

Community Discipleship Review



There is a cost to discipleship. The pattern of the cross and resurrection is to be written deeply into the life of the disciple... 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.

General Synod Report, *Developing Discipleship*, February 2015

Introduction

The Discipleship, Vocation and Ministry Team has prepared this *Community Discipleship Review* which small groups or PCCs might wish to use, on a vision day or another similar occasion. 'Discipleship' can become jargon, but the reality it points to - modelling our lives on 'the most authentic pattern of living' we see in Jesus Christ - is absolutely central. All four Gospels are written so that those who later read them will listen with a mind to living as Jesus' disciples or apprentices, in the communities we now call churches. Discipleship has rightly become a high priority of the Church of England with a recent report and initiative called *Developing Discipleship*. Bishop Andrew Watson has highlighted the importance of discipleship for our diocese. This resource draws upon and can be used in tandem with the recent Church of England *Evidence to Action* materials on discipleship as well as with the materials that the *London Institute for Contemporary Christianity* have produced on whole-life discipleship, including the *Frontline* courses.

A review has to be comprehensive – 360° - if it is to be effective. So too, because our faith touches every part of our lives, this discipleship review must take in the whole of life. As a team, we have come to think of faith in four ways: rooted faith, sharing faith, working faith and responsible faith (and we have a handy graphic to go with it!) This simple tool can help to consider how our faith touches the whole of life.

- Rooted faith is about how *deep* our faith goes, and especially how prayer, Scripture and worship nourish us.
- Sharing faith is about expressing our faith *within* our relationships with others, face to face or virtual.
- Working faith is about *working out* our faith in the places we find ourselves: work, home, network or elsewhere.
- Responsible faith is about *living out* our faith as we face the wider issues of justice and peace in our day.

Collective self-assessment is hard, and to keep things simple, these questions require straightforward yes/ no answers. You could split a PCC or small group into four sub-groups to complete one section each before conferring in plenary. Or individuals could answer the questions and then compare their answers! We hope you will be encouraged by this process, even if it reveals areas of neglect and weakness in your church life. If such areas do come to light, we have suggested a way forward at the end. The key to using this resource is in the follow-up. Church culture is inevitably dynamic, and we are always seeking and sometimes finding what makes a faithful church. A good change process will look for small changes, so called 'one-degree shifts', rather than a blueprint.

Preparation

However, this is not a church OFSTED! Before embarking on this process, be still and ask God to help you. Read the following words of Jesus from John 15 slowly, using a *lectio divina* method.

I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.⁵ "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing....You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. This is my command: Love each other.

After the first reading: each person may say aloud the one word which strikes them.

After the second reading: each person may offer a brief, 30 second reflection on that word or on something else which has struck them.

After the third reading, pray silently or aloud.

ROOTED FAITH

1. How would you describe your church if it were:
 - an animal
 - a film or book?
2. Is your church a community where people experience and practice forgiveness and grace?
3. Does the *worship* in your church ever give you a sense of the *beauty and mystery* of God?
4. Does your church enable a deep, theological engagement with *the Bible*?
5. Are the *small groups* in your church enjoyable and 'joinable'?
6. Does your church encourage *different pathways* for people to grow in their faith, e.g. retreats/ pilgrimage/ mission trips, guided study, digital resources, creative forms of prayer?
7. Does your church equip people for *life's major challenges*, e.g. parenting, singleness, marriage, sickness and death?
8. Is your church community able to live creatively with difference and diversity?



ROOTED

Score /7

SHARING FAITH

1. Does your church *build the confidence* of its people in sharing their faith in Christ through invitation and / or words?
2. Does your church regularly run courses for *those 'just looking' or starting out on a journey of faith* in Christ?
3. Does your church provide opportunities to explore *the questions people in your church and your wider communities* are really asking?
4. Does your church create opportunities *to hear one another's stories* of how God is at work in your daily lives?
5. Is your church good at helping parents of baptised children to grow in their faith, and to nurture their children's faith in the home?
6. Would *visitors* get a good impression of your church from your communications, website, facebook, notice boards etc.?
7. Do you have *meaningful relationships with other churches* locally and globally?

Score

/7

SHARING

WORKING FAITH

1. Does your church help people *identify gifts and abilities* for serving God and others **when at church**?
2. Does your church help people *identify gifts and abilities* for serving God and others **when not at church**?
3. Does your church celebrate and pray when you have *new roles and new responsibilities* **outside the church**?
4. Do those in *full-time education* have an opportunity to think about how their faith affects their lives?
5. Are there opportunities to learn what is going on in one another's lives *Monday to Saturday*?
6. Is your *church 'business' well conducted*? E.g. with contracts, employees, volunteers, committee management.
7. Does your church *demand too much 'internal' commitment* to church activities and events?

Score

/7



WORKING

RESPONSIBLE FAITH

1. Does being part of your church make a discernible difference to the lifestyle decisions of its people?
2. Does your church enable volunteering to tackle current social issues in the wider community e.g. debt, food poverty, self-harm, homelessness?
3. Does preaching and teaching help your church reflect on the underlying reasons for these and other issues?
4. Do the intercessions at your church engage in prophetic prayer about these issues and the wider world?
5. Does your church engage with national and local civic authorities, as well as local and national community life (e.g. via events, forums, traditional/ social media)?
6. Does your church engage with a *Christian creation-care initiative such as [Eco-Church](#)*?
7. Is your church comfortable talking about giving, stewardship and the use of money?

Score

/7



RESPONSIBLE

LOOKING FORWARD

This may well have been a difficult process and after completing it, it is worth pausing again to pray and to listen to God. Having done that, **for each of the four areas of rooted, sharing, working and responsible**, on a piece of flipchart paper, you could do a simple SWOT analysis.

- What are the **Strengths** in what you've discovered?
- What are the **Weaknesses**?
- Remembering that God works in our weakness, what are the **Opportunities** hidden in apparent failures?
- Remembering that we are in a spiritual battle, what are the real **Threats** to our life together?

These responses can be kept and followed up on a later occasion, but focus now on the **opportunities**. Working in plenary, for each area, identify **just one** to take forward as a whole group (alternatively, the four smaller groups could work on one opportunity in the area they've just considered). After a brief discussion, you need decide on **one concrete action** you could take to engage with this opportunity.

Area	Opportunity	Action
Rooted Sharing Working Responsible		

For each proposed action, on a separate piece of flipchart paper, work through these questions below.

Who's going to lead it?
What resources do we need to take this forward?
Who can help us do it?
When will we start?
When will we next review?

If you would like to take this further, do contact Revd Matt Prior, Adult Discipleship Adviser Matthew.Prior@cofguildford.org.uk.