

Calling All God's People

The calling, discipleship & ministry of laity in the Church of England: A chronological review of significant reports and initiatives

1. The Church of England has, on frequent occasions in recent church history, acknowledged the urgent priority to do far more to release the potential of the whole people of God. There has been a steady stream of reports and initiatives on the role of the laity since the 1940s. The issue has been tackled from several different angles, including the role of the laity in evangelism, the role of the laity in discipleship, and the role of the laity in formal and informal ministerial roles. The Church of England's engagement with lay issues may be tracked across three distinct periods in the last 80 years. Common themes around calling, discipleship and ministry emerge in each of these periods.
2. This review seeks to plot a storyline of the understanding and action around these themes that the church as an institution has sought to grapple with and advance. The themes of calling, discipleship and ministry of the laity are interwoven in these reports. Some reports attempt to draw connections and links between them, but few seek to build any form of formal typology. This review does not seek to develop a definitive framing of the relationship between the calling, discipleship and ministry of the laity. Instead, comment will be offered on the ways in which these themes can be seen to intersect, with indication of what further reflections might be useful.
3. It should be noted that this is a review of institutional discourse and action. It presents an overview of the Church's reports on 'an issue' (or series of issues). It does not consider, for instance, the impact of wider networks on the formation and expression of faith for ordinary Christians (i.e. ecumenical activities, parachurch organisations, movements, pilgrimages and festivals, etc). Similarly, it does not assess the different ways in which participation and engagement in church life has adapted and altered at a local level. Many of the reports attest to the ways in which the laity have been marginalised in institutional discourse, and some of these seek to affirm new patterns and practices 'on the ground'. However, a separate assessment of the influence of broader non-institutional movements that shape the contemporary expression of Anglicanism is perhaps also merited as a 'story line'.

Post-War to the 1960s

4. The period from the 1940s to the 1960s was in many ways the height of the twentieth-century ecumenical movement as the Church of England worked with other European churches to encourage the rebuilding of Europe and to grow the role of the European churches in post-war civil society.
5. Starting in the immediate post-war period, a Church Assembly Report from 1949 on *Evangelism and the Laity* was produced in response to *Towards the Conversion of England*, Archbishop Temple's seminal 1946 collection of essays. The report suggests how the laity can and should play a greater part in evangelism. Examples of ideas offered include cell groups in workplaces, specifically 'Christian' activities (such as family prayer and Bible study groups) at home and involvement by the laity in charitable and voluntary initiatives in the Church and the community. As might be expected given the origins of the report in the Temple document, the focus is on laity as part of the 'evangelistic effort', supported by the clergy with little or no discussion of Christian leadership. Given that the report argues for a range of decentralised and spontaneous

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initiatives, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is no implementation plan or any metrics for tracking results.

6. There were no further Church-sponsored reports on lay issues, but 1963 saw the publication of two important books by academic theologians on the role of the laity. Kathleen Bliss's *We the People*, (London, SCM Press, 1963) situated its vision of the laity in the post-war global ecumenical movement but there is also an acknowledgement of how articulate, confident lay people might help the Church's mission in a rapidly secularising external context. Bliss argued that the Church focused too much on lay people carrying out menial roles in church at the expense of their role in wider society. She queried whether the Church equips lay people sufficiently to understand their faith and to explain it to others, and argued that – thus equipped – laity might play a role in bridging the gap between the Church and secular culture.
7. Similar points are made in Gibb's and Morton's seminal *God's Frozen People: A Book for and about ordinary Christians* which argued that the laity are best equipped to evangelise in the wider culture since (they claimed) the Church had become ossified and had forgotten how to do so. The authors subsequently went on to found the Audenshaw Foundation which published papers on public issues.
8. A related strand of work in this period emerged around the 1968 Lambeth Conference. The *Lambeth Essays on Ministry* (London, SPCK, 1969) was one of three volumes written as preparatory studies for the attending bishops, alongside collections of essays on Faith and Unity. The preface from the then Archbishop Michael Ramsey also noted that these essays were intended for a wider readership as 'independent considerations of some of the great issues which confront the Christian Church at this time.' The essays on ministry notably start with the role of Laymen (sic) in mission, society and in ministry. The writers build on statements given at the 1958 conference that sought to orientate a foundational understanding that the whole church is called to serve in 'ministry' and notably that this is a primary calling of the Laity; 'serving [God] in their daily work and witness'. Noting that this might involve callings to serve in the 'mission fields' overseas, the essays sought to emphasise the need to recognise the secular society in the UK as such a destination. In recognition of this the essays articulate a vision for the church that orientates its ministry to support this calling. This includes initiatives to train clergy as 'resource men and enablers' (sic) for the laity in society and some laity in similar roles as chaplains in institutions and industry.

