

GENERAL SYNOD

Developing Discipleship

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“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age”.
Matthew 28.19-20.

1. The General Synod agreed three goals for the five years from 2010 to 2015: contributing to the common good, promoting spiritual and numerical growth and re-imagining ministry.
2. The Synod debated Intentional Evangelism in November 2013 as a contribution to reflection on promoting spiritual and numerical growth. The Synod debated aspects of the Common Good in July 2014 following a presentation by Jim Wallis and discussion in small groups.
3. In February 2015 the Archbishops’ Council will sponsor group work and a debate on encouraging the discipleship of the whole people of God as the foundation of re-imagining ministry for the 21st Century.
4. This paper introduces the group discussion and debate.
5. This paper and the General Synod debate aim to begin a more intentional conversation across the Church about discipleship, not to offer a final word. The conversation will continue in a number of ways over the next five years.

What does it mean to be a disciple?

6. Jesus calls both men and women to be disciples: to learn from him, to pattern their lives upon his life, to follow him. The first disciples recognised that the Kingdom of God was drawing near in the ministry of Jesus. They were called to repentance and faith (Mark 1.14-15). They were invited into a community marked by a particular rhythm of life: the call to be with Jesus together and to be sent out (Mark 3.14). All are called: the poor, the rich, the sinners, the sick, the disgraced and forgotten, the lost and weary, the unclean and the oppressed, women and men, the young and the old.
7. To be a disciple is to be called to a life of learning and formation in the likeness of Christ. Jesus draws his disciples apart and teaches them the deep patterns, ethics and actions of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5.1-12), the ways of prayer and worship (Luke 11.1-4), the principles of life together (John 13.1-20).
8. Yet to be a disciple is also to be called to live a distinctive life of witness and service, an apostolic life, sent into the world, to follow God’s call. Through the course of Jesus’ ministry the disciples are sent out in mission and return to reflect (Luke 9.1-6, and Luke 10.1-12). This pattern of sending and gathering leads to the great commission of the

disciples in the power of the Holy Spirit by the risen Christ (Matthew 28.16-20; Mark 16.14-18; Luke 24.44-53; John 20.21-22; Acts 1.6-11).

9. There is a cost to discipleship. The first disciples leave everything to follow Jesus. The pattern of the cross and resurrection is to be written deeply into the life of the disciple:

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9.21-22).

10. Yet discipleship is also an invitation to the strongest hope, the deepest joy, the greatest fulfilment, the most authentic pattern of living, the highest adventure known to humanity. The call of Jesus is to have life in all its fullness (John 10.10). His message brings us joy: “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (John 15.11).

11. A disciple is called by the grace of God to live a life dedicated to God’s glory and distinct from the life of the world around us:

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12.1-2)

12. Disciples seek to live in the power of the Spirit, as members of the Church, and in the perspective of the resurrection life. In the words of the prayer from the baptism service:

*“May God who has received you by baptism into his Church,
pour upon you the riches of his grace,
that within the company of Christ’s pilgrim people
you may daily be renewed by his anointing Spirit,
and come to the inheritance of the saints in glory.”¹*

13. The New Testament uses a rich stock of images to remind us of what it means to be a disciple. First among them is the image and sacrament of baptism. We are washed and made holy, set apart for God (Hebrews 10.22; 1 Corinthians 6.11). In baptism, we have died and our lives are hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3.3). God has marked us with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit who is at work within us constantly reminding us of God’s love and compassion (Ephesians 1.13; Romans 8.23, 26). We are called to respond to God’s grace through a continual offering of our whole lives in service. This is the heart of our worship, transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12.1-2). There are no part-time disciples. There are no disciples for a season. Together we are being formed by the Spirit into a new community, the people of God, a priesthood of all believers, living stones in the Temple:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2.9-10).

¹ Common Worship, Holy Baptism, 71

14. Baptism is both initiation into Christian faith and life and commissioning for Christian service. Disciples are sustained and sanctified in their Christian living by participation in the Holy Communion in which God's people come together to be with Christ and are sent out in mission to God's world. In the Eucharist, there is opportunity for confession of sin and amendment of life, the receiving of grace in word and sacrament, a renewal of Christian fellowship, a remembering of Christ's death and resurrection, and an opportunity to dedicate ourselves a fresh in God's service. Above all the Eucharist is a sacrament of God's grace, an outward and visible sign of the inner and spiritual grace of God's love for the world poured out in Jesus Christ.
15. Disciples are called to dwell deep in Christ and continually to welcome Christ to dwell in us by his Spirit (John 14.23; Revelation 3.20). As we dwell deep in Christ, in teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers, so we are continually renewed in the grace of the Holy Spirit and able to bear the fruit of the kingdom (Acts 2.42; John 15.5). That fruit will be seen in the transformation of God's world in peace and justice (Isaiah 5.7); in the transformation of God's people in holiness (Galatians 5.22); in the making of new disciples, called to salvation and for service (Luke 5.10).

