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Kingdom Learning

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Contents

Acknowledgements

The third chapter of my book *Reimagining Ministry* includes a section entitled 'The learning church' and another entitled 'Reflective discipleship'. These placed reflective learning at the heart of the church's life. This book takes up and expands on the themes I briefly dealt with there. It has been written in the midst of my role as a teacher in ministerial education and expands on the themes I try to develop with students when teaching them mission and ministry, leadership, education and theological reflection. I have also tried to be mindful of my experience of 20 years in parish ministry and to write for my fellow clergy, facing the challenges of rapid change in the life of our society and the place of the church within it.

I have not attempted to write a practical 'how-to-do-it' manual, nor yet a theoretical study. What I have attempted is to explain how learning actually takes place and offer some principles for teaching and learning in the context of a local church based on this. This means that alongside the more practical sections and interspersed with them there are sections of deeper exploration. I hope readers will find these interesting in themselves as well as offering guidance for the practice of teaching and learning. Towards the end of the book I have made some comments on the way my own Church, the Church of England, approaches the training of its clergy. This topic requires another book to do it full justice. I hope what I have included here is enough to indicate the main lines of what my argument would be.

No book like this could be written without a good deal of help. I am grateful to successive cohorts of students at Ripon College Cuddesdon and on the Monmouth Ministry Area Leaders' Course,

who have challenged and helped to develop my thinking in these areas. In particular, I would like to thank Karen Charman, Andrew Down, Mark Lawson-Jones, Gill Nobes, Alex Williams and Clive Watts for permission to quote their experiences and in some cases their college assignments in this book. I am also profoundly grateful to Rob Gallagher for permission to use the story from his ministry as the basis for my study of theological reflection in Chapter 2.

Tina Hodgett, Rowena King, Debbie McIsaac, Tim Treanor and Janet Williams read an early draft of this book and gave me valuable feedback, which has helped to shape the final draft. Needless to say, they are not responsible for the many shortcomings that remain.

There are also three written sources that have been particularly influential. In my opinion, Anton Baumohl's *Making Adult Disciples* is the best book written on adult learning in the church in a British context, although it has been out of print for many years.[1] Sylvia Wilkey Collinson's *Making Disciples* is a detailed study of the New Testament evidence, which offers some profound insights into the teaching methods of Jesus and the early church.[2] Thomas Hawkins' *The Learning Congregation* applies system theory to the Christian congregation to show how adaptive change is possible.[3] In all three cases there is, as far as I am aware, nothing quite like any of these books. I hope I have been able to build successfully on the work of these authors.

My usual practice is to alternate between male and female for the representative person, thus avoiding the ugly 'him or her'. This is what I have done in this book. Accordingly, the representative disciple, teacher, church leader and theologian is sometimes 'he' and sometimes 'she'. I hope readers will bear with me if this should be confusing.

I have used 'church' with a lower-case 'c' to refer to both the local church and the wider church. 'Church' with a capital 'C' refers to specific denominations and most often to the Church of England, the Church of which I am a member and from which most of my examples are drawn. I hope what I write will have some relevance to Churches of other denominations and to Scotland and Wales, but I leave the reader to judge.

Without the support of my wife Meg, neither the writing nor the experience of ministry on which it is based would have been possible.

David Heywood
December 2016

Notes

1 Anton Baumohl, *Making Adult Disciples*, London: Scripture Union, 1984.

2 Sylvia Wilkey Collinson, *Making Disciples: The Significance of Jesus' Teaching Methods for Today's Church*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006 (originally Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004).

3 Thomas Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.

'Setting God's People Free'

In the past few years, my hope was that whole-life-discipleship would be the next aspect of mission to crystallize in the Church's understanding and practice. But this hope, expressed in my earlier book *Reimagining Ministry*, has not been realized. The Church's next step forward was to be chaplaincy ministry, which is rapidly taking off in a variety of informal settings, helping to bridge the ever-widening gap between the Christian faith community and wider society. But just as *Kingdom Learning* was being published, the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England issued the report 'Setting God's People Free',[1] drawing attention to the need to 'empower, liberate and disciple the 98 per cent of the Church of England who are not ordained' and 'set them free for fruitful, faithful mission and ministry' (p. 1).

As the report makes clear, and I argue in the Introduction to this book, accomplishing this goal will require a 'seismic revolution in the culture of the Church' (p. 3). In particular, it requires the Church of England to name and confront the culture of clericalism, which is deeply embedded in its modes of operating, especially in the training of its clergy (p. 22). I would go further and urge that the Church, perhaps represented by its bishops, publicly acknowledges this damaging aspect of its inherited culture and determines to adopt a new mindset and new practice.

The report laments that, although 'Lay engagement and influence in the workplace, community and society is vast', there is nevertheless 'very little curiosity, affirmation, prayer, theological or practical resourcing for these roles at local church level' (p. 12). It notes that 'most clergy want to release lay leaders, but genuinely struggle to do so' (p. 17), and raises the question of 'the most

appropriate models of theological education and formation for an empowered and confident laity' (p. 15). 'Few churches', the report declares, 'are equipped with the kind of "action learning" approaches that we see in Jesus' disciple-making and in best practice in adult learning models in wider society' (p. 18).