1970s, 80s and 90s

9. There appears to have been a long gap in 'official' Church of England statements on the role of the laity until the publication of *All Are Called: Towards a Theology of the Laity* in 1985 by a specially-established Working Party on the Theology of the Laity. The context for establishing the Working Party seems to have been an acknowledgement that the lay issues raised in the 1960s had not been sufficiently addressed. The report argued that laity were still seen primarily as 'non-ordained' and their role and ministries subordinate to those of the clergy. It takes a side-swipe at what it sees as the Church's focus on its internal structures rather than on its secular task of transforming the world. The report identified four areas of lay 'ministry', to include 'churchly ministries', 'ministries with family, friends and neighbours', 'Monday morning ministries' and 'Saturday night' ministries. Despite this helpful breakdown of different types of lay

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roles, the report made no clear recommendations and was more a series of (coately argued) essays and perspectives.

10. *All Are Called* named a variety of understandings within the Church as to the nature of ordained ministry. This was raised as a key issue in relation to discussions about lay vocation. The theology of ordained ministry – and a culture of clericalism - has a bearing on discussions of lay people in potentially casting lay vocation as second class and sucking energy into internal Church structures. The authors called for greater parity of esteem to be given by the Church to those exercising different ministries. Within this, the challenge of whether many lay people ‘would frankly ‘rather not be called’’ is raised. The need for education and training highlighted but avoided the risk of deducting the nature of lay training from the educational needs of clergy.
11. Two years later, in 1987, the Board of Education issued a report, *Called to Be Adult Disciples (GS 794)*, to General Synod in response to *All Are Called*. The report made a series of ambitious recommendations to ‘encourage a climate in the Church of England in which the laity’s gifts are valued and developed with respect to Christian discipleship in the whole of life’. The recommendations ranged across a number of different areas of the Church, from parishes (use of liturgy, discussion groups for lay people, adult Christian learning), to dioceses (each Bishop to appoint a senior member of staff with a responsibility ‘to focus and develop the role of the laity in the dispersed church’) to the national Church (issuing of liturgical resources, changes to theological education, inclusion of lay people on national boards and councils).
12. Although *Called to be Adult Disciples* did not have a clear implementation plan or structure for accounting for progress made, subsequent reports indicate that it did set off some productive developments, including the hiring in many dioceses of a Lay Development officer or equivalent role. However, as John Hull noted in his book *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning* (London, SCM 1985) approaches focused on learning-based models for Christian formation have to contend with a ‘cultural collusion’ in which laity might resist initiatives to ‘learn to live out faith.’ Hull cited several reasons for this: the privatisation of religion and the tendency to see this part of life as ‘a haven from the complexity’ of modern life is one, and another is the perception that learning (especially that connected to catechesis) is for children. Ironically, as Hull concluded, this leads most adult Christians to settle for a childish experience of faith resistant to its complexities and ambiguities, refusing to learn since ‘learning would have been confusing. Learning would have violated the simplicity of the haven.’ (Hull, 1985, p. 10).
13. Throughout the mid-90s into the millennium a highly active Adult Christian Education Network developed in dioceses, supported by staff and a working group at the Board of Education/National Society. This group encouraged dioceses and local churches to adopt more intentional educational strategies through their publications and resources (see, for instance, *Tomorrow is another country: education in a post-modern world* (GS Misc 467, 1996)).
14. In parallel to developments in Adult Christian Education, the Advisory Board of Ministry’s 1995 consultation paper, *Our Common Calling*, highlighted the need to recognise the lay vocation and to ensure collaborative ministry at parish level in order to reduce tension between the roles of laity and clergy that many felt to be present in these contexts.
15. In 1999 the Advisory Board of Ministry’s working group issued a progress document on its initiatives entitled *Called to a New Life: The World of Lay Discipleship* (GS Misc

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546). The report found that after a flurry of activity in the late 1980s following *All Are Called*, funding for lay development posts had been cut and the Church's strategic focus had moved towards ordained and Reader ministries. Despite the progress which they agreed had been made, the report's writers noted that 'There is a deep and profoundly disturbing gap between intention, strategy and the reality of what is actually happening in many parishes.' Hull's analysis is helpful in appreciating why this activity failed to make the impact it had intended.