How are disciples formed and sustained?

16. Disciples are formed and sustained primarily through the grace of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit seen in the witness of the local church, through a community dedicated to a life of prayer, service and witness in daily life which is a living interpretation of the Christian faith. Such a community continually invites others to explore the Way of Faith and provokes questions in the society in which it is set. The Church is called to pray constantly that God will pour out grace afresh in every community in our land and that men, women and children will be drawn by that grace to the fire of God's love.
17. Disciples are formed through the ancient discipline of catechesis, teaching the faith to those who are ready to learn more and preparing to be baptised and confirmed or to renew their baptismal promises. The Church responds to the grace of God in the lives of those being drawn to faith through offering opportunities for prayer, accompaniment, formation in holiness and learning the faith as a regular part of the life of every parish and fresh expression of church. Divine and human agency both play their part. In the words of St. Paul, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth".²
18. In this quinquennium the House of Bishops has developed new resources for this work of teaching and learning the faith and forming disciples in the Pilgrim Course. The General Synod has debated Intentional Evangelism (GS 1917) and the Archbishops have established a Task Group for Evangelism to take forward the call to make disciples in every place at the present time.
19. Disciples are sustained in their on-going Christian life not primarily through courses but through worship, mission and community – through being with Jesus and being sent out.³ We grow in our discipleship through Christian witness at work and in our leisure, in our prayers and in our worship. Disciples are formed and sustained through experiences of difficulty and suffering as well as through joy. Formal Christian education plays a key but secondary role to this formation in the life of the Church through deepening

² 1 Corinthians 3.6

³ Roger Walton, *Disciples Together: discipleship, formation and small groups*, SCM, 2014 pp.41-61

engagement with Scripture and the tradition, through providing opportunities for reflection on Christian experience and through equipping the saints for the work of ministry until all come “to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ”.⁴

20. Lay and ordained together share a common discipleship. The outworking of that discipleship is the living-out of our Christian faith in the whole of our lives: in our work, in family life, in the wider community, in the service of God’s kingdom. Christian discipleship is expressed today in thousands of different ways and places: in food banks, schools and hospitals; through the creative arts and media; in homes, workplaces; through voluntary work with children, the elderly through mutual care and support of young to old and vice versa, through Street Pastors, homeless projects, campaigning, credit unions, peace-making and political action, in the building of stable, loving families, in generous giving, in love for our neighbours, in hospitality, in care for the environment, in soup kitchens, advice centres and voluntary organisations. Together as the Church we are the Body of Christ, a community of missionary disciples.⁵ This missionary discipleship is the foundation of every Christian’s vocation to work and service.
21. Nurturing this sense of discipleship across the Church is therefore vital as the Church of England seeks to serve the common good through the life and service of every member. Nurturing discipleship is the very essence of promoting spiritual and numerical growth. Nurturing discipleship lies at the heart of re-imagining both lay and ordained ministry.

Discipleship in the tradition

22. As we look back through the history of the Church, it is possible to identify periods of significant reflection on the central importance of discipleship in the life of the Church.
23. These periods of reflection are almost all in times of significant change. This is because the challenges of discipleship vary according to context. These resources from the past form deep wells of inspiration and reflection for the Church today as we reflect in our own times of change and transition on what it means to be a disciple and to form and sustain disciples of Jesus Christ.
24. The monastic movement was a renewed call to discipleship. As Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire, so monasticism emerged as a counter cultural movement, emphasising personal formation and holiness.⁶ The Rule of Benedict aims to establish “a school of the Lord’s service. In instituting it we hope to establish nothing harsh or oppressive”.⁷ Later monastic movements, including that led by St. Francis, call the Church back to the essentials of Christian service and mission in community.
25. The Reformation is a movement which re-establishes discipleship at the heart of Christian faith with an emphasis on worship in the language of the people (Article 24), of setting the reading of the Scriptures in the heart of worship, and establishing the that the visible Church of Christ “is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached and the sacraments duly administered..” (Article 19). The Anglican Reformers paid careful attention to the power of liturgical worship and the reading of scripture in the

⁴ Ephesians 4.12

⁵ Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, 2013, 24, 40, 120

⁶ See Diarmaid McCulloch, *A History of Christianity*, pp.200ff.

