

GENERAL SYNOD

Progress of the implementation of Setting God's People Free (SGPF)

July 2019

Introduction

What is needed, first and foremost, is not a programme but a change in culture. A culture that communicates the all-encompassing scope of the good news for the whole of life, and pursues the core calling of every church community and every follower of Jesus – to form whole-life maturing disciples. And a culture that embodies in every structure and way of working the mutuality of our baptismal calling and the fruitful complementarity of our roles and vocations

(Setting God's People Free (GS2056) p. 5)

1. Setting God's People Free (GS2056), received by General Synod in February 2017, lays out a bold vision for the calling of all God's people to serve God's mission. The report identified two key shifts in our culture to help the Church of England to fulfil this vision: ***encouraging and equipping lay people to follow Jesus confidently in every sphere of life; and affirming and enacting the complementary gifting, vocation and mutual accountability in discipleship between lay and ordained followers.*** The type of change that the report calls for is not easy and will take time. However, in just over two years since the report was published, we are beginning to see signs that change is not only possible but, in God's grace, beginning to happen.
2. The implementation of SGPF hinges on four crucial elements:
 - a) Engaging a wide variety of people to use their roles and influence to embed this change across the life of the church – and coordinating that work.
 - b) Identifying the small shifts that make a big difference in equipping people to live out the Good News Sunday to Saturday – and putting these into practice.
 - c) Being attentive to what we learn as we try to make changes – and taking steps to measure this well.
 - d) Ensuring our approach to change is rooted in prayer – and placing discernment of how God is calling us at the heart of evaluating impact.
3. Implementing SGPF necessarily involves a wide range of stakeholders. This makes it a difficult and complex process to describe. Part of the implementation is how dioceses and the National Church Institutions (NCIs) are adapting their communications, training and resources – and how this is being connected and reinforced. This paper seeks to convey how this coordination of 'organisational change' is being undertaken. However, this is only one aspect of the work.
4. Initial plans for implementation included the proposal for a small grouping of 'pilot dioceses' to form a learning community to test out practical steps to foster confident faith across the whole of life and to explore how to affirm and enhance mutual following

for lay and ordained disciples. The response to take up implementation was overwhelming, with 25 dioceses participating. Several other dioceses have also adopted strands of work to implement the aspirations of SGPF. Through these networks the concrete task of identifying 'small shifts for a big difference' has begun. This includes a variety of initiatives across dioceses, within deaneries and through hundreds of worshipping communities. A selection of these activities are discussed below. The dozens of initiatives that dioceses and worshipping communities have begun are starting points where learning can be gathered to make sustained changes into the future.

5. The culture shift called for in Setting God's People Free is one that undergirds several important areas of work across the church. Within the Discipleship Learning Communities (DLCs) dioceses have been encouraged to use SGPF as a way of testing and adapting their vision for mission and ministry. As a result, there should be greater awareness in these places of a focus on 'everyday faith in everyday life', though the language of Setting God's People Free will not necessarily be used. Similarly, there are a variety of ways to embed the vision for the '*all-encompassing scope of the good news for the whole of life*' in the diverse traditions of the church.
6. This paper provides detail on the first two years of the initial phase of implementation, with an outline of planned activities for the third year. If approval for funding to continue this initial phase to 2022 is given, this will provide capacity to embed effective organisational changes, develop resources that have been fruitful in the pilot work, and focus on incorporating learning about leadership and ministry into future training and formation work.
7. This update is an interim report. A fuller report evaluating the Discipleship Learning Communities will be provided to General Synod in 2020. This report will outline the practical steps that can be taken by dioceses, leaders and worshipping communities to produce the change in our culture to which we aspire.

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Background

Will we determine to empower, liberate and disciple the 98% of the Church of England who are not ordained and therefore set them free for fruitful, faithful mission and ministry, influence, leadership, and most importantly, vibrant relationship with Jesus in all of life? And will we do so not only in church-based ministry on a Sunday but in work and school, in gym and shop, in field and factory, Monday to Saturday? SGPF (GS2056, p.1)