Millennium and Beyond

16. Just as the Church of England's thinking on the laity in the 1940s and 1950s had arisen out of its broader interest in the ecumenical movement, an increasing focus on diversity from 2000 onwards brought the issue of the laity to the fore. Consideration of discipleship and ministry as connected, and not separate issues, also appears to have been given renewed focus.
17. In 2000, a report by the Stephen Lawrence Follow-Up Staff Group entitled *Called to Lead: A Challenge to Include Minority Ethnic People* (GS Misc 625) noted the potential for lay involvement in widening the Church's reach into BAME communities. They stated hopefully that 'Lay leadership from minority ethnic Anglicans is there, in terms of churchwardens, PCC members, etc.' but did not set out in detail how this existing population could be affirmed and supported.
18. *For Such a Time as This: A Renewed Diaconate in the Church of England* (2001) made the case for the renewal of the diaconate. It included discussion of the renewal in the theology of ministry, lay and ordained, affirming that 'every baptized believer is called to ministry'. "Ministry" is defined as being more than "discipleship", and as something that should be discerned with the Church. It highlighted the overlap in ministerial tasks, which required 'theological clarity and consistency about the various ministries of the Church'. The theological resources within the report were offered to assist the Church this task.
19. In 2003, a comprehensive assessment of the selection and training of clergy led to proposals in *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church* (GS 1569), known as the Hind report. This sought to 'outline a remarkable vision of the Church in its calling to participate in God's mission in the world and set in motion an unprecedented series of changes designed to strengthen our provision of training. The report seeks to support the people of God in their discipleship and to equip clergy and Readers in their ministries. It asked groups of dioceses to work together in a new way and, with ecumenical partners and our training institutions, to create new patterns of training and to enable lifelong learning' (GS progress review paper 2005).
20. In response to Hind, a report from the Faith and Order Advisory Group in 2007 on the *Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church: Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives* aimed to provide a resource for discussion as the Church evaluated its ministry needs for the 21st century. This report was a deep theological engagement with ministry which tackled many of the recurring issues raised around (lay) ministry. Its aims included addressing the relationship between lay and diaconal ministries.
21. Mission and ministry are held together throughout this report: the three principle, interpenetrating tasks for the Church, given in the Great Commission, are the ministry of pastoral responsibility, of the sacraments and of the word. The laity share in this threefold ministry in a variety of ways, equally alongside the ordained, through their faith and baptism. The full and equal value of different ministries is affirmed, and it is argued that the Church should regard and treat them as such in the way it administers them.

