

Study 5: Growth in Learning

Theological education might seem a luxury – especially in developing countries. But it is an essential part of preparing church leaders for mission, both clergy and laity. In this session we look at the urgent need for Christian education.

Getting started

In this session we are considering the importance of Christian knowledge and learning, however we understand this. Being sensitive to differences in training and experience in the group, reflect briefly on significant moments when you have learned more about your Christian journey.

View from the world church

There is always room to learn and grow. In Myanmar and Ghana, church leaders are developing skills and taking the church forward.

MYANMAR: Anglican churches are the beating heart of thousands of communities throughout the world. In many communities, the local Anglican church is both the main source of spiritual nourishment and the only source of social welfare. This is why USPG considers it so important that Anglican Churches are able to develop a sturdy infrastructure – in terms of both buildings and administration – and a strong leadership.

Since we were founded in 1701, USPG has been involved in training and developing local leadership. One beneficiary of a USPG scholarship was Stephen Than Myint Oo, who was installed as the Archbishop of Myanmar in 2008. While still a priest, Archbishop Stephen embarked on a doctorate in theology with funding from USPG. As a child, the archbishop attended a USPG-supported school. No wonder he felt able to say: 'USPG is deeply rooted in my heart and mind.'

The Church in Myanmar oversees schools and healthcare programmes, agricultural training and support for orphans. In the midst of a difficult and restrictive situation, the church is reaching out by sharing the little it has with those who are in even greater need.

Explaining his concept of church growth, the archbishop said: 'The Church of Myanmar is trying to be the church for others, doing mission holistically and with unconditional love – trying to be the church for others, instead of self-seeking.'

GHANA: Another beneficiary of USPG funding is the Revd Solomon Frimpong, from Koforidua Diocese, in Ghana, who studied at St Nicholas' Theological Seminary. The 28-year-old explained: 'Training has helped me to know more about how to relate to people from different cultures and backgrounds. I have also been trained in youth ministry and administration, which will help with managing churches.'

He said: 'I hope to help the church to grow. My aim is to become a good priest and a servant to those around me. For me, mission is about encouraging people to understand that when there seems to be no hope left, there is always hope in God.'

Habib Nader, of USPG, said: 'These scholarships are about helping Anglican Churches around the world to equip themselves with present and future leaders for effective mission and ministry.'

For discussion

1. Many of us are aware of our church leaders, but tend not to think about their need for ongoing training. Drawing upon these stories and your own experience, consider the qualities of good leadership and why this is important for the church.
2. For most of us, education is a fundamental part of life: to live is to learn. But how much effort do we put into developing our Christian understanding – and why do you think Christians are sometimes wary of theological education?

Looking at the Bible: Acts 10

The 'conversion of Cornelius' is a key moment in the widening vision of the emerging church. It is a key learning point when the church's first leader, Peter, comes to realise the breadth of God's love for all humanity, and the role that the church must play in responding to this. To grow the church we too need leaders with vision, people who have the capacity to unfold the wisdom of scripture in the contexts of contemporary needs.

1. This passage shows a sea-change occurring in the church's concept of the gospel – though the lesson was not easily learned! At each twist in the story, discuss what prevented those involved from taking God's lessons on board.
2. Peter was 'the rock' on which the church was built, so it is perhaps surprising to see how he argued with God! Look again at the passage and make a list of Peter's character traits and qualities. How does this compare with church leadership today, and what conclusions can we draw?
3. As we come to the end of this course, take it in turns to share a little about what you have learned – about church growth and your growth personally. List individually and as a group some of the things you could do to engage more fully in ongoing growth.

Prayer

Spirit of Jesus, you travel before us,
Guiding us along unexpected paths.
Let down from heaven your gracious gifts,
And shed new insight upon our leaders,
So that they can help all your people grow.

Action: Go deeper

Having completed this study course, please consider going deeper by extending your involvement with USPG. Invite one of our Speakers to your church or take part in our four-session mission study course: *The World is My Parish* (free to download at www.uspg.org.uk/worldismyparish).