The report includes an implementation plan, which may mean that I have to revise my assessment of the Church's performance in this area so far: namely that despite well thought-out policy aspirations, nothing of substance has been achieved. The weakness of the report, however, is that the quotation given above about the need for best practice in adult learning is almost the only mention of the importance of skills in this area.

It has long been my conviction that the Church as a whole needs to take on board the theory and practice of adult education if it is to be adequately equipped for ministry and mission. As I argue in Chapter 4, training for ordination that ignores educational best practice disempowers the Church, in particular making it more difficult for clergy to exercise collaborative models of ministry. But equally important, clergy require skills of adult education to achieve their aspiration to release the laity for mission. The aim of this book is to put those skills into the hands of all who wish to practise them.

'Setting God's People Free' begins with a quotation from Paul's letter to the Colossians: 'He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ' (Colossians 1.28, NIV). It is my prayer that this book might provide a resource for achieving this goal in the present day, setting free the 98 per cent of the Church, who currently receive very little in the way of effective learning for discipleship and ministry, to play their part in the outpouring of God's love to the world.

Note

1 Archbishop's Council, 'Setting God's People Free', General Synod Paper 2056 February 2017, www.churchofengland.org/media/3858033/gs-2056-setting-gods-people-free-pdf.

Introduction:

Learning for Discipleship and Ministry

An Adaptive Zone

The past two generations have seen a quiet revolution in the life of the church in Britain that is still gathering pace. Not only are we rediscovering the priority of mission in God's purposes, we are also discovering the breadth of all that is involved, from fresh expressions to Street Pastors, chaplaincy to Messy Church, retreats and quiet days to community engagement. To take fresh expressions of church as just one aspect of the church's renewed confidence in mission, it is estimated that four times as many churches were started in the year 2013–14 as were started in 2004, the year of the *Mission-shaped Church* report.[1] A model of mission that revolved around the invitation to 'come' to church is being replaced by a model that emphasizes the responsibility of the church to 'go': to witness to its faith through engagement with the wider community.

This re-emphasis on mission and renewed understanding of the *missio Dei*, the mission of God, is one aspect of the church's response to a wider change. The church is currently in what Ann Morisy has called an 'adaptive zone'.[2] It faces a series of inter-related and unfamiliar challenges, whose novelty and interrelatedness mean that the solutions are far from obvious. The past two or three generations have witnessed an ever-widening gap between the culture of contemporary society and the tradition of Christian faith. At a basic level, this period has seen the loss of a previously widespread acquaintance with the basic tenets of Christianity. More profoundly, the differences between society and the church on moral issues, not simply areas of personal morality, such as divorce, euthanasia and sexual orientation, but

on social issues, such as materialism, individualism, competition and inequality, have become a substantial gulf. With the rise of pluralism, churches now have to compete in the marketplace of ideas as one voice among many, adapting to society's view of them as one interest group among many, advocating one truth among a kaleidoscopic variety of religious and quasi-religious positions. Moreover, the commitment of society to tolerance of diversity as the basis of social cohesion tends to fuel a growth in suspicion towards religious faith, typified by the hostile reception in some sections of the media of Tim Farron as leader of the Liberal Democrats in 2015, since religious believers are seen to appeal to sources of authority outside social control as arbiters of truth and conduct.

Not only are the changes taking place in society profound but the pace of change is becoming faster. As long ago as 1997, Thomas Hawkins could write: 'We no longer experience the river of time as a slow, peaceful stream with quiet eddies and calm pools . . . we are instead white-water rafting through the rapids of social, technological and demographic change.'[3] Until the 1970s it was reasonable to assume that most people would have learned most of what they needed for adult life by their early twenties. From the 1980s onwards, and especially since the development of the internet, bringing the possibility of instant worldwide communication, the pace of change has rapidly increased. The pace of economic and social change now not only requires individuals to become lifelong learners but organizations to learn continuously in order to adapt nimbly to the challenges of continual change. The pressure is on the church to become a 'learning church' in order to find adaptive solutions, ways of being and doing suited to the challenges of a new and unfamiliar situation.[4]

All this means that traditional and inherited ways of understanding church and mission, discipleship and ministry need to be 'reimagined' or 'relearned'. In 2010 the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England noted the paradox of an increasingly secular society in which attempts to marginalize religion are on the increase, with a growing interest in the spiritual dimension of life as well as some specifically religious issues.[5] In order to equip the Church to grow both spiritually and numerically

and to contribute to the common good of society, the Council saw the need to both reimagine the Church's ministry and deepen the discipleship of every Christian.[6] In 2015 the report 'Released for Mission' identified five priorities for the rural church, including 'building a culture of discipleship appropriate to the rural context' and 'envisioning, enabling and equipping the ministry of lay people'. 'This', the report went on, 'requires the church nationally to reconceive its ministry, rethink how it trains its ministers and how it releases them for mission.'[7] In a similar way, writing about the role of local ministry in a church equipped for mission, Adrian Dorber declares, 'This new form of ministry is a quiet revolution that makes for systemic change at every level.'[8]

These calls for 'reconceiving' ministry and 'systemic change' point to the need for a process of adaptive change: the kind of change where solutions are not obvious and there is a need for far-reaching adjustments in the way we understand the problems before the way forward becomes clear. Adaptive change is far from easy: it involves facing inertia and risking conflict. Nevertheless, the key elements in the process have been well charted by writers in management studies and are not difficult to apply in the life of the church. While adaptive solutions may represent a break with the immediate past, they will nevertheless remain faithful to the Churches' core purpose and identity. In fact that core purpose and identity will be a key resource in steering the process of change. It will involve the recovery of some important elements of Christian tradition, such as the centrality of God's mission in the life of the church; the call to discipleship of all God's people, lay and ordained alike; and the nature of the church as a community of learning, rooted in Scripture and tradition.