8. In introducing the debate on *Setting God's People Free* in February 2017, Canon Mark Russell noted that the topic and recommendations, summarised above, were not a new challenge, but one which required 'a clear strategy and an implementation plan to make them come alive'.
9. The culture change of SGPF is underpinned by two key shifts:
 - I. Promoting individual behaviours, collective structures and collaborative leadership that equips the whole people of God to follow Jesus confidently in every sphere of life; and
 - II. Enriching mutual recognition and support between lay and ordained followers.
10. Debate on the report affirmed the need for a strategic and sustained programme to stimulate deep-seated change in the culture of the Church of England across several areas. These included greater attention and resources to nurture the foundations of Christian formation for young and old; practical solutions to support Christians in leadership roles beyond the institutional church; a new approach to resourcing and training clergy in their enabling roles; the need to encourage laity in roles as people 'called in' to the church as well as to vocations 'sent out' in the world; the need to tackle our response to this challenge as adaptive change, particularly at the local level; and a focus for change that includes lay and ordained leaders across the church, listening and responding to a variety of perspectives.
11. The *Setting God's People Free* General Synod report (GS2056) recommended four priorities for immediate action to implement these shifts:
 - I. National championing of the two over-arching culture shifts
 - II. A national portal (digital resources) to inspire and support every member of the Church of England in 'all of life discipleship' and vocational journey
 - III. A learning community of 'pilot dioceses' that are prioritising both of the recommended culture shifts
 - IV. Re-modelling the selection, training and ongoing ministerial development of clergy in line with the priority of lay formation and discipleship.
12. These priority areas have shaped a programme of activities coordinated through the newly formed Archbishops' Council Evangelism and Discipleship Team (E&D). This work does not adopt a 'top-down approach' but seeks to engage energy and initiative for change across the church – in dioceses, deaneries and worshipping communities as well as in the work of the National Church Institutions (NCIs), Theological Colleges (TEIs) and a range of supportive agencies and partners.

13. The implementation of Setting God's People Free (SGPF) is held within a strand of work in Renewal and Reform with the overall aim of facilitating a change in the culture of the church, so that we can better *enable the whole people of God to live out the Good News of Jesus confidently in all of life, Sunday to Saturday* (see Appendix 1).
14. An implementation plan working with dioceses, across the NCIs, and with a range of partners, is 18 months into a three-year Strategic Development Funding (SDF) programme. This paper outlines progress on the four priorities for work in the initial report, noting indications of where change in culture is observable and highlighting areas for further work to drive this forward.

Progress on current implementation

15. Work on the implementation of SGPF recommendations began in June 2017 following a successful bid for funding from the Strategic Investment Board. A project team to coordinate the work was in place in November 2017. Interest from dioceses in joining the pilot process was greater than anticipated, leading to the decision to expand this area of work to include 25 dioceses in three cohorts (see Appendix 1).
16. Following the publication of SGPF, a significant number of diocesan synods have received and debated its recommendations. A discussion document which summarises the main SGPF report has also been widely distributed for use in deaneries and PCCs. The implementation of SGPF has been a focus of attention for Diocesan Lay Chairs through their national conference, with many taking active roles in direct implementation in their dioceses. Generating a wide ownership around the implementation of SGPF and enabling a range of initiatives to flourish is of vital importance to achieve the aspirations for change that SGPF calls for.

National championing of the two over-arching culture shifts

17. The programme has two appointed champions: Dr Jamie Harrison (Chair of the House of Laity) and Rachel Treweek (Bishop of Gloucester). Jamie and Bishop Rachel are strong advocates for SGPF in various contexts. This work is supported by a strong advisory group. As national champions, Jamie and Bishop Rachel are also active in ensuring that attention to implementation of SGPF recommendations remains a priority in the leadership and governance of the church.
18. Work to broaden and deepen the theological underpinning for SGPF has been undertaken through a sub-group of the Faith and Order Commission (FAOC), supported by staff from the Council for Christian Unity (CCU), E&D and the Ministry Division. This work has also included perspectives on lay ministry, and consideration of key theological themes emerging from other Renewal and Reform areas. **A discussion document entitled *Calling All God's People* has been approved by FAOC, to be published in July 2019 (See Appendix 2).** A colloquium event will be held in July 2019 to help move this work forward. This event will help develop a more comprehensive resource for ministerial education. Similarly, joint work with the Liturgical Commission is underway to build on learning around the development of liturgical resources to support the calling of all God's people. This work will develop learning from initiatives in pilot worshipping communities as well as those from within the National Church Institutions.

19. Ongoing attention is also being given to the need to deepen the setting of the mission and ministry of the whole people of God in a robust framework for appreciating God's transforming activity outside of, as well as through, the church. A range of partner organisations and networks with experience and insight into how to support Christians in their faith in everyday life have been identified, as well as particular callings or professions. Growing this network is a priority for the future, as is finding ways in which these groups can be supportive partners in diocesan initiatives.
20. A core feature of 'championing work' has included embedding and aligning the two SGPF culture shifts with other priorities. This includes ongoing work in the Ministry Division to develop more holistic approaches to speaking about vocation and supporting individuals in discernment; close working with the Education Division on how the *Growing Faith* (GS2121) focus builds learning around SGPF and facilitates better engagement around vocation with children and young people; and maintaining close links to the work of Mission and Public Affairs (MPA) and the Church Urban Fund (CUF) to support the Christian calling to transform society. **A key challenge in this wider work is how best to retain a clear focus on the SGPF shifts as foundational to the wider change we are seeking, without this limiting or complicating other focussed initiatives.**

A national portal to inspire and support 'all of life discipleship' and vocational journey

