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Setting God's People Free

Summary Version

(for discussion in Deaneries & PCC's)

The Opportunity before Us

We have before us an amazing opportunity to impact our nation for Christ. 98% of the people in the Church of England are not ordained and spend 95% of our lives out in society. There we have the privilege and opportunity to serve Christ in every task we do, in every encounter we have, and every place we find ourselves – in the factory as well as the sanctuary, in the primary school as well as in the Sunday school, in the team meeting as well as in the prayer meeting.

The question is: how can we make the most of that opportunity?

*How can we, ordained and lay together,
enable one another to live out
the Good News of Jesus in all our life,
Monday to Saturday, as well as Sunday?*

Over the last century, we, the Church of England, have been much stronger at freeing and equipping God's people to serve Christ in church-based ministries than in their Monday to Saturday daily lives. And so the Archbishops' Council commissioned this report not just to analyse the situation but to help change it.

Setting God's People Free (SGPF) recognises that the Church exists in two forms – 'gathered' and 'sent'. The gathered church is the body of believers when we are worshipping together on a Sunday or during the week. The sent church is the body of believers when we are out in the world worshipping Christ by honouring and serving him in our various walks of life. Both are vitally important, but the focus of the report is on ensuring that what we do when we are gathered nurtures us for our role when we are sent.

SGPF proposes steps to nourish and communicate what is already working in parishes that have set out on this road. But it also proposes a number of new learning initiatives to complement those. Its aim is to see confident involvement, engagement, and leadership by lay people wherever they are called to serve in the world.

This summary focuses on the main points that are particularly relevant to local churches. The full report can be found here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/3858033/gs-2056-setting-gods-people-free.pdf>

The Way Forward

SGPF concludes that two vital shifts have to occur if all God's people are to be set free to fulfil our calling to evangelise the nation.

SHIFT 1:

We, ordained and lay, must teach and equip lay people to follow Jesus confidently in every sphere of life in ways that show the difference the Gospel makes.

A huge number of lay people serve in positions of influence and leadership in the church, home, community, workplace, and society. Therefore, we need to enable every member of our congregations – lay and clergy alike – to follow Jesus confidently wherever they are.

SHIFT 2:

We, ordained and lay, must recognise that we are all baptised equally into Christ, that we are equal in worth and status, complementary in gifting and vocation, mutually accountable in discipleship, and equal partners in mission.



Baptism in Christ is the primary sacrament and we are all equal under God through it. Lay people, like clergy, have callings and vocations. They just happen to be callings and vocations which do not require ordination. Somehow, however, many lay people feel like second-class Christians and can leave the task of mission in the world to those they see as more qualified – the ordained. At the same time, many clergy, though recognising the status that their ordination confers on them in many lay minds, often don't feel particularly powerful, and yearn for more lay people who are open to growing in discipleship. It is vital that we all, ordained and lay, play our roles.

These two shifts in thinking and practice would serve to create a fresh culture that communicates the all-encompassing scope of the good news for the whole of life; a culture that pursues the core calling of every church community and every follower of Jesus to form disciples following Jesus in the whole of their lives; a culture that celebrates our shared baptismal calling and the fruitful interdependence of our roles and vocations, and maximises the Church's fruitfulness in serving and witnessing in our nation. This is the culture towards which we are working.

Clarifying some Terms

A number of key words in this report can be understood in a variety of ways so it's important to be clear about how SGPF uses them.

A disciple is someone who's learning the way of Jesus in their context at this moment. Discipleship is the process by which this learning happens.

A subset of discipleship is leadership. This is not just about being a positional leader (manager, head teacher, etc.) but is also about being a relational leader, someone whose love, care and wisdom exercises influence in the church, the workplace, and daily life.

Monday to Saturday lives. This phrase is used as shorthand for our ordinary daily engagement in God's world when we are not gathered together in church or involved in church-based activities. Of course, people who work on Sunday come into that category too.

Clarifying the Challenge

Lay involvement and leadership across the gathered and sent Church is essential to the mission and life of the Church of England.

Only a very sketchy picture exists of the nature and scale of this vital contribution and there is little research about the support lay people would value or the pressures and opportunities they face. Indeed, one of the most significant challenges lay leaders say they struggle with is a perceived lack of understanding within the Church about their vocation and calling as people of influence in their wider communities and workplaces, whether they be plumbers or stockbrokers, shop assistants or, as in the quote below, a Senior Civil Servant and Diocesan Lay Chair:

'Interestingly or perhaps sadly, at no time did my clergy colleagues ever take any interest in my working life, ministry at work or offer to provide support such as prayer with regard to my employment. This was despite the fact they were aware of the pressure I was under due to the huge cuts in public finance that were affecting so many of the staff working for me, and my role as a senior leader in that situation.'