The rediscovery and renewed emphasis on these in the life of the contemporary church is evidence of a process of adaptive change already in progress. But they also point the way to the need for the church to face the cost of further change. Adaptive change requires the ability to discern the hidden assumptions rooted in current ways of doing things and to weigh these in the light of the tradition. It requires the willingness to arrive at *metanoia*, a deep-rooted change of heart and mind leading to new ways of acting.

Finally, in distinction from mere technical change, adaptive change is essentially non-hierarchical: it requires the participation of the grass roots in recognizing and responding to outdated and inauthentic ways of working and the willingness to experiment with new ways.[9]

In this book I want to suggest four ways in which God is calling the church to become a 'learning church', drawing in each case on the practice of adult education. I want to suggest that understanding the way people learn provides a key resource and potentially the confidence we need to face the challenges of the present day. I also want to point to some of the deep-rooted assumptions at the heart of our church life that currently hold us back and have the potential, if not addressed, seriously to impede the progress of God's mission.

This book builds on my previous book, *Reimagining Ministry*.[10] There I charted the progress of the church's participation in God's mission over the previous 20 to 30 years. I suggested that one of the key elements of Christian tradition we need to recover is a vision of God's kingdom and of the church as the 'sign, agent and foretaste' of the kingdom.[11] I suggested that this vision also provides a very different perspective on ministry: not simply the ministry of the ordained, but the ministry of the whole church in the service of God's mission. I was writing specifically for the Church to which I belong, the Church of England, in the hope that what I had to say would also be of help to other denominations. Our challenge, I suggested, is not simply to 'restructure' the Church's ministry but to 'reimagine' it: to understand the purpose and nature of ministry in a whole new way. The years since *Reimagining Ministry* have seen the church gradually moving in the kind of direction I suggested, and I take this to be a sign that the book was broadly in tune with what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. In some ways I have been proved wrong: most particularly, I did not foresee the mushrooming of opportunities for informal chaplaincy in a wide variety of settings. I see this as a significant development in the Churches' mission, a key way God is providing a bridge across the ever-widening gulf between the Christian faith community and the wider society in which we are set.[12]

The first of the four ways I believe God is calling us to adapt to the challenges of today is in the area of discipleship. In the words of 'Released for Mission', it is about 'building a culture of discipleship'. The challenge here is enormous. For generations, most regular worshippers have been disempowered: they have been encouraged to see the responsibility for the life and mission of the church in the hands of the trained clergy. A church in mission requires these same worshippers to see themselves as 'missionary disciples',[13] called to play their part in the church's ministry. Already the need for programmes to enable and encourage ordinary Christian believers to grow in discipleship is an item that is firmly on the agenda for the Churches. Progress, however, is slow and stumbling, characterized by thoughtful statements of intent and patchy to non-existent follow-up. Although this book is not a 'how-to-do-it' manual, I set out some basic principles of adult learning and a set of broad guidelines to help those who want to encourage discipleship learning in their churches. I also point to some reasons why I believe the progress in this area has been so disappointing.

An indispensable element in discipleship is Jesus' call to join him in his mission. Ministry and discipleship, as I will explain shortly, belong together. As part of discipleship learning, God's people also need to be resourced to live as followers of Christ in the course of their daily lives and work, and many will need training for their involvement in specific aspects of ministry. Here I am referring to the ministry of all God's people in and through the local church. Each denomination has courses of training in place to prepare people for licensed ministry, lay and ordained. In this book I focus on the wider and less formal ministry churches are called to undertake both to build up the life of the church as a worshipping, loving community and also to serve the wider community and networks in which they are set. I also suggest why the model of training for ministry offered at national level, the kind of training most existing clergy have received, reflects a poor model of learning, and some of the ways this needs to change.

The context in which discipleship learning and much training for ministry takes place is the life of the local church. But the

church's corporate life is not only the context for learning, it plays a vital part in the learning itself. Disciples learn what it means to follow Christ through participating in the life of the church. A vital task for those entrusted with the leadership of the churches is, therefore, to maintain the faithfulness of the church's life. Church leaders need continually to be asking whether 'the way we do things here' faithfully reflects our understanding of the gospel. It is not only individuals who learn: whole churches learn together what it means to embody the love of God and the good news we have received in Christ in the shared life of the community. Therefore a third element in the book is the exploration of how this takes place: how church leaders can facilitate this corporate learning that allows churches to adapt and change. The key tool in this, I suggest, is the skill of theological reflection. In Chapter 2 I set out at length how I understand this process and in Chapters 3 and 4 apply it to the task of enabling and guiding learning in the local church.