21. The development of digital resources has been taken forward in close collaboration with the Digital Communications Team in their comprehensive re-imagining of digital presence and engagement. The vision for a portal to operate as a 'direct channel to congregations' and individuals has been largely superseded by this work. The focus remains on how we can best use and develop our portfolio of digital channels and campaigns to '*inspire and support "all of life discipleship" and vocational journey for all members of the Church of England*'.
22. This work includes a focus on how our national communications can represent clearer images and accounts of the Christian life and calling of the whole people of God; how national campaigns, notably Christmas and Lent, affirm and address questions of faith across the whole of life; and how channels and campaigns that encourage an everyday faith can be identified, with the digital and print resources to support this.
23. Inroads have been made in each of these areas. A successful trial of the #EverydayFaith campaign ran in October 2018 and January 2019, and a fully resourced campaign is planned for January 2020. The channels developed by the digital team provide capacity for this to engage over 40,000 individuals and 10,000 churches. The individual reflections for 'a journey into everyday faith' will be linked to shared practices developed by churches in pilot dioceses that seek to enable a more confident, everyday faith.
24. A challenge in digital work is providing the appropriate balance between investing in national resources and adapting to and promoting the variety of resources from dioceses and partners that emerge to meet diverse needs and aspirations. A project is underway in 2019 to help identify the mechanisms that can be used to better facilitate this (Connected Disciples). This includes attention to how several dioceses have developed 'learning platforms' and digital resources to support approaches to 'a rule of

life.’ The aim of this work is to provide a central hub for connecting people to resources that help people to form and express faith in everyday life. The findings of this project will shape the next phase of work on digital resources in this area.

25. The development of digital resources also seeks to address issues of accessibility. These include using plainer language as a general principle, as well as an ongoing commitment to provide printed materials. Attention is also given to the new visual and voice technologies offering wider access to people with hearing or sight impairments. In time it is hoped that digital resources will also provide capacity for material to be produced in a wider range of languages.

A learning community of ‘pilot dioceses’ that are prioritising both culture shifts

26. Three Discipleship Learning Communities (DLCs) were established in 2018 as a mechanism for implementing SGPF. The DLC model was based on the successful work of the Strategic Learning Communities, modified to focus on the types of adaptive changes diocesan teams face in implementing SGPF in their context. Each diocese was asked to identify how to embed the SGPF culture shifts in their vision for mission and ministry and how to communicate this within their existing priorities or goals. To ensure this leads to tangible change, they also worked on how to apply the eight levers for change outlined in the report as specific actions for communications, training and resource development. In addition, each diocese was asked to work with at least ten ‘pilot parishes’ representing different traditions and contexts.

27. A DLC runs for 12 months with three learning events at six-month intervals. The gatherings focus on peer-to-peer interactions to sharpen and share learning on what activities best facilitate change. A phone call with the senior member of staff responsible for implementation in their dioceses is held between each event. This call offers support in the implementation of actions and gathers reflections on learning for future gatherings. Feedback from dioceses on the **initial learning and impact** of participation in the DLCs shows the learning communities have provided:

- I. A supportive yet challenging forum for enabling implementation and the setting of clear actions;
- II. A space to share ideas on best practice in nurturing Christian formation and witness;
- III. A process to test out, and develop evidence of, effective approaches for supporting faith in everyday life in their parishes and worshipping communities; and
- IV. A mechanism to map the resources and partner organisations useful in supporting this work.

28. As a result of participation in the DLCs, each diocese has an action plan for the implementation of the culture shifts called for in SGPF, connected to their vision and set in their strategic framework. **For most dioceses this is observable across a range of areas of activity**, i.e. in selection and training for ministers, in mission action planning, in parish level resources and broader communication. **For a small number of dioceses this has not yet translated to a broad impact.** Reflection from the

sponsors in these latter dioceses suggests this is because teams did not have the seniority to support sustained work on deeper change. They were, however, able to begin a range of positive projects to support faith in everyday life.

29. Scaling engagement through the DLCs has helped to facilitate conversations with an estimated 10,000 key influencers in deanery synods, open forum events, ministerial training events, lay conferences and parish development days. Work to engage with the desired number of pilot parishes has proved more challenging. Work with over 150 worshipping communities, including Fresh Expressions, church plants and a range of traditions and contexts, has begun. This number is set to rise as several dioceses remain at the beginning of this phase. Early examples of activities that might lead to sustained culture change include:

- I. A new suite of church resources for *Everyday Faith* linked to a re-alignment of ministerial training and development priorities.¹
- II. The introduction of *Personal Discipleship Plans* with structured conversations for individuals with mentors or in triplets to open and re-focus work on vocations.²
- III. The use of congregational surveys and structured conversations to help worshipping communities implement practices that support faith in everyday life.³
- IV. The adaptation of processes for clergy recruitment and ministerial development to include greater attention to the “enabling” elements of ministry.⁴

30. Work with parishes has been inhibited by the lack of appropriate tools to provide data on the ‘depth of discipleship’ and the impact of interventions and initiatives. A variety of approaches to address this are being trialled. Work towards appropriate measures has been greatly enhanced by connecting with work in the Research and Statistics Unit on *The Big Church Survey* project. This survey has been developed to give data on patterns and perception of Christian life and witness in a given worshipping community, demographic or geographic area. Similarly, work to develop tools to help worshipping communities identify specific interventions, monitor their impact and identify key learning forms part of the work with pilot parishes. This is being linked to similar work to monitor the effectiveness of projects funded by the Strategy and Development Unit (SDU).