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22. Good collaborative working between ministers is seen as a key to overcoming the perceived problem of overlap in function between ministries, but the Church must also provide clarity about what it wants from its ministries. Ministry, it is argued, is not a set of mutually independent, distinct tasks. Rather, ministries are complementary, and 'are theologically differentiated but ordered to a common goal within the mission of God that is at work through the Church'.
23. The report acknowledged the confusion about what is and is not "ministry", and to whom the word applies. Ministry is not 'the official work of the clergy' and every baptised person is gifted through the Holy Spirit and may be called to ministry. However, ministry is not equivalent to the everyday activity of a Christian life of discipleship but, rather, is '*God-given work, for the kingdom of God, that is acknowledged by the Church*'. Influenced by John N Collins' *Diakonia*, ministry is seen as having an authoritative commissioning for a task which cannot be individualistic or subjective; a calling must be jointly discerned by individual and Church, with the minister equipped and commissioned. In line with contemporary interests, the focus of the report was on ordained diaconal ministry. Discussion on lay ministry also tends to focus on authorised ecclesial roles. However, a short section acknowledged the role of lay people in 'acts of witness and service, at home, at work and in social life' and in informal unauthorised lay ministry.
24. Institutional focus on the role of licenced/authorised lay ministry continued in *Reader Upbeat* (GS 1689, 2008). The report was prepared in response to a 2006 Private Member's Motion calling for the development of the office of Reader considering the variety of lay and ordained ministries emerging. It was debated and subsequently updated in 2009. Most recommendations made in the report relate to one key issue: whether Readers 'are full partners in the public ministry of the Church'. Readers are distinguished from other lay ministries based on (accredited) training and (nationally transferable) licence. The updated report includes an Annex on 'The Reader as lay educator', arguing this is a unique gift they offer the church in a as lay theologians, at a time of missional need.
25. Alongside the focus on developing ecclesial roles, *Mission-shaped church* (2004, 2009) opened, or re-opened, conversations about (lay) leadership within mission contexts as 'the effectiveness of our ministry and mission in the future will depend on our ability to identify, train and authorize 'local' ministers'. This was produced by a working group in Mission and Public Affairs.
26. Fresh Expressions of Church and Pioneer ministry have played an important role in the recent flourishing of lay ministry, with the 2016 Church Army Report, *The Day of Small Things*, reporting that almost half of fresh expressions leaders are lay and over a third termed 'lay-lay'. The report stressed the need to recognise their leadership, learn from them, and ensure appropriate support and training is provided.
27. In 2011 a report from the Archbishops' Council and the House of Bishops, *Challenges for the New Quinquennium* (GS 1815) again drew attention to the 'importance of lay development' not in connection to ecclesial role or mission in church planting but for 'equipping members of the laity for effective discipleship in the world'. This laid the groundwork for future reports, but also led to joint work between the Ministry Division, the Education Division and Mission and Public Affairs on a series of resource papers for Developing Discipleship in 2012. *Getting Discipleship into the Lifeblood* offered examples of strategic approaches taken by dioceses to be intentional around disciple making. *Discipleship in Daily Life* drew attention to resources that might help support

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being disciples in the world as did a specific set of resources aimed as *Discipleship and Fresh Expressions of Church*.

28. In 2013 the Ministry Council returned to the issue in an internal discussion paper on '*Equipping ALL the saints for the work of ministry*' (MC(13)12b). The paper recommends further reviews on support and training for lay education and lay ministry in order to 'prepare the ground for a wider debate about the contribution of the laity to the mission and ministry of the church'. Some of the proposals were developed into the Resourcing Ministerial Education workstream under Renewal and Reform as well as the establishment of the Lay Ministries Task Group.
29. *Equipping ALL the saints for the work of ministry* (MC (13) 12b, May 2014) usefully noted current trends as a range of new lay ministries emerged and proliferated. It highlighted the need for rhetoric around collaborative ministry and lay education to become reality, noting the wide diversity between dioceses and the increasingly complex boundary between different lay ministries and between lay and ordained ministries. It noted the paucity of insight regarding the extent of lay ministry and suggested that the range of lay ministries should be reviewed. The tendency to "clericalise" ministries is seen as a lack of both the imagination and the theology informing policy. The default for 'ministry' being 'ordained' is noted and the disparity of resources allocated to ordained ministries compared with lay is highlighted. A change of culture and attitude among (some) clergy is suggested as needed to equip them as positive, collaborative leaders. The report closed with a call to strengthen the Church's theology about the laity.
30. Meanwhile there was increasing pressure – particularly from Synod members – for the Church to more clearly focus on equipping the laity. A paper for the July 2013 House of Laity Standing Committee called for a 'culture change' in perceived 'clericalism and parochialism' in the Church. Minutes of the debate report a 'sense of frustration' at the failure of the Church 'to mobilise effectively the gifts and talents of lay people, both within the Church and in the world outside, particularly the world of work'. The House of Laity called for further policy development work on the role of the laity and suggested the establishment of a small task group.
31. *Equipping ALL the saints* was accompanied by a second internal discussion paper for Ministry Council, *Transforming Lay Ministry* (MC (13) 12a), which drew on outcomes of a joint Ministry Division - CRC Symposium on Lay Ministry in 2011. It includes the principle, from the College of Bishops, that lay ministry is best determined at a local (diocesan) level, though it acknowledged the challenge this presents to a mobile population in terms of transferability. It recommends that more ministries are licensed, thus affirming lay ministry and ensuring appropriate training provision.
32. These two papers fed into the May 2014 report to the Archbishops' Council, *Equipping the saints for the work of mission*, a report based on surveying dioceses. The research revealed three key areas for improvement - strategy, resources and culture - with the clericalised culture of church and ministry being the biggest perceived barrier to change. It recommended that Resourcing Task Groups should give particular attention to lay ministry, and that a new basis for lay licensing and authorisation be set out 'with an emphasis on positive encouragement for innovation, simplifying, enabling and lightening of burdens'.
33. A couple of peripherally-related reports should be noted – in part for their content, but also for the way in which ministry and discipleship appear to be considered as separate 'institutional' issues. A statement from the Education Division, Ministry Division and

