

Briefing Paper on ‘Everyday Disciples’

Everyday Disciples is the name given to the Diocese of Oxford’s evolving strategic framework for supporting and equipping our worshipping communities in nurturing life-long disciples, confident in living out and sharing their faith, and in pursuing their vocational callings in everyday life.

The task is essential to our Diocesan Vision to be ‘A more Christ-like church for the sake of God’s world: contemplative, compassionate and courageous’. It also aligns closely with the vision priorities and outcomes being shared across the National Church of England ([Vision and Strategy | The Church of England](#)).

- To become a church of missionary disciples where all God’s people are free to live the Christian life, wherever they spend time Sunday to Saturday.
- To be a church where mixed ecology is the norm – flourishing communities of faith in parishes and in church planting, fresh expressions of church, chaplaincy and on-line).
- To be a church that is younger and more diverse.

Theological and Scriptural Basis

Everyday Disciples has at its essence, the understanding that as disciples of Jesus Christ we are all: Chosen, Called and Commissioned. In the dynamic loving relationship of the Trinity, the Father **chooses** the people of God to participate in this love, through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Son. Jesus now **calls** us to follow him in the way of discipleship and through the work of the Holy Spirit, **commissions** and empowers us share as witnesses in words and actions.

Chosen

God chose Israel: For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has **chosen** you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession (Deut.7:6). Jesus then says to all disciples: ‘You did not choose me but I **chose** you’ (John 14)

Called

God also called Israel to holiness and into a journey of formation as His people, through obedience to the commandments, meditation upon God’s word, gathering to pray, praise, remember and celebrate the works of God through storytelling, meals, pilgrimage and festivals.

Throughout the Gospels we hear Jesus echoing this same calling to holiness, particularly in the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. There is no force, rather the invitation to watch, listen, imagine and . There are also deep rhythms of prayer, worship, study, silence and solitude as well as sharing and eating. At the Last Supper, in the washing of feet and the giving of a ‘new commandment’, Jesus calls them into life as a holy people (Matthew 5-7; John 13).

Commissioned:

The call of Abram in Genesis 12 reveals how from the beginning, God's people were to be a blessing to the world. They were to reflect God's love in words and through acts of mercy in caring for widows, orphans, slaves, and aliens. An understanding and further commissioning given by Jesus (Matt 28:18-20).

In all aspects of Everyday Disciples we are seeking to reflect these three intertwining elements and the dynamic mix of teaching and equipping alongside space for reflection and formation we see in Scripture as God calls people of every kind and background to follow Jesus and transformed lives.

Five key Shifts

Through a process of prayer, discernment and consultation, five key shifts have been identified as necessary to see real growth in a holistic understanding of discipleship across our diocese. These are being continuously refined and shaped in prayer, as we focus work streams and activities around them:

1: Intentionally placing discipleship at the heart of everything we are and how we share together.

This is a shift from discipleship being seen as a separate, even draining, element of church life to it infusing everything through the way we help people to encounter God, tell and celebrate stories of transformation and how we create engaging and accessible pathways for them to follow.

2. Embracing the Body of Christ as the vibrant and creative centre for Christian formation

This is a shift from the nurture of discipleship and formation as the remit of church leaders alone to a shared understanding of it being about everyone participating in growing, journeying and taking responsibility together. This involves modelling and teaching with current leaders and focus given to the way we value, equip and release each person to participate in local worshipping communities and in the wider Body of Christ.

3: Creating understanding of discipleship as a whole life journey

This is a shift from 'making disciples' as merely involving 'conversion', to embracing in confidence a journey of encounter, discovery, learning and formation. We see the need for a whole range of more targeted resources in helping people to develop spiritual disciplines, new forms of 'pilgrim' communities to accompany people and attention to what we offer at key life-transition points.

4. Engaging intentionally with young adults aged 18 - 35

A shift from a 'missing generation', to those we are noticing, welcoming, valuing, placing into nurturing environments, and journeying with. We see the need for a fresh perspective on the passions and dreams of younger people, amplifying their voices and co-creating with them bespoke pathways to explore and grow in faith – pursuing the 'ancient ways' as much as creating new ones.

5: Understanding ourselves to all be called into and involved with God's mission

This is a shift from understanding missional discipleship as only meaning being 'evangelists', to all see ourselves as 'witnesses', confident in what we have to live out and share in our personal faith stories, while acknowledging and serving alongside those who are specifically gifted as evangelists. We believe this involves training leaders in how to nurture all 5 of the Marks of Mission. We believe this involves churches confident in telling the story of Jesus, alongside active sharing in social justice, the environment and practical acts of service.

The five cultural shifts we have identified in the Everyday framework are not a prescribed action plan. They shape a conversation about how God is inviting everyone in our churches to grow and flourish. They are prompts to pray and notice where God is calling us to deepen in contemplation, to nurture greater compassion and to seek greater courage.

*Revd Andrew Blyth
Director of Mission & Ministry
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