¹See: <https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/ministry-for-mission/discipleship/everyday-faith>

²See <https://www.oxford.anglican.org/pathways/everyday-faith/>

³See <https://www.canterburydiocese.org/changing-lives-conversations/>

⁴ See <https://www.chester.anglican.org/ministry/continuing-ministerial-development/ministerial-development-review/>

31. Common challenges to implementation include:

- I. Holding a clear focus on the aspirations of SGPF in a context where ‘change initiatives are coming out of our ears.’ This includes diocesan-level initiatives as well as national activities.
- II. Lack of resources in working with worshipping communities – where ‘change takes longer and needs people to nurture.’
- III. Finding a proper balance of integration between diocesan and national initiatives.

As might be expected in such a large-scale process, the pace of change varies from place to place. The DLC process therefore focuses on the impact of initiatives and the learning that can be drawn from this. A constant thread in action-setting is also to ensure activities focus on supporting people to live out their faith in everyday life. Whilst attention to lay involvement in governance and lay ministry is important, it is this dimension of culture change that remains a priority.

32. The first wave of DLCs finished in June 2019. An evaluation report with key learning will be published in autumn 2019. The report will provide case studies of initiatives, recommendations and resources for how these might be developed more broadly. It will also include learning from dioceses not involved in the DLC cohorts, where other initiatives mirror the aspirations of SGPF. Further DLC cohorts are planned for 2020. Invitations have been sent to participate and nine dioceses have expressed interest. A further four have declined to participate, but outlined how they intend to implement SGPF in other ways.

Re-modelling the selection, training and on-going ministerial development in line with the priority of lay formation and discipleship

33. Staff in the Ministry Division have engaged in a consultation process around the re-modelling of selection criteria for ordained ministry, which included a focus on lay formation, discipleship and collaborative leadership. This has led to clear proposals for the inclusion of new criteria that affirm this need in the *Future Clergy* recommendations. The Ministry Council has affirmed its commitment to the aspirations of SGPF in discussions of its vision for ‘*Ministry for a Christian presence in every community*’. This work is core to the implementation of SGPF and will gain further traction as this fresh vision shapes work nationally and across dioceses.

34. As noted above, dioceses in the DLCs have already begun to implement changes to the continuing ministerial development they provide. This includes a focus on how lay formation and collaborative ministry are included as questions for reflection in the Ministerial Development Review process. Attention has also been given to leadership development work, including how clergy can be supported in their roles, the widening of support for lay leaders in dioceses and provision for Continuing Ministerial Development.

35. Further work in this area will draw on how the theological enrichment work with FAOC, on *Calling All God's People*, and the grounded analysis of learning from the DLCs can be best used to help theological educators in colleges and dioceses explore

approaches to initial and ongoing ministerial formation. A further area of work to be developed lies in links to the chaplaincy sector. The role chaplaincy plays in supporting faith in everyday life is a crucial area of ministry within dioceses. Similarly, the role that chaplains can play in enabling a greater focus on how to equip confident witnesses and holistic calling has been identified as significant resource.

36. It is important to note that several developments in lay ministry are pertinent to this priority. Several dioceses in the DLCs have used the DLC process to explore how ordained and lay ministry can better enable the calling of the whole people of God. In addition, the Central Readers Council has initiated a series of events looking at the shape of reader ministry and how this can be better focussed on enabling teaching of the faith (catechesis), enabling mission (as faith in everyday life) and enhancing collaborative leadership.⁵ As the introduction to this resource states: *the theme that links the three foci is that of everyday (or Sunday to Saturday) faith, and the urgent need within the church for skilled teachers who can take us all deeper in faith, enable us to live this faith in the everyday circumstances of life, and so give a lead in church and society.* This is a significant opportunity for widening the resources available to help local church communities to be 'everyday faith' churches. Supporting this initiative will be a continuing area of joint work with the Ministry Division, alongside the newly appointed Lay Ministries Officer.