⁷ Rule of Benedict, Prologue, 46

formation of the Christian community. A congregation which prays year by year these words from the Book of Common Prayer is formed and shaped for whole life discipleship:

26. “And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice unto thee; humbly beseeching thee that all we who are partakers of this Holy Communion may be fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly benediction.”⁸
27. The Anglican Reformers give renewed attention to the teaching of the faith so that it can be lived through printed homilies and exposition of scripture, through the emphasis on priests being men of scholarship and wisdom, and through the development of the catechism, setting out the faith as it is to be taught to children, young people and converts. Worship and the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion are central to the formation of the Church and the formation of disciples. That formation is orientated both towards virtue in this life and the joy of resurrection. Before the baptism of those of riper years, the priest prays for the candidates that:

*“being steadfast in faith, joyful through hope and rooted in charity, [they] may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that finally they may come to the land of everlasting life, there to reign with thee, world without end”*⁹

28. In the 17th century, Richard Baxter explored and developed this tradition of catechesis for life by restoring the practice of preaching not only publicly but from house to house, emphasising the need to teach the faith for a lifetime of discipleship.¹⁰ A century later, John and Charles Wesley led a further renewal of discipleship from within the Church of England and, ultimately, beyond it in the foundation of the Methodist Church. The contribution of John Wesley to the understanding of discipleship lies not only in his exposition of doctrine but in his confidence to proclaim the Christian gospel beyond the community of the Church and his development of the system of bands and classes to both form and sustain disciples in the pursuit of scriptural holiness.
29. The Methodist covenant prayer, now incorporated into Common Worship, expresses powerfully the sense of dynamic, fruitful discipleship focussed in a life offered to God in response to God’s grace:

*I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you
or laid aside for you,
exalted for you
or brought low for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing;*

⁸ The Book of Common Prayer, Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper, Prayer of Oblation

⁹ The Book of Common Prayer, Baptism to such as are of riper years, Opening Collect

¹⁰ Richard Baxter, The Reformed Pastor

*I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.*

*And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours.
So be it.*

*And the covenant now made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.¹¹*

30. The Church in the twenty-first century faces different challenges from the early monastics in the fourth century, the Franciscans in the twelfth, the Reformers and Puritans in the sixteenth and seventeenth or the early Methodists in the eighteenth.¹² As the Church of England in 2015 we face the challenge of calling one another afresh to follow Christ in the face of a global, secularised, materialistic culture, often experienced as a desert for the soul.¹³ We need to draw on the deep wisdom of the past but also to apply ourselves afresh to an authentic and Anglican understanding of discipleship for the 21st Century.

Reflection on discipleship in the contemporary Church of England

31. How effective is the Church of England at the present time in nurturing and sustaining this call to discipleship?
32. In May 2013 the Archbishops' Council commissioned a review of current provision across the dioceses in forming and sustaining disciples.
33. The survey found many good things. Some excellent work is being done and some fine theological leadership is being given by individuals. However, the survey also identified some significant obstacles to further growth and development. According to the survey, lay development and discipleship are not clearly articulated as strategic priorities in most dioceses. It was widely perceived that the biggest obstacle in lay development is the clericalised culture of church and ministry.
34. The Church of England has not devoted a great deal of time and energy to reflection on the discipleship the whole people of God in recent times.
35. In the whole 20th Century there were just three national reports on this issue.¹⁴ The best and most contemporary of these remains the 1985 report, *All are Called: Towards a Theology of the Laity*. The stress throughout the document is on developing vocation and discipleship not in the Church alone but in the world: in families, workplaces and neighbourhoods. *All Are Called* appeals for fresh and deeper theological reflection on what it means to be a lay disciple; a more visible affirmation of lay discipleship and vocation in the world, in liturgy and worship; and greater investment in equipping God's

¹¹ Common Worship, Times and Seasons, p.110

¹² Roger Walton describes these challenges helpfully as post-national, post-modern and post-Christendom.