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Mission and Public Affairs Division in October 2014 on *Ten Marks of a Diocese Committed to Developing Disciples* included in one of its recommendations (Recommendation 7) the criterion that 'gifts of leadership are recognised and developed among all the baptised' and goes on to advise that

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

34. However, the main focus of the statement is on the institutional (diocesan) structures of the Church and laity's role within those structures rather than seeking to look at how the Church should work with laity in a dispersed and fragmented culture. In January 2015, *Developing Discipleship* (GS 1977) hearkened back (consciously or not) to the Church Assembly report of 1949, to acknowledge that 'Lay and ordained together share a common discipleship' and noted the outworking of this discipleship in all aspects of life.
35. *Developing Discipleship* (GS 1977, 2015) argued that 'lay and ordained together share a common discipleship' and that 'nurturing discipleship lies at the heart of re-imagining both lay and ordained ministry'. It raised the widely held perception that the most significant obstacle to lay development is clericalization of church and ministry. It argues that the language of discipleship must be broader, meaning the tasks of those in recognised ministries, and highlighted the theological deficit in our understanding of "discipleship".
36. A further contemporary set of reflections that mirrored the call of *Developing Disciples* comes from work in the Anglican Communion. The report from 2016 Anglican Consultative Council entitled *Intentional Discipleship in a World of Differences* highlighted that across the Anglican Communion there is a recognition that 'disciple-making' lies at the heart of the churches intentional activities and that this is 'radically transformative of the whole life'. To support these discussions the Anglican Communion Office produced a resource. *Intentional Discipleship and Disciple-Making: An Anglican guide for Christian Life and Formation* mapped out some understanding of discipleship and the practice of disciple-making across the Communion. The Anglican Communion has set a focus on 2019 being 'a year of intentional discipleship' under the motto of asking each province to consider how to best help foster 'Jesus-shaped lives'.
37. The report *Resourcing Ministerial Education* in part sought to respond to this context. The vision of the 2015 paper *Resourcing Ministerial Education* (GS 1979) is 'a growing church with a flourishing ministry', supported by significant growth in numbers and quality of ministers, including lay. It hopes for the rapid development of lay ministries and improved collaborative leadership. The approach taken is 'theological reflection on practice'. An update was provided in GS 2020, including a theological preface which noted the lack of consensus between dioceses about lay ministry and the need for more focused work to achieve the required culture change. It ought to be noted that the project around this of the Common Awards for Ministry and Mission initially included the scope of wider lay formation and discipleship.
38. The establishment of a Task Group on Lay Leadership may be traced back to 2011 and a report to Synod from the House of Bishops and the Archbishops' Council on *Challenges for the New Quinquennium* (GS 1815). The report admitted that 'there is some serious thinking to be done if the rhetoric about the role of the laity is to be turned into reality'. It had two main tasks: first, preparing laity for 'specific areas of ministry as Readers, youth

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workers, pastoral assistants etc', and second, 'equipping members of the laity for effective discipleship in the world'. It pointed out some areas of good practice but noted that 'there is still a long way to go in releasing every Christian across the Church of England into active discipleship and witness in the world.' No specific recommendations were made with regard to the laity in non-ecclesial ministry, but the report did call for 'exhortation and affirmation' from those in leadership in the dioceses or in the Church at national level.