From here it is a short step to my fourth concern. The pace of change is relentless and, as a result, the need for churches to evaluate their own life and mission is continual. Local churches and whole denominations need to become 'learning organizations', capable of adapting and changing without losing sight of their core purpose and identity. Leaders at all levels need to be equipped to lead adaptive change. In Chapter 4, I will argue that we are prevented from attaining this by our assumptions about the nature of leadership, the nature of learning and the nature of theology. Here again, theological reflection plays a central role for what it tells us about the nature of knowledge. Over the course of the book I hope to guide the reader into a way of seeing knowledge not as a grand theoretical construct but as a continuous feedback loop by means of which we orientate ourselves to the world in which we live, make sense of and manage its tasks and relationships. The one, being essentially static, impedes our ability to respond to adaptive challenges; the other, being fluid and dynamic, aids it. A book on the nature of adaptive leadership would be a separate project and help is available from a variety of sources.[14] My concern here is simply to point to the very considerable obstacles that stand in our way.

The Story so Far

The story of the Churches' attempts to encourage discipleship learning is one of thoughtful, well-grounded recommendations and frustrating lack of progress. I am writing specifically about the Church of England, with which I am most familiar, but the picture does not appear to be too different in most of the other denominations.

The year 2003 saw a major study of the future of training for ordination in the Church of England with the title *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*, a report that came to be known, after its principal author, as the 'Hind Report'.[15] The title of the report was important in two ways. First, it consciously adopted the word 'formation' for the process by which candidates were to be trained for ordained ministry; and formation was understood to include growth in the virtues of character required for ministry as well as in knowledge and skills. Second, it placed this process of formation in the context of a 'learning church', a whole church committed to learning its faith and growing in discipleship. The amount of attention given to discipleship learning, however, is disappointingly small, amounting to some five or six pages and linking it, for the most part, with training for ministry, whether lay or ordained. But it did begin a process by which discipleship learning once again became a focus of attention for the Church.

As a direct outcome of this renewed recognition of the importance of learning for discipleship, an ecumenical working party was set up with representatives from the Methodist and United Reformed Churches, and its report was included in the next major document from the Church of England, *Shaping the Future*.[16] The report was headed 'Education for Discipleship', and aspired to lay the foundations for a nationwide provision of opportunities for discipleship learning. Its definition of discipleship was 'the whole-life response of Christians to Jesus Christ', a definition intended to cover 'everything a Christian believes and does', including her participation in ministry in the world as part of the mission of God. The report's authors carefully differentiated this from a 'preliminary foundation stage' for training for

licensed ministry. Lay discipleship and ministry should be seen to have a value in themselves independent of formal training and recognition. They also deliberately distanced themselves, as I also wish to do, from the style of church life that sees discipleship in terms of discipline, in which leaders have sought to oversee the lives of their followers in intrusive and authoritarian ways.[17]

The aim of 'Education for Discipleship' was to be 'to help students, individually and in community, to develop a habit of informed, critical and creative engagement with issues of faith, morality, discipleship, mission and ministry'. Students were to learn about the Bible and Christian tradition, and be equipped to relate these to the 'varied contexts of contemporary culture', the life of the church and their own daily lives. The underlying principles to which the report draws attention are worth quoting at length because they echo the principles I have taken for granted in the writing of this book:

- Every human being has a capacity for learning, which is part of what it means to be human.
- Those who respond to God's call to follow him share explicitly in his mission in the world.
- Christian discipleship has both an individual and a corporate dimension, and is a collaborative as well as an individual response to Christ's call.
- All God's people are called to discipleship; all are valuable; all are gifted.
- Communities and networks of learning are an invaluable resource to the Church.
- The Church is resourced by the mutuality of learning between public ministers (lay and ordained) and the rest of the people of God.
- Learning designed to enhance discipleship needs to be rooted in understandings of the Christian tradition and the Bible.
- Learning is life-long.[18]

The report then went on to outline an ambitious programme of regional provision for discipleship learning, with the possibility of assessment for those who wished it, which would also dovetail

with formal training for licensed ministry. Unfortunately, virtually no progress was made in implementing it, so that five years later a strategy document for the Diocese of Carlisle entitled 'Growing Disciples' made no mention of any regional provision, and a survey of 2013 concluded that 'lay development and discipleship are not clearly articulated as strategic priorities in most dioceses.'[19]

In 2015 the Church made another attempt, this time in a General Synod Paper entitled 'Developing Discipleship'. As well as quoting the 2013 survey, this also concluded that 'there is no well-developed authoritative source for the theology of discipleship to which the contemporary Church of England can readily look to inform its teaching.' As a result, the report continued, the Church's vision of discipleship is unclear; its understanding of service neglects the calling of Christians to live out their Christian faith in the world; the Church's understanding of ministry becomes 'lopsided', with far too much attention devoted to ordained ministry; and, most serious of all, the witness and mission of the Church is impoverished.[20]

The main cause of this situation and 'the biggest obstacle in lay development' was widely perceived to be 'the clericalised culture of church and ministry'.[21] This is the situation to which I drew attention in *Reimagining Ministry*. At the heart of clericalism lies the assumption that ministry is the prerogative of the clergy, so that ministry comes to be defined as 'what the clergy do'. The consequences of clericalism are many:

- Many clergy are reluctant to devolve responsibility and involve others in ministry.
- Many congregations are reluctant to engage in ministry.
- Lay ministry, when it does take place, is seen as 'helping the clergy'.
- Training courses for lay ministry are designed to reproduce the training of the clergy.
- Schemes of pastoral reorganization concentrate on the deployment of the clergy rather than the mission of the whole church.
- Ordained ministry consumes the overwhelming proportion of the Church's financial resources, time and energy.