¹³ "It is up to us today to render experiences of the Church concretely accessible, to multiply the wells where thirsting men and women are invited to encounter Jesus, to offer oases in the deserts of life" From the Message of the Synod of Roman Catholic Bishops on the New Evangelisation, 3.

¹⁴ *The Position of the Laity*, 1902; *All are Called, towards a theology of the laity*, 1985, *Called to New Life: the world of lay discipleship*, 1999.

people for their vocation in life and in the world in parishes, dioceses and the National Church Institutions.

36. As part of the preparation for the 2015 Synod debate, Jeremy Worthen, (Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and Theology) undertook a piece of research on sources we might use in developing a contemporary Anglican theology of discipleship (including liturgical sources and common ecumenical statements).¹⁵
37. Jeremy's conclusion is that "there is no well-developed authoritative source for the theology of discipleship to which the contemporary Church of England can readily look to inform its teaching here". This does not mean, of course, that there has been no writing on this subject by Anglicans and others. There are some excellent and recent studies, particularly at a popular level.¹⁶ However the thinking they represent has not been fully absorbed into the lifeblood and culture of our Church and our understanding discipleship and ministry.
38. The lack of a coherent and concisely stated common understanding of discipleship has a number of consequences for the life of parishes, of dioceses and of the Church of England as a whole.
- Our vision for the Church and for discipleship is not as clear as it could be. Many churches and dioceses include the goal of making disciples in their vision statements. But what does this mean beyond conversion to Christian faith? Where do we find a compelling vision for lay discipleship in the world?
 - Our understanding of service becomes restricted to the life of the Church. A full theology of discipleship, of course, embraces the world and the kingdom of God in the whole of creation as the horizon and the sphere of Christian service and mission. There are many kinds of callings for Christians: the majority are concerned with living out the Christian faith through daily life and work, in the family and the wider community. Without this deep and wide understanding of discipleship, our understanding of ministry and mission becomes too narrowly focussed on the Church.
 - Our theological understanding of ministry becomes lopsided. An immense amount of reflection has been invested over the last 25 years on ordained ministry; there has been some reflection on licensed lay ministry but very little on the service offered by the majority of Christians for the majority of time through their discipleship. If we are not careful, the language of discipleship contracts to cover only those who have a recognised ministry.
 - Finally, and most seriously, the witness and mission of the whole Church is impoverished as Christians are neither encouraged nor sustained in the living out of their Christian faith in daily life. The 1945 Report, *Towards the Conversion of England* recognised the vital role which lay disciples could play in witness and evangelism. The 2014 Report, *From Anecdote to Evidence*, connects the growth of

¹⁵ Jeremy Worthen, *Towards a contemporary theology of discipleship: sources for the Church of England* <https://www.churchofengland.org/education/adult-education-lay-discipleship-and-shared-ministry/resources-for-discipleship.aspx>

¹⁶ See for example, Graham Cray, *Disciples and Citizens*, IVP, 2007; Robert Cotton, *Re-imagining Discipleship*, SPCK 2013, Roger Walton, *The Reflective Disciple* (Epworth 2008)., SCM, 2012 Paul Moore, *Making Disciples in Messy Church*, Messy Church, 2013

the Church clearly to lay participation and leadership and being intentional in nurturing discipleship. Yet this vision has yet to be fully realised.

39. We have a clear vision as the Church of England to contribute to the common good of our society, to seek spiritual and numerical growth and to re-imagine ministry. If we are to fulfil this vision, then we need as a church to pay greater and deeper attention to the discipleship of the whole people of God in the next quinquennium of our life together.
40. We should not be surprised or discouraged that we need to do further work in this vital area nor should we blame others or ourselves for the present situation. Rather we should recognise that the changing times in which we live call for a changing and evolving understanding of discipleship within the life of the Church. Over the past generation, the Church of England has sought to set the mission of God at the heart of our common life: we are seeking to become a mission-shaped Church. One of the next, and critical, steps in that journey is a deeper and stronger call to missionary discipleship and for the Church to see itself and to become a community of missionary disciples.

What should we then do?

41. Further reflection on discipleship is needed, but where is it to take place and how will it impact the life and the deep culture of the Church of England?
42. There are many things which can be done by individuals and within local churches to strengthen and develop our common understanding of discipleship. This General Synod paper might helpfully be studied by PCC's and small groups as a way of beginning that conversation.
43. This paper outlines three ways of moving forward in dioceses and nationally. Others may emerge from the General Synod debate.

