working-class clergy in ministry would be essential for future-proofing this people group. Understanding the wider issues and what is needed for better support would be valuable.

Recommendation to the church of England is for funding to be released to create an apprenticeship training program for any candidate that academically would be beneficial for. As seen in this study, the present offering is not inspiring working-class candidates to come forward and is not fully equipping them for their first few years in ministry.

A presentation of case studies of churches effectively planted in estates by working-class clergy would offer inspiration and encouragement. In-depth qualitative case studies should be conducted on churches that have been effectively planted in urban estates by working-class clergy. Researchers could identify the contextual factors, strategies, leadership approaches, and ministry models used by these successful working-class clergy planters. Best practices could be derived from cross-case analysis to guide future church planting efforts and working-class clergy training.

Longitudinal tracking of working-class priests from ordination through five plus years of ministry would be beneficial. In-depth interviews at multiple intervals would uncover ongoing barriers, challenges, sources of support, and other experiential factors influencing their trajectories. Researchers could identify patterns in clergy attrition, persistence, satisfaction, and effectiveness associated with class background. This could reveal needed systemic reforms and

pinpoint ways to better support working-class clergy through a crucially formative period of ministry.

During the writing of this study, the Church of England launched an updated selection process after reports that the existing framework favoured middle-class candidates. This process was launched in 2022 and is still in the process of bedding in. I would propose a follow-up research project once the new framework is implemented into how this new route for selection is affecting working-class clergy and do the same findings apply.

Postscript

As I conclude this research journey, my heart is filled with hope and conviction regarding the vital role working-class priests can play in catalysing renewal across England's overlooked urban estates. Despite facing barriers, these leaders possess the grit, gifts, and grounding in the community that is needed to plant life-giving churches. With long-term investments in selection processes recognising their potential, training systems aligned with their realities, and deployment models optimising their strengths, a grassroots movement of working-class clergy can blossom.

While this project focused specifically on empowering working-class church planters, the implications stretch far beyond. The findings suggest a need for greater cultural awareness and pedagogical adaptations to make theological education more accessible for all. The flexibility, customisation, and relational emphasis advocated here would allow our training systems to nurture gifts too often stifled by rigid conventions. I hope this work sparks broader conversations about inclusivity and removes unnecessary obstacles that deny leaders their calling.

On a personal note, I step away from this research with expanded perspectives and a deeper trust in God's heart to use the overlooked. Having heard painful stories of gifted leaders being excluded, I am convinced existing systems must change to welcome diverse voices. Yet I

am also reminded that a diploma, pedigree, or postcode does not determine one's destiny when the Spirit of Christ dwells within. As Paul declared, we have this treasure in jars of clay to show the transcendent power belongs to God (2 Cor. 4.7). May cracked but beautiful vessels continue rising up to proclaim the Kingdom.