39. This thinking was developed in a paper to the Ministry Council in 2015 reporting on the results of consultation with dioceses on the Resourcing the Future and Resourcing Ministerial Education initiatives. The paper included a diagram setting out a four-fold distinction between **lay ministry, lay expertise, lay leadership** and **discipleship**. Building on this more nuanced understanding of different lay roles, the paper called for a 'change of culture' to accept and encourage lay leadership, an expert review of rules and practices which constrain lay leadership, more intentional leadership development and formation for lay leaders and for the National Church Institutions to play a greater role in equipping and supporting lay leaders through the provision of information, guidance and learning opportunities.
40. These recommendations were escalated to Archbishops' Council later in the year. In September 2015 the Archbishops' Council agreed to establish a Lay Leadership Task Group and a separate Lay Ministries Task Group.
41. The Lay Leadership Task Group produced the Archbishops' Council report *Setting God's People Free*, (GS 2056) which addresses the question of how we 'enable God's people to grow in their capacity to live out the Good News of Jesus in all of life – in service in the church and in the world'. Theological groundwork is laid in discussion of baptismal mutuality, giving lay and ordained equality in worth and status. *SGPF* addresses the "spectre of 'clericalism'" as a (perceived) barrier to healthy clergy-lay relationships and calls for change in culture and practice to enable complementarity in roles and vocation. Lay ministry, alongside wider influence, is seen as crucial for the mission and life of the Church.
42. *SGPF* highlighted four areas of lay involvement, two each within the gathered and sent church, distinguishing between elected and unelected roles in the former. It laments the lack of data on or processes for tracking lay ministries and the lack of a consistent approach to training, support or recognition for those in lay ecclesial roles.
43. The Lay Ministries working group produced a short paper, *Serving Together*, which was presented to the Ministry Council and the House of Bishops in 2017. It offered an assessment on the reasons why lay ministry was perceived by some as being institutionally devalued. Some of these were around the lack of flexibility in recognising the types of roles people undertook. Other issues were seen in the ways in which training and formation led people to invest a strong sense of identity in these roles, in part because of an insufficient theology around lay ecclesial roles. This report was felt to lack a robust enough assessment of the diversity and actual practice of lay involvement in ministry to give confidence in its proposals. Gaining a more accurate picture of actual practice is therefore a current priority.
44. In 2019 the CRC produced *Resourcing Sunday to Saturday Faith*, a renewed vision for Readers/LLMs as teachers of the faith, enablers of mission and leaders in church and society. The booklet seeks to challenge the Church to better receive the gift of lay

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ministry and to ensure Readers/LLMs are equipped to enable all Christians to be confident disciples.

Reflections on calling, discipleship and ministry

45. Discussions of the theology of lay ministry are in general less represented than that of the ministry of the ordained, and seem largely to have evolved in response or relation to other topics. As such, there is a more limited range of reports compared with the abundance of literature on ordained ministry. Perhaps as a result, lay ministry has most frequently been defined in opposition to what it is not, i.e. ordained ministry. In earlier material this is focused more clearly on the ways in which ministry might be extended to the 'Monday and Saturday' ministries of engagement in the world. More latterly however, attention is given to 'Sunday' ministries, particularly those authorised or commissioned.
46. In recent decades, as a variety of lay ministries have emerged and evolved, and interest in the diaconate renewed, there has been an increased focus on the proper distinction between lay and ordained ministries, especially Readers and Deacons, as well as between lay ministries. However, where a/the theology of lay ministries is explored, it has often been in the context of wider discussions about the (calling and discipleship of the) whole people of God. Renewal and Reform has most recently re-prioritised these conversations within the Church.
47. The issue of discipleship, Catechesis, Christian formation and Adult Theological Education is a common thread through these reports, particularly as these are effective precursors of evangelism and mission. As such, the question is posed as to why these themes keep recurring as challenges to address. This is the basis of the call for cultural change that SGPF espouses. Here too, however, one must bear in mind that similar actions on slightly different tacks have been approached before. This underlines how the activity of discipleship is one of ongoing attention for the Church in relation to the context or contexts in which it is found. It also suggests, however, that clarity about the shift in context might merit closer attention.

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