And in summary: the vital ministry of the whole church is seen as relatively insignificant; so much so that ordained ministry is routinely referred to as 'the' ministry.

'Developing Discipleship' led to a working group under the title of 'Serving Together', which produced an interim report the following year. Once again it was clear that far more of the Church's energy needed to be devoted to lay discipleship and ministry. Most significantly, the obstacles to progress were recognized to lie in the Church's corporate mindset. The 'three essential changes' required all had to do with the need to 'reimagine' or 'reconceive' what we mean by 'ministry'. They are outlined as follows:

- 'Corporate and institutional *reflection on the current theology and practice* of lay ministry needs to continue and gain momentum, strength and a sense of purpose.'
- 'Encouraging through practical action and embedding at all levels the belief that all ministry is best understood and practised as a *collegiate and corporate endeavour*.'
- 'Shifting discourse about lay ministry from concerns about role and identity to the *undertaking of tasks and acts of service* in response to particular missional needs.' In other words, ceasing to think of lay ministry in terms of offices, like Readers or Eucharistic assistants, but starting to think in terms of the ministry required in each local context to fulfil the mission of God in that place.[22]

While the Church continues in its failure to get to grips with the problem of clericalism, mature Christians become frustrated. An online survey of lay church members in the Diocese of St Alban's in 2014 may be taken as representative.[23] The survey demonstrated that the 1,385 lay Christians who completed it had a sound grasp of the theological basis for ministry. By and large they understood that baptism is the basis of the Christian's authorization for ministry, agreed that every Christian has a distinctive call from God and recognized that 'ministry' involved both contributing to the growth of the church and serving God in the wider world. Almost 90 per cent saw lay ministry as important in the life of the church. And significantly there was also a considerable measure of disagreement with the idea that ministry is about 'helping the vicar'.

The survey also revealed considerable frustration, in some cases amounting to impatience, with the failure of the clergy in many places to recognize the place of lay ministry, especially of ministry in the wider world, or to enable and equip lay people for ministry.

In some cases, the frustration is so great that lay people leave the church. In his book *The Invisible Church*, Steve Aisthorpe reports on his survey of over 800 Scottish Christians who continued to practise their faith but had left their churches, in many cases after years of active service, often in positions of leadership. In the cases of more than half of the people he interviewed, the decisive factor in the decision to leave had been a desire to respond to missional opportunities in the area, opportunities their local church was ignoring. One-third agreed with the statement: 'Not being involved in a traditional church congregation frees me to pursue what I believe is my Christian calling.'[24]

The idea that Christians of many years' standing are contemplating or actually leaving their churches in order to free up time to respond to God's call to mission emphasizes the urgency of the challenges posed by 'Serving Together'. It is to those challenges that this book is addressed. My hope is that Christians will not find it necessary to leave their churches, because those churches will be providing the stimulating discipleship learning they look for and recognizing the priority of enabling and equipping them for ministry in the world. But this can only happen effectively when we also reflect on the patterns of our church life with an eye to evaluating their faithfulness to the gospel, ready to face the cost of change should that become necessary.

Discipleship and Ministry

Before embarking on the exploration of how all this can take place, it is important to be clear about the understanding of ministry and discipleship I am taking for granted. What do we mean by ministry and discipleship? And what is the relationship between them?

1 Ministry is the church's participation in the mission of God
Over the last 50 years or so the church has rediscovered the basic truth that mission is primarily the action of God. Mission

begins in the heart of God the Trinity; it is an expression of the Trinitarian movement of God towards the world in both creation and redemption. It is not just something God does: it is an aspect of God's character, an overflow of the love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit towards the world God has created. The church does not initiate mission: it is called into being by mission. It has no essence in itself: its nature is derived from its relation to God's mission. 'The Church derives its being from the missionary God and is created and shaped to share in the *missio Dei*, the goal of which is the coming of the kingdom.'[25]

The mission of God goes before the church. The 'chief actor', the 'director of the whole enterprise', is the Holy Spirit.[26] But the church is called to participate: it is a 'privileged instrument' in God's mission.[27] In the words of Rowan Williams, 'mission is finding out what the Holy Spirit is doing and joining in.'[28] We thus encounter that familiar mystery, the relation between divine and human action. Mission is the work of God, and yet also the work of the church: something God initiates in which we are called to participate, and in which our response becomes part of his action. Our response, the work of the whole church, is what we call 'ministry'.

The word most commonly translated 'ministry' in the New Testament is the Greek word *diakonia*. Traditionally, *diakonia* has been understood as 'humble service', and the ministry of 'deacons' as humble service to others in both church and community. More recently, based on an extensive survey of the way the word *diakonia* was ordinarily used in the first century, the New Testament scholar John Collins has proposed that the root meaning of *diakonia* is not so much 'humble' as 'commissioned' service, the carrying out of a 'mandated task'.[29] The person engaged in *diakonia* may simply be an 'assistant', but is often an 'agent' or 'emissary'. This understanding of the word provides an obvious link with the mission of God. It implies that the 'ministry' of the church derives from the fact of its being 'sent'. The church's role as a 'foretaste, sign and agent' of the kingdom of God is expressed through its ministry. Wherever the church participates in the mission of God, there is 'ministry'.