Ten Marks of Developing Disciples

44. The first is to commend to dioceses and parishes the Ten Marks of a Diocese committed to Developing Disciples appended to this paper. They are very much provisional and work in progress. Dioceses are invited to further develop and explore them as a contribution to good practice.
45. These marks have been drawn together by staff of the Education Division, MPA and the Ministry Division. They are drawn out of the research on current good practice across the dioceses in 2013.
46. As presently drafted they describe healthy marks within a diocese. However, all of the marks can and should apply equally to parishes, benefices and fresh expressions of church.

A new theological conversation on discipleship and ministry

- a) As part of re-imagining ministry, the Ministry Council has drawn together a group of theologians, bishops and theological educators to work together to resource a new theological conversation on discipleship and ministry.
- b) This group will prepare the ground for a larger conversation between bishops, theologians and theological educators on these themes in September 2015, as part of the College of Bishops.
- c) It is hoped that following that conversation a group will develop fresh theological resources in this area for the General Synod in the next quinquennium.

A Revised Catechism

- a) The Catechism of the Church of England is an important but neglected document. Little use has been made of the catechism as an aid to teaching or as a resource for lived discipleship for many years (although the Pilgrim material is based to some extent on the catechism).
- b) The present Catechism is a faithful summary of Anglican belief yet is written primarily as a resource for children growing up into the faith in a predominantly Christian society rather than as a resource for children and adults aiming to live out their discipleship in a complex and changing world.
- c) However the Catechism is one very significant place where it is possible for the Church of England to reflect upon and express its common understanding of discipleship and, in commentaries and reflections, to resource this area of Christian life.
- d) The motion before Synod commends to the House of Bishops the need to develop and revise the Catechism in the next five years and to commission resources to help the whole Church explore and live out our common discipleship.

+Steven Sheffield

5 January 2015.

TEN MARKS OF A DIOCESE COMMITTED TO DEVELOPING DISCIPLES

In a diocese committed to developing disciples

1. ...A lifelong journey of discipleship and growth in Christian maturity is supported and modelled by all.

The diocese offers opportunities for nurturing faith, prayer and discipleship across all generations, so that all Christians continually grow as followers of Jesus in their understanding and their actions.

2. ...The importance of discipleship in daily life is affirmed.

Events, publications and statements at all levels of diocesan activity highlight and support the role of Christians living out their faith as they seek to build the Kingdom of God in the wider community, workplace and home.

3. ...Gatherings for worship celebrate the discipleship of all the baptised.

The discipleship of the whole people of God is celebrated in the liturgy by word and symbol in the worship of congregations and on diocesan occasions such as the induction of ministers into parishes.

4. ...Disciples are equipped to help others to become followers of Jesus.

The diocese offers deliberate planning and resourcing to enable congregations and individuals in their witness to Christ, and develops support networks with those involved in ministries such as lay evangelists or lay pioneers.

5.Diocesan work on vocations is based on the principle that all the baptised are called into God's service.

Vocations advisers strategically promote opportunities to work with all Christians to discern and develop their calling and ministry in both the world and the church.

6. ...Good practice in facilitating learning and formation is developed.

Laity, clergy and parishes are regularly resourced and equipped with high levels of expertise in using facilitation skills, learning methodologies and approaches to catechesis and formation.

7.Gifts of leadership are recognised and developed among all the baptised.

A share in spiritual leadership, governance and witness in the wider community is affirmed by lay and ordained alike, and such affirmation is embedded in diocesan processes (e.g. Articles of Enquiry, Mission Action Plans and Ministry Development Review).

8. ...Innovation and experiment are encouraged in mission, ministry and discipleship.

The diocese promotes and affirms new developments in forms of church life, in which disciples – lay and ordained alike - grow as they are released into new areas of active service and ministry.

9. ...Specific diocesan policies and plans promote discipleship development

As an integral part of diocesan strategy there are current theologically rooted plans, projects and programmes in place to encourage and resource discipleship development.

10. ...Diocesan resources are committed to the development of the whole people of God. Resources of staff and money and time are allocated, and their effectiveness in enabling discipleship development of all regularly reviewed and assessed.

Final version of the Ten Marks: produced by Education Division, Ministry Division and MPA following wider consultation with diocesan networks. December 19 2014

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