

OXFORD DIOCESAN SYNOD

Discipleship and Evangelism: Update and invitation to reflect on the on-going work of 'Everyday Disciples'

Background

1. As a diocese we have clearly recognised that nurturing 'Christ-like disciples' who are contemplative, compassionate and courageous, is crucial to every aspect of our response to God together as faith communities and for the sake of the world. However, there is a great diversity of interpretation and understanding around the meaning and practices of nurturing 'disciples' – even the use of the word itself.
2. Likewise, there is much discussion about different approaches to 'evangelism'. Within a shared commitment to live out the Five Marks of Mission – how are we called to be, and to proclaim, the 'good news' of Jesus Christ in this generation reflecting our different traditions and diversity of contexts?
3. Through the discernment process for Common Vision during 2023 and 2024, the 'Discipleship and Christian Formation Group' helped to focus to two key callings for us as a diocese:
 - a. Encouraging and equipping all parishes as 'centres' of Christian formation and in offering creative and engaging 'discipleship pathways' which reflect their different contexts and are accessible to people of all backgrounds and ages.
 - b. Helping them to nurture life-long followers of Jesus Christ, who feel confident in living out and in sharing their faith in everyday life.
4. The Group also developed a broad framework for how we can respond to these callings. 'Everyday Disciples' was shared with Bishop's Council in July 2025 and is now helping to shape further exploration in the Bishop's Staff team and across the Department of Mission and Ministry. We do not have a detailed strategy, but we do have a clear direction of travel in praying, exploring and responding to three theological themes and we are actively seeking to enable five key cultural shifts in contextually appropriate ways across the diocese.
5. As reflected in this paper, we are further ahead with actions in relation to discipleship than we are to evangelism. In part this is to be expected given the shift in understanding we believe is needed for the sharing of the Good News found in Jesus Christ to be the natural overflow of deeper personal relationship with Him. However, I have now taken direct responsibility for the way we share in evangelism and how we equip others in this work to ensure that it flows through all aspects of our Mission and Ministry. I invite Diocesan Synod members and others across the diocese to share the needs in different parish contexts, also examples of fruitful practice from which we can all learn.

Three theological themes

6. The 'Everyday Disciples' framework invites us to pray, explore and develop discipleship 'pathways' in response to what it means to be:
 - a. **Chosen as God's people** (*Deut. 7:6; John 15:16*)
 - b. **Called into the way of Christ** (*Matt. 5-7; John 13*)
 - c. **Commissioned to be a blessing in the world** (*Genesis 12; Matt 28:18-20*)
7. This is already shaping many aspects of the work of the Department of Mission and Ministry Department, most obviously in Children and Youth Ministry and the development of the YouShape discipleship programme. The themes are also being reflected in the resources we have offered for Advent and Lent 'Come and See', and in the work being undertaken to develop the Learning Hub.
8. Alongside others, it will be a key task for both the newly appointed Head of Discipleship and the lead DDO to work with Bishop's staff, area teams, deaneries and parishes to develop a much fuller mix of prayer, exploration and response. Again, I actively encourage Diocesan Synod members to help in shaping this.

Five shifts

9. A new diocesan bishop will have a key role in shaping our thinking and plans (including what we call things) in the longer term. We believe though that we can and should be praying for, and attending to, the underlying shifts in understanding which have already been discerned for the way in which we approach and nurture 'discipleship in all who want to grow as followers of Jesus':
 - a. **Placing discipleship at the heart of 'who we are'.**
From 'discipleship' as a separate (even competing) task to infusing every aspect of church life with creative, engaging and accessible pathways for all to follow.
 - b. **Understanding the Body of Christ as the context for Christian formation**
From discipleship and formation as the remit of church leaders to the whole people of God participating in growing, journeying and responsibility together.
 - c. **Understanding discipleship as a journey of growth and transformation through the whole of a life**
From 'making disciples' linked to 'conversion', to embracing a life-long journey of growth and formation as confident, equipped and engaged followers of Jesus.
 - d. **Intentionally engaging with young adults (18 – 30s)**
From 'missing generation', to prayerfully seeing where young adults are outside the church and being intentional about welcome, value, nurturing environments, and journeying with them – involving and energising all generations.
 - e. **Learning to think of ourselves as 'Missionary' Disciples**
From 'mission', especially sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, as only for the 'evangelists', to confidence in a shared calling as 'witnesses' and in living out the full Marks of God's mission in our everyday lives.

How are we enabling the shifts?

10. Again, recognising the diversity of parish contexts and traditions, the practical outworkings of 'Everyday Disciples' must evolve in the life of our diocese, and we need to share as Diocesan Synod, in area teams, deaneries and parishes to prayerfully discern how God wants to lead.
11. From the work we are already involved in, we believe this includes:
 - a. More support and practical equipping for church leaders, clergy and lay, to teach and develop the holistic understanding of discipleship which will flow into the expression of the five marks of mission – this is being reflected in our CMD provisions including for 'Posts of First Responsibility' and in training for Children and Youth Ministry.
 - b. Encouraging ways of telling the story of how faith makes a difference in everyday lives including through Social Justice and Environment Action
 - c. Developing the use of 'mission chapters' to bring together clergy and lay leaders from different contexts to share ideas and mutual support – as is being piloted now with a group who serve in Market Town contexts.
 - d. Developing the Learning Hub to create much easier access to materials and in hosting a wider range of courses for individuals and small groups, and 'going deeper' tutor led study groups.
 - e. Offering more of the 'Moving from Pastoral to Spiritual Conversations' style of equipping short course and resources for enabling faith sharing
 - f. Expanding the 'YouShape' programme in each archdeaconry
 - g. Offering more 'nurturing faith' printed and digital resources such as Advent and Lent to reflect a greater range of contexts and circumstances
 - h. Identifying and nurturing those who do have a calling as evangelists and using them as a resource to serve across our diocese
 - i. Reviewing and learning through our World Mission Partnerships
 - j. Support for Deanery and Parish 'missions'
 - k. Offering Quiet Days and working parishes to reimagine buildings and churchyards as places of spiritual encounter

Questions for reflection, discussion and feedback

- From our experience across the diocese, do we recognise the two callings identified by the Common Vision Discipleship and Formation Group?
- How do we think we might best explore and help our diocese respond to the three theological themes?
- How do we think we might best explore and help our diocese make the key shifts in understanding about discipleship and to overflow into evangelism?

Revd Canon Andrew Blyth
Director of Mission and Ministry, February 2026