This is the definition of ministry I will be using when we consider learning for ministry. It is a broad one and brings a wide range of activity within its scope: not only participation in church-based programmes of evangelism and service but learning to express Christian love and live out Christian community in the course of everyday life; to discern the presence of God and the signs of God's kingdom in places of daily work; and service on Christ's behalf alongside people of all faiths and none in a variety of community contexts. However, it is not indiscriminately broad: it is related to and defined by the *missio Dei*, another concept with a broad reach, not always easy to define but nevertheless fundamental for the life of the church. It has the merit of relating to and being defined by the call and action of God rather than of the church. It also helps to guard against some of the church's historical errors and shortcomings, especially its tendency to collapse the ministry of the whole church into the ministry of the ordained. Its starting point is the ministry of the *whole church*, shaped by the *missio Dei*.

2 Discipleship is the call to follow Christ by developing Christlike character and a godly pattern of life

In the words of *Shaping the Future*, it is a 'whole-life response to Jesus Christ'.[30] At the heart of the New Testament is the call to Christians to be 'transformed' into the image of Jesus Christ. One of the most remarkable features of Paul's letters is that, convinced as he was of his own calling to preach the gospel and found churches throughout the Roman world, in his letters he never urges the members of those churches to engage in personal evangelism. Rather, his continuous theme is the call to live a transformed life. To the Colossians he writes that he is toiling and struggling 'with all the energy that [Christ] powerfully inspires within me' to present everyone 'mature in Christ' (Colossians 1.28–29). To the Galatians he writes that he is 'in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you' (Galatians 4.19).

This call and process of transformation is a corporate one. The verbs of Paul's exhortations are plural verbs: he is calling them to respond not simply as individuals but as whole communities. To

the Philippians he writes of his confidence that he who began a good work 'among you' will bring it to completion in the day of Christ (Philippians 1.6). Later in the letter he urges the fledgling church to aim at unity of heart and mind. And in Ephesians the writer looks forward to the day when, 'all of us come to the unity of the faith . . . to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ . . . we must grow up in every way into . . . Christ, from whom the whole body . . . promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love' (Ephesians 4.13–16).

Partly, the reason for this has to do with mission. Paul clearly wanted his churches to be distinctive in their manner of life so that others would be drawn to Christ, to 'shine like stars in the world' (Philippians 2.15). This mission emphasis is an important element in contemporary calls for distinctive Christian lifestyle. Lesslie Newbigin asks:

> How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.[31]

And Graham Tomlin writes:

> God has chosen to work out his will for the world not through a bunch of individuals being sent out to persuade others to believe in him, but by creating a community made up of very different people, giving them his Spirit who enables them to live together in unity, to develop a new way of life and to live this life publicly.[32]

But the call to transformation is not simply functional, for the sake of effectiveness in mission. The deeper reason has to do with the nature of the Christian life. Baptism symbolizes and effects not just salvation from sin but incorporation into Christ. It calls and requires us to live a new life: the life of Jesus himself, given to us by his Holy Spirit. There is simply no other way of being a Christian.

> The compass and content of our vision for the Church is Jesus Christ. In times of uncertainty and confusion, if we navigate by this compass we are likely to stay on course . . . It is Jesus who gives the church its DNA, its genetic code. While the Church may need to take a variety of shapes as our culture changes, it will be on course providing we discern that the risen Christ is at the centre.[33]

We have seen that church, ministry and discipleship are all defined by the mission of God. In the words of Emil Brunner, 'The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning.'[34] Mission, as the 'overflowing of God's being and nature into God's purposeful activity in the world',[35] calls the church into existence and individuals to discipleship and ministry. But within this overarching framework of understanding, the relationship between ministry and discipleship requires a closer look. The relationship is integral: the disciple's gradual change of inward character and its outward expression in a godly life that reflects the character of Jesus and her participation in the mission of God are part of a single process of gradual formation and reorientation of life.

3 Ministry arises from discipleship

Discipleship is not only an inward and outward transformation into the likeness of Christ, it is at the same time the discovery of our true selves, the people God created us each to be. We are never free until we submit our hearts and minds in obedience to Christ, and we are never so much our true selves as when becoming more like him. One aspect of this discovery of all God made us to be is the discovery of God-given vocation. To some extent this arises through the recognition of the gifts God gives us for his service, some of which are listed in passages in the New Testament such as Romans 12.3–8; 1 Corinthians 12.4–11; Ephesians 4.11. But at a deeper level is the God-given passion or desire that causes us to 'hunger and thirst for righteousness' in a particular corner or aspect of his world.

Francis Dewar lists a number of features of personal calling, among them:

- You will be doing what in your heart of hearts you love to do.
- It will be a generous giving of what you truly are and could be.