Encouragingly, there are many examples throughout the UK of innovative practice to equip lay people, but awareness of these initiatives is limited. The challenge, however, is not merely one of communication, but, first and foremost, of theology.



Our theology shapes our actions, our beliefs our way of life, so there is an urgent need to develop a robust theology of the identity and role of lay people in God's plan and to teach and communicate it widely. Within this, it is important to clarify that the work of mission is more than rescuing souls from a lost and degenerate world. Rather, it is a richer and more holistic endeavour, embracing the releasing and empowering of all God's people to be the Church in the world in order that the whole of creation might be transformed and restored in Christ. And it is vital for us to help Christians see how this actually works out day by day in schools and workplaces, in hospitals and clubs, in homes and social spaces, as well as in foodbanks and homeless shelters.

A strong theology of lay ministry is rooted in our common baptism into the priesthood of all believers and the understanding that discipleship is central to the whole of our life. It recognises that the whole church is called to minister in the world, and therefore leads naturally to a commitment to the education, nurture, and growth of lay people for their role in their specific contexts.

This lack of a robust biblical view of the laity has led to three damaging consequences:

- The voices of lay people are often little heard, or sought, in the shaping of the Church's priorities
- Relationships between clergy and laity are not always as healthy or fruitful as they might be, or understood to be mutually complementary
- The resources for lay discipling for both gathered and sent contexts are inadequate and funding is disproportionately allocated to clergy training. Yes, there is money for 'Reader' training but very little directed to whole-life discipleship. Indeed, there is often no overall vision for lay mission beyond church-based activities

Meeting the Challenge – Nationally and Locally

SGPF made a number of concrete recommendations across many areas of church life, identifying eight key levers of change. Four are particularly relevant to the way that the national church and dioceses operate. Specifically:

1. Reforming church structures and legislation to strengthen relationships between clergy and lay people
2. Bishops integrating an interest in and a concern for lay people into personal and Diocesan priorities, practices, and processes
3. Re-focussing clergy selection, training, and development to integrate a concern for the development and discipling of lay people
4. Reorienting church communications to create a balance between the historic focus on clergy and the Church as an institution and the central role of lay people in the life and mission of the Church in the world

Four other levers of change were identified that relate closely to the specific opportunities and challenges of local churches, each of which is described in a bit more detail below:

1. Developing a biblical vision for the role of lay people
2. Listening to lay people's experiences
3. Equipping lay people for their Monday to Saturday frontline ministries
4. Enhancing our gathered worship and liturgy to resource lay people for their Monday to Saturday lives



Developing a biblical vision for the role of lay people

When God's people realise that we can serve him in every action we do, wherever we are, then we are freed to do mission in our daily lives. For that to happen, though, we need a sustained and practical theological understanding of what lay engagement, leadership, discipleship, and formation looks like. And work has begun on this.

This will result in the creation of an inspiring biblical vision for lay Christians playing their vital role in engaging confidently with the urgent challenges and opportunities of our time. This might look like understanding how a plumber can bring peace and comfort to a family, or a barista hope to a lonely customer, or a sanitation worker beauty and health to a neighbourhood. It would offer foundations for instilling the Christian story across our schools, and re-imagining business enterprise in terms of the kingdom of God. It could help Christians recognise how hope can be brought to the most marginalised by doctors, lawyers, and care-givers, or by redeeming local and national politics.

Listening to lay people's experiences

How best can we understand and encourage the contribution, effectiveness, and needs of the lay people in the mission of the church?

One of the most encouraging things that we can do as we develop a theology of mission for lay people is to tell stories and share testimonies of what God is already doing in our daily lives. This will involve the development of a range of simple tools for parishes that enable us to understand the texture of each other's daily lives. Of course, any church can begin simply by creating a culture of asking each other questions about their Monday to Saturday lives, either formally in a service or informally over coffee, e.g. What will you be doing this time tomorrow? What are your challenges, joys, opportunities in your week? To listen properly to the voice of lay people, however, we will need to make time and this will require us to change the focus of our church life and practice.

It is vital to involve children and young people in this, to understand their contexts, help them see school, college, family, friendship, and leisure through Christ's eyes, equipping our young brothers and sisters for the fullness of life God has for them.