Future activities to 2020

37. Effective progress has begun in each of the four priority areas. Work with the dioceses in the DLCs has been given the greatest attention and resources. A further ten dioceses have expressed interest in joining a fourth cohort of the DLCs. Several dioceses not involved in the DLC process have also independently aligned their work to the implementation of SGPF. **A new *Disciple Enablers Network* will be established to facilitate shared learning with colleagues in dioceses**, including several new diocesan posts to resource lay formation and calling. These activities are an integral part of the work of the Archbishops' Council Evangelism and Discipleship Team, and an aspect of how SGPF is being integrated into the 'motivate the million' strategy (GS 2118).
38. Work with pilot parishes will continue into 2019 and 2020 with the aim of **engaging 10,000 individuals in contextually defined initiatives to implement SGPF principles across at least 300 communities**. This activity will help to provide case studies on core learning. As part of this, attention will be given to **designing and testing an accessible set of measures on depth of discipleship, and to monitoring the impact of projects**.
39. A series of learning events in different locations are planned in 2020 to share findings from the DLCs and to resource work at a parish/worshipping community level. These will follow the first fully resourced Everyday Faith campaign in January 2020. A key aim for these activities is to provide momentum for national and diocesan implementation plans.

⁵ See https://www.readers.cofe.anglican.org/u_d_lib_pub/p348.pdf

40. Further targeting of digital resources will be identified in 2019 and developed in tandem with the next phase of the Digital Communications strategy. Initial testing of the 'Connected Disciples' work will offer a viability assessment on any ongoing investment in a 'digital portal' infrastructure.
41. Joint work with the Ministry Division will continue on how best to emphasise the calling of God's people to serve God's mission in God's world, and to specific calls to lay and ordained ministry. This will include an evaluation and sharing of best practice in this area in the vocations processes dioceses are adapting. In addition to this, attention will be given to how best to support the types of ministerial formation and training that the Future Clergy review identifies.

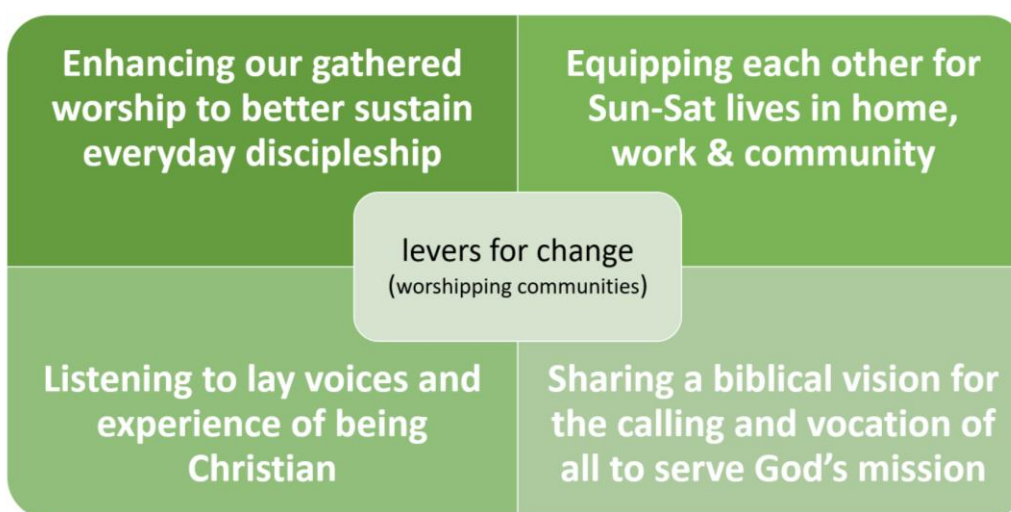
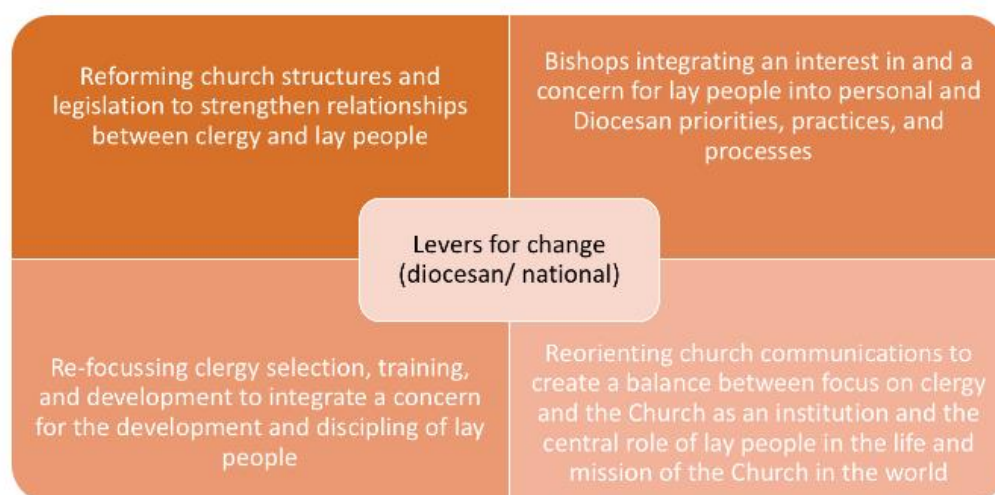
Appendix 1: Additional information on SGPF implementation