- It will be prompted by God.
- It will be something that in *some* way enriches the impoverished, or gives sight to the blind, or release to the prisoners, or freedom for the oppressed.
- It is more likely, statistically speaking, to be in the secular sphere than in the Church, simply because there is more of it.[36]

When speaking about a sense of personal calling, there is a danger that this might become individualistic and even proprietorial: a case of 'my ministry' as the expression of my own particular passions. Dewar's description makes clear that the discovery of genuine God-given passion is neither of these. It is, rather, a generous giving, directed towards the service of God and others. Moreover, his reference to the ministry of God's servant described in Isaiah 61 and quoted by Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth makes clear that genuine God-given passion is kingdom-shaped, a desire to serve his loving rule. Crucially, for most people the calling is to serve God in the 'secular' sphere: if not in their places of work or lives, then in the wider community.

4 Ministry contributes to discipleship

Rarely can there have been a group of people less prepared for the ministry to which Jesus called them than the apostles. Right up to the time of the Ascension, they still expected the coming of the kingdom to involve the restoration of rule to the people of Israel (Acts 1.6). Only through a painful process of change and conflict did they gradually discover God's purpose that the Gentiles should be included among his people. Earlier, while Jesus was recommissioning Peter for the part he was to play as leader of the apostles, Peter was still looking sideways at the beloved disciple and asking what his future was to be (John 21.20–21)!

But part of the purpose of their ministry was to contribute to their transformation into the people Christ intended them to be. This is expressed perhaps most clearly in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. The ministry to which God had called him and his companions had brought them to a place of despair. Paul writes: 'we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the

sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead' (2 Corinthians 1.8–9). For Paul and his companions, experience of ministry had the effect of refining and deepening their personal discipleship. Later he writes to the Romans: 'we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope' (Romans 5.3–4). Later still, to the Philippians he writes: 'I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need' (Philippians 4.12). The experience of ministry had contributed to his growth in discipleship, tried and tested him and developed his character.

Ann Morisy provides a contemporary illustration of the capacity of ministry to facilitate our growth in discipleship in her description of a group of people who had committed themselves to a project providing debt advice.

> One by one, as the volunteers were confronted by the insidiousness with which debt claims its victims and the destruction which results, they found that the pattern of their weekend changed. No longer could they find the motivation to spend Saturday afternoon going round the shops, indulging the extraordinary pleasure which comes from spending money. Each time they looked in the shop window, the slogans which spelt out the availability of instant credit and the discounts for those taking on a charge card churned their stomachs . . . shopping became a functional task, no longer a psychological fix, and its power over them evaporated.[37]

In this case, ministry had the effect of alerting those involved to the influence of secular culture in a particular area of their lives. Involvement in ministry can be expected to have a number of more general effects. It challenges us through the calling to serve, to put the needs of others before our own. It teaches us more of the nature of sin, both the structural sin of society and also the sinful tendencies of our own hearts. It teaches us more of the goodness and mercy of God, his compassion for the poor and marginalized and his strength in our weakness.

Ministry in the Whole of Life

I have suggested that it is impossible to make a clear distinction between ministry and discipleship. Ministry both arises from and contributes to personal discipleship. The distinction between them is fluid: often they will be seen to be complementary aspects of the same situation. In this respect I differ from the accepted position of the Church of England, in which the term 'ministry' is reserved for 'licensed ministry', lay or ordained; that is, for ministry officially recognized by the Church.[38]

It is arguable that using the word 'ministry' for publicly licensed ministry, 'with its key focus on the nurture, development and leadership of the Church and equipping others for service',[39] and 'discipleship' for Christian service in the world preserves a helpful distinction. But there are dangers in this usage of which it is important to be aware. One is the danger of forgetting the integral relationship between discipleship and ministry. Another is thinking of 'ministry' purely in terms of activities that build up the life of the gathered church and forgetting the vital role of the church dispersed in the world. A third is seeking to control the work of the Holy Spirit by insisting, in effect, that he works within our structures. Finally, perhaps the worst danger is that of falling into theological error, the error that sees the life of the church as prior to and independent of God's call to mission.

The church is not an end but a means. It is a foretaste of the kingdom, the first fruits of a salvation that will ultimately extend to the reconciliation of the whole creation under the lordship of Jesus Christ. The goal of mission is the kingdom of God, and ministry is the way the church participates with God the Holy Spirit in working for the coming of the kingdom.

This insight is evocatively and cogently expressed in the work of Miroslav Volf on the significance of 'work in the Spirit'.[40] According to Volf the purpose of human work in the new creation is 'co-operation with the Spirit in the renewal of creation'. The Spirit is the giver of diverse gifts, whose purpose is to enable each person to pursue a God-given vocation to work for the coming of God's kingdom in co-operation with the Holy Spirit. For Volf, as for Dewar, vocation is not a general calling to a particular type of work – the vocation to

teach, to be a lawyer, to the church's ministry. It is a specific calling, empowered by the Spirit, to work in an area of passion. Equally, for Volf, the potential for daily work to become a contribution to the coming of the kingdom is for *all* people, not only Christians. Since the kingdom is an expression of our deepest human longings, it is open to all to make their daily occupations a means of working for it.

As Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright rejoiced that so many of the Christians he used to meet:

> went straight from worshipping Jesus in church to making a radical difference in the material lives of people down the street, by running playgroups for children with single-parent working mums, by organizing credit unions to help people at the bottom of the financial ladder find their way to responsible solvency, by campaigning for better housing, against dangerous roads, for drug rehab centres, for wise laws relating to alcohol, for decent library and sporting facilities, for a thousand other things in which God's sovereign rule extends to hard, concrete reality.[41]

All these are examples of 'ministry', not because a local church has organized or even recognized these activities but because they are part and parcel of the mission of God, whose goal is the coming of the kingdom.