Equipping for Monday to Saturday

Bishop Graham Cray has said that 'Churches have to realise that the core of their calling is to be disciple-making communities, whatever else they do'. It is important, therefore, that every parish and member of the Church of England is able to access support and resources around discipleship, lay calling, and lay leadership. This would initially focus on six areas:

- 1. Calling:** all Christians are called, all have a 'vocation', and it is vital to develop practical support in helping all God's people understand their general calling to Christ, their particular calling to specific contexts, places or roles, and their unique gifting
- 2. Opportunity:** to help lay people explore and grow in their calling
- 3. Training:** easy to access practical, fit-for-purpose training for lay people's callings and skills development
- 4. Connections:** easy web access to tools, resources, etc.
- 5. Affirmation:** at a local church level, e.g. commissioning
- 6. Ongoing learning:** resources



Developing our gathered worship to resource lay people in all of life

Worship is the purpose of the church and the heart of our life as Christians. Given the focus of this report, two aspects of our gathered worship need greater emphasis. The first is to recover the emphasis on the common baptismal identity that clergy and lay people share. This may involve recovering the truth that Easter is the season of Baptism, with priests renewing their ordination promises at the Chrism Eucharist and congregations renewing their Baptismal vows on Easter Sunday.

The second emphasis is to help lay people make the connections between Sunday gathered worship and liturgy and our daily life. In line with Mark 3:14, where Jesus calls the disciples ‘to be with him and to be sent out’, our gathered worship and liturgy should reflect and celebrate midweek lives, and become the point where the gathered church is fed, commissioned, and sent into the world. This applies to every aspect of the service from the words of welcome to the prayer of dismissal. This is not, however, merely about creating new forms and emphases but about recovering and highlighting the rich whole-life heritage that is embedded in our existing liturgy.

Implementation Plan – Next Steps

Four key recommendations were made by SGPF and are being implemented as a matter of priority:

1. The national championing of the two key culture shifts. This work began in the spring of 2017.
2. The development of a national online portal for whole-life discipleship accessible by every member of the Church of England. The new Church of England website and digital resources will be rolled out from autumn 2017.
3. The establishment of a learning community of Dioceses committed to learning how to implement the two culture shifts and to sharing that learning. (In fact, 3 learning communities will be running from autumn 2017 to summer 2019.)
4. The remodelling of the selection, training and development of ministers in line with the priority of lay mission and discipleship. This work began in the summer of 2017.

It is, however, important to recognise that some churches, deaneries, and dioceses have already begun this journey. And so these national initiatives are partly about releasing, enabling, encouraging and communicating what is already emerging and already fruitful at local level. None of us need to wait for the results of these initiatives, we can begin now and contribute to the wider Church along the way.

The potential of a flourishing laity to contribute to the life, mission, and fruitfulness of the Church in this nation is almost boundless. And we all have our part to play in this. As Paul of Tarsus wrote:

*‘He is the one we proclaim,
admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom,
so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.
To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy
Christ so powerfully works in me.’*

Colossians 1:28-29



Responding to the Report – Some Discussion Questions

Here are some questions you may find helpful as you explore the report and its implications. They can be discussed by the PCC, Deanery Synod or small groups within the church. Wherever they are discussed it's important that the responses and actions are written down so that:

- *Each group or individual has a record of the specific steps or actions they have said they will take.*
- *Each group or individual can be reminded of these steps or actions at regular intervals to help us embed them in our day to day life*
- *Ideas and actions can be fed through to the leadership within the church to help inform prayerful thinking and planning.*

Change is often easier to imagine than to make happen, so as individuals and as church communities we need to find ways to help one another put things into practice. That is why there is such an emphasis in the questions on practical ideas and next steps. So try to be as specific as you can about what you think can change in your own life and in the life of your church. And try to find a way of prayerfully reminding yourself of the specific steps you have committed to take as you seek to follow the way of Jesus in all aspects of your life.

Current strengths

1. How does our church already support and encourage us in our lives beyond the walls of the church? What do you particularly appreciate?

Current connections

2. What specific contexts do you/we find ourselves in, Monday to Saturday? Where are you/we? Who are you/we already meeting?

Challenges and opportunities

3. What challenges do you/we face in those contexts? What opportunities for building relationships and Christian influence do you/we see?

What helps

4. What so far has helped you/us be fruitful in those contexts?

What else

5. What would help you/us be more fruitful for Christ in our Monday to Saturday lives? Would any of the following help:
 - More opportunities to pray together in large or small groups
 - Opportunities to share
 - Opportunities to seek wisdom for situations I'm facing
 - Opportunities for encouragement, testimonies
 - Opportunities to access specific teaching/training for key challenges we face?

Small steps

6. What one or two small steps could I/we take to help in the next month?

What one or two small steps could I/we take to help in the next 6 months?

What steps could I/we plan to take in the next year?

Other churches

7. In what ways might we work with other churches in the deanery to help each other's congregations have a greater impact in their Monday to Saturday lives?
 - Would it help to create network groups by trade or activity (eg. Christian teachers, carers, parents, artists, electricians, nurses) to share expertise and experiences, facilitate joint prayer for key challenges, engage in teaching and Bible study?

Anything else

8. Thinking about the report, what particularly struck you as important for you or for our church?



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