Dioceses participating in the Discipleship Learning Communities

| Cohort 1 Jan 2018 – Jan 2019 | Cohort 2 May 2018 – May 2019 | Cohort 3 June 2018 – June 2019 | Cohort 4* Feb 2020 – March 2021 |
|--|--|---|--|
| Chester Gloucester Newcastle Southwark Carlisle Chichester Leeds Portsmouth St Edmundsbury and Ipswich | Leicester Oxford Bath & Wells Sheffield Durham Winchester Rochester Norwich | Hereford Canterbury Lincoln Blackburn Lichfield Liverpool <i>Ely (until May 2019)</i> <i>Birmingham (until Sep 2018)</i> | Birmingham Bristol Derby Exeter Europe Guildford Manchester London Truro |

*confirmed interest at time of writing.

Summary of the 'eight levers for change' from Setting God's People Free



Appendix 2: Faith and Order Commission discussion paper: Calling all God's People – Theological Overview

Introduction

1. 'Baptism marks the beginning of a journey with God which continues for the rest of our lives, the first step in response to God's love' (Pastoral Introduction, Church of England baptism service). This journey of faith in Christ is lived out day by day, in every kind of situation. That includes our homes and families, the places where we work or socialise, and the groups that we join. Christ the light of the world is always present, and by serving him in the midst of the realities of daily life, we 'shine as lights in the world' (Phil. 2.15).
2. The church exists as people respond to the word and works of God, by following Christ every day in the varied circumstances of their relationships and occupations, and by meeting in Christ's name as worshiping communities, to offer praise and prayer and to receive God's grace in the ministry of word and sacrament. These two aspects of being the church should not be separated from each other, nor should one be subordinated to the other. The church is one with Christ as it shares in God's mission in every part of society, and the church is one with Christ in its joyful gathering to celebrate his resurrection.
3. All sorts of people support the life of worshiping communities, in all kind of ways. All sorts of people share in God's mission in the world, in all kinds of ways. That has always been true, but it is true in a context that is changing, at times with disorienting rapidity. Yet the journey of faith remains a call to all God's people, and an invitation to explore.
4. What ways do we have of recognising, valuing, and encouraging all this activity? Where does it fit into our theological pictures of God and the church? The short text that follows seeks to show how reflection on three key themes from Christian tradition – calling, discipleship and ministry – can help us find common points of reference for addressing these questions together, within the creative diversity of the Church of England.

Who does God call?

'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)

5. God's call to humanity begins with **creation**. To be made – uniquely – in the divine image and likeness is to be called for a purpose, for God and in relationship to God (Gen. 1.26–28; cf. Gen. 2.15). We live in God's world, and, wherever we go, God is present, and God is at work, calling us to fulfilment by sharing in that work. Yet from the beginning, the human race has listened to other voices and turned away from God's will.

6. For the sake of all humanity, now marked by sin and death, God calls a **people**: to belong to him, to proclaim his praise and to serve him in holiness (Exodus 19.6; 1 Peter 2.9). This calling comes as a gift from God that we receive together in baptism, alongside those who have gone before us and those who will come after us. We are called to be part of God's people in our generation, to share in its common life and common task, for the sake of the world.
7. The life of God's people is characterized by freedom: we belong together because we have been liberated by God's grace, to proclaim God's mighty acts. In the words of the Song of Zechariah (the Benedictus) from Luke 1.68–79 (traditionally used at Morning Prayer), we give thanks day by day that God has set us free: 'Free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.'
8. The word translated 'worship' here also means 'serve' in a more general sense. Worship is the service we offer in addressing the one who has delivered us, and witness is the service we offer in our interaction with other people, including those who do not yet know God's 'marvellous light'. The two are inseparable from one another: in our worship, we witness to God's saving action, and in our witness, we invite all to share in worship of the one saviour (cf. Is. 43.8–21). We are set free to serve God in worship and witness 'all the days of our life' – not just on Sundays, not just at special moments or when we meet with other Christians, but every day, every moment.
9. God calls us as a people, and God calls **each one** of us. Within the common calling of God's people, every person has a unique calling. In the Gospels, we see people responding to God's call in Christ in different ways, as Jesus asks different things of them.
10. In responding to God's call and finding our place among God's people, we accept commitments that mark us in deep and lasting ways. We can refer to acceptance of such life-shaping commitment as a calling, or a **vocation**, that we receive from God. Vocations can be of different kinds, and we may have more than one at a time.
11. Christians have used the language of vocation to talk about three intersecting areas: work, relationships and ministry. Accepting a commitment to a specific occupation, profession or sphere of work in response to God's call, to share in God's work in God's world, becomes a vocation. So does accepting a commitment to another person in marriage and family life, or to a religious community or to celibacy. So does accepting a commitment to serve the church in a lifelong ministry, or in a specific place.
12. Paul stresses in his description of the church as Christ's body that each of us receives gifts from God, and none should be singled out as intrinsically superior to others (Rom. 12.3–8; 1 Cor. 12.4–31). Similarly, the diversity of vocations in the church should not be turned into a hierarchy but rather affirmed and celebrated. The Protestant Reformers of the 16th century sharply challenged the assumption that vocations to priestly ministry or religious community were superior to vocations to everyday occupations or family life. In the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer (1662), the Second Collect for Good Friday expresses this very clearly:

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified: Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee for all estates of men in thy holy Church, that every member of the

same, in his vocation and ministry, may truly and godly serve thee; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

13. The idea that every member of the church has a vocation within the common calling of God's people for the common good is very powerful – and challenging too. It is vital in the contemporary context of the Church of England that we uphold it and explore its implications together. Only in the wonderful variety of individual vocations – to work (paid or unpaid), to relationships, to ministry – can the common calling of the church be fulfilled.

How should we respond to God's call?

'But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.' (Matthew 6.33)

14. Christians are people who have heard God's call in Jesus Christ. Our response is first and foremost to follow Christ – to **be his disciples**. Discipleship is about receiving before it is about giving, about listening before it is about speaking, about relationship before it is about activity. Our response to God's calls is first and foremost to receive from, listen to and be in relationship with Christ: 'And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons.' (Mark 3.14–15). Whatever we may be sent out to do in his name must flow from being with him.
15. As Christ's disciples, we need to keep putting ourselves in a place where we can grow deeper in relationship with him. Some Christians find it useful to have a 'rule of life' (as it is traditionally known) which sets out some basic parameters for this. It might include, for instance, commitments about a pattern of daily prayer, regular public worship (including frequency of receiving the Eucharist), studying the Scriptures and acts of service towards others. It might reflect the specific vocations we have, and the opportunities, challenges and limits that come with them. The 'disciplines' of discipleship will not be the same for everyone, but if we are serious about following Christ day by day, we need a rhythm of life that helps us to be continually attentive to him.
16. Jesus taught his followers to '**strive first for the kingdom of God** and his righteousness' (Matt. 6.33). The proclamation of God's kingdom in word and deed is fundamental to the gospel and goes right back to the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Mk 1.14–15). The kingdom is the subject of much of his teaching (especially the parables), and it lies at the heart of the prayer he taught his disciples. The New Testament makes it clear that God's kingly rule is uniquely present in the person of Jesus Christ, and that following him therefore draws us into the kingdom and begins to unravel sin's disruption of creation, as we pray in his name, 'your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as in heaven'.
17. Although, as we have seen, these two aspects of the church are inseparable from one another, and feed into and enliven each other, we may sometimes feel a tension between serving God by supporting the worshipping communities of the church and serving God by being present as the church in God's world. We have limited time and resources: so how much should go into sustaining the life of the worshipping community, with its acts of worship, community life, various meetings and organizational structures, and how much into striving for God's kingdom on earth, in the

local community around us, wider society, our place of work, our family and friends who are disconnected from the church? There is a persistent danger that those who are closely involved in the life of worshipping communities stress the first at the expense of the second, and this has clearly been the case at times in the Church of England.

18. Reflecting on the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church can help us here. It has been said that the church is sign, instrument and foretaste of the kingdom. The church should show what God's kingdom is about, in and to the world. To do this, the church needs its members to care for its common life and its growth into the fullness of Christ, and the church needs its members to be present and active in the world, longing for God's reign to be known in every part of this earthly life, including the communities around us with their particular needs. How should the Christian community be striving for God's kingdom and God's justice in this village, this town, this city, this nation, across every part of political, social and cultural life? The question cannot be answered unless the church is transformatively present throughout political, social and cultural life, and the Church of England therefore needs to affirm, identify, support and equip vocations to work in every part of the nation's life.
19. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus begins his public ministry by announcing: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news' (Mark 1.15). Because the kingdom has drawn near in Jesus Christ, there is a gospel to share, and the heartbeat of the church is the sharing of this gospel with the world. There is no part of the 'world' where the church is not called to be, because there is no person, community or situation to which the gospel is not addressed.
20. Each person in the church has a part in this calling to **make the gospel known**. For some, this takes the form of a specific vocation to be evangelists, a term that is found in the New Testament itself. They might also be termed missionaries, missionaries, or pioneers; whatever terminology is used, this is a vocation to be honoured and supported. It may require commitment to the community and place in which one is currently living, or it may ask for willingness to leave what is familiar and cross cultural or national barriers.
21. All Christians are called **to witness to Christ** in their daily lives and everyday encounters, through words, through action and through prayerful presence. In his encounters with his disciples after his death and resurrection, Jesus made them his witnesses, to the ends of the earth (Acts 1.8; cf. Matt. 28.19-20, Luke 24.48). The whole church is called to follow Christ, seek God's kingdom, make the gospel known and witness in the world, valuing the varied gifts and vocations that have been given for this purpose, and the beautiful pattern that emerges when they are fully woven together.

Are we all called to ministry?

'Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.' (1 Cor. 12.4-7)

22. To many people, this will seem like a strange question. Some will think the answer is obviously no, 'ministers' being a designated category within the life of the church, associated with specific and weighty responsibilities and restricted to a relatively small

number of people. Some will think the answer is obviously yes, because every member of the church is given gifts for the upbuilding of others (1 Cor. 12.4–7), and to exercise these is to engage in ministry.

23. While the Book of Common Prayer, in a passage already quoted, can speak of the ‘vocation and ministry’ of ‘every member’ of the church, it also characteristically uses the term ‘the Minister’ to refer to the ordained person who is officiating in public worship. For much of Anglican history, only deacons, priests and bishops would naturally be referred to as ‘ministers’. With the advent of Readers in the nineteenth century, the Church of England introduced a new distinction between ‘lay’ and ‘ordained’ ministers.
24. The lack of precision in terminology about ministry in the Church of England stems in part from the New Testament itself. Part of the challenge is that the earliest Christians generally used a very common, everyday word in places where you find ‘ministry’ or ‘minister’ in English translations. *Diakonia* can also mean ‘**service**’, in the sense of what a servant does. Sometimes in the New Testament that is clearly what is intended, while at other times it has a more technical sense, referring to something done on behalf of Christ and therefore also of the church – to a **commissioned task**, which brings responsibility and accountability to the one commissioning it.
25. One of the key biblical passages here is Ephesians 4.11–14, which can be read in two different ways, to support both of the responses to the question identified at the start of this section. You can argue for a more restricted understanding of ministry by punctuating the passage like this:
- The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ... (Eph. 4:11–12)
- Read in this way, ‘the work of ministry’ is equated with ‘equipping the saints’, as something done (only) by apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.
26. On the other hand, most modern translations omit the comma between ‘saints’ and ‘for the work of ministry’, so that the role of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers becomes ‘to equip the saints for the work of ministry’, i.e. **ministry is something done by everyone**. There are good exegetical reasons for adopting this second position.
27. If we accept this second way of reading Ephesians 4.11–12, it still leaves open the question of precisely what is meant by ‘ministry’ – remembering that the same Greek word can also mean ‘service’. The danger is that we begin with the assumption that ‘ministry’ means something along the lines of what the clergy do in our current perception, then open our Bibles to discover that all are called to ministry and therefore decide that everyone is called to join in with the clergy’s work. That has at times generated an unhelpful conflict in which those who are clergy feel their distinctive role is not understood or appreciated, and those who are not clergy feel that whole areas of church life that should be open to all are being fenced off with ‘Keep out!’ signs.
28. It is useful to hear that underlying note of ‘service’, not just in Ephesians 4.12, but whenever we use the word ‘ministry’. The previous section tried to resist playing off service in the worshipping community and service in the wider world as competing for

attention and resources: both belong to our striving as disciples for the kingdom of God. We might now go a step further and say that the calling of each disciple will normally include *both* the exercise of gifts that build up the body of Christ, which we can refer to as ministry, *and* ways of serving Christ in our wider community and society, as **twin aspects of 'the work of ministry / service'** spoken of in Ephesians 4.12. Moreover, the work of ministry / service to Christ by which we build up one another will have as one of its primary aims equipping one another for the work of ministry / service to Christ among the people, communities and institutions of their daily lives.

29. Within the work of ministry in the Church of England, **clergy** are called both to specific responsibilities and to a pattern of life. It is a vocation that marks them with an enduring 'character'. This picture is set out in its historic formularies, its contemporary ordination services and its ecclesiastical legislation. The Church of England holds that the three orders of ministry – deacon, priest and bishop – have been given to the whole church of God in the providence of God and derive from the ministry of the apostles. That does not mean that all the roles and tasks associated with these orders stay the same forever; indeed, we are living through a time of significant transition in this respect.
30. There is also a renewed awareness of the importance of flexibility and creativity in licensing, authorising and simply encouraging **many other ministries** in the Church of England alongside ordained ministries. These too are needed 'for building up the body of Christ'. Some of them will be roles that people take on for a limited period, some that, as with ordained ministries, they take on for life – that become a lasting vocation.

Conclusion

31. In the Introduction, it was said that 'The church is one with Christ as it shares in God's mission in every part of society, and the church is one with Christ in its joyful gathering to celebrate his resurrection.' Christ is not divided, and these two aspects of the life of the church cannot be separated from one another. Neither should be thought of as only a secondary 'means' to enable the other. Those who would journey with Christ day by day gather together week by week to share the peace of Christ, to build up one another as members of his precious body, and to be sent in that same peace to the many and varied contexts where they live out their calling to share in God's work.