But in an ideal world local churches *will* recognize, support and perhaps organize such activities. This will mean encouraging and training Christians to pray for the coming of the kingdom in the places they live and work, to discern the signs of God's kingdom and to work for the kingdom in co-operation with the Holy Spirit, one another and all those who desire the well-being of others. In such instances the line between 'discipleship' and 'ministry' is well and truly blurred: both are taking place, as different aspects of the same situation and activity.

Kingdom Learning

In this book I shall suggest how the ministry of all God's people within a 'collegiate and corporate' pattern of mission and ministry, which the Church of England and its partner denominations

aspire to, can become a reality. In part this will be through offering some general principles to guide programmes of discipleship learning and ministerial training. At a deeper level I will be examining the discipline of theological reflection (TR) to show how TR reflects the way people learn most effectively and how, because it is specifically *theological* reflection, TR enables us to grow not only in our understanding of God but also in the realm of feelings and values. I hope to show the way TR enables and challenges us to develop Christian character and so forms us in the likeness of Christ. I will also show the centrality of TR in whole-church learning: the kind of learning through which a local church or whole denomination is enabled to reflect on its own life.

Chapter 1 begins by asking what discipleship meant for the first disciples, the followers of Jesus and members of the New Testament churches. I will be examining the Gospels to tease out Jesus' characteristic teaching methods, Paul's aspirations for his churches, and the ways discipleship learning was expected to take place. I then explore the vision that lies behind discipleship learning: the vision of God's kingdom as the Christian understanding of what it means to live a fully human life in community. Part of any vision for learning is an understanding of the learner. Accordingly, I look at the way adult learning has been understood in the past hundred years and ask how this compares with what we know about the nature of God's kingdom. Finally in Chapter 1, I will raise the subject of character, showing how character development is once again becoming part of the agenda for education in this country, and the part it plays in learning for discipleship and ministry. Recognizing the vital importance of character and virtue as an element in learning raises the question of what knowledge actually is, what approach to learning best facilitates the development of virtue, and how growth in virtue is to be understood in relation to growth in knowledge.

I then devote the whole of Chapter 2 to an exploration of theological reflection. TR is the way we connect life and faith: the way we learn to see our everyday lives through the lens of Christian faith, and the way we recognize and respond to the challenges to faith daily life is continually throwing at us. Although I use an example of TR from ordained ministry, it is a tool equally adapted for lay and ordained, discipleship and ministry. The example I have chosen allows me to investigate what is going on in TR from several different points of view. I will be exploring the place of Scripture, the role of the church and the involvement of the Holy Spirit. At the heart of the exploration, however, lies the investigation of what knowledge actually is, the way we hold and deploy our knowledge and what is actually going on when we learn.

In Chapter 3, I begin to bring together the exploration so far in order to put it into practice. I begin by showing how TR echoes the widely recognized cycle of experiential learning: how TR can be understood as bringing an intentionally Christian dimension to both formal planned learning and to the informal learning that people engage in all the time. I then look specifically at planned programmes of Christian learning and offer some general guidelines to help those whose responsibility it is to promote discipleship learning in the local church.

However, it is important to be aware that while such programmes have their undoubted value, they are not the most important source of learning in the life of the church. The most important learning comes about as a result of participation in the life of the church, in the course of which people learn to recognize, consciously or unconsciously, the shared perspectives at the heart of the church's life, the meaning of Christian faith for the members of this particular community, their shared expectations for Christian conduct, their vision of mission and ministry. I suggest that the most powerful experiences of learning are likely to be those that come about when these shared assumptions are examined with a view to testing their faithfulness to the gospel. They take the form of 'interventions' with the potential for transformative change in the life of individuals and in the church as a whole. Using theological reflection as a learning tool to enable the church to reflect together on its own life is the key to adaptive change. When used wisely it has the power to overturn the culture of clericalism in which church members are expected to rely on the expertise of the clergy, and to empower and equip ordinary lay Christians for mission and service.

The next section of this chapter takes us deeper still. Here I introduce the concept of a 'practice', first put forward by Alasdair

MacIntyre, an idea that is becoming increasingly influential in discussion of Christian ministry. I show how practices bring together knowledge, skills and virtues in a unified whole. I go on to look at the local church as a 'community of practice' and show how this can make sense of the corporate element of learning, the way we learn together and from one another. Moreover, by exploring the boundaries between the church and the other communities of faith in which people take part, it can also help us to think about the way Christians can be equipped to live out their faith in the varied contexts of their daily life and work.

In Chapter 4, I turn to look specifically at learning for ministry. First I show that ministry itself can be understood as a practice, or rather as a related cluster of practices, and that this has important implications for the way people are trained most effectively for ministry. I then look at the challenges that face the church as we seek to come to terms with the assumptions we have inherited from the past that prevent us from enabling the ministry of the whole church. I show how our existing understanding of leadership, of the nature of knowledge itself and of the nature of theology, conspire together to inhibit the changes we need to make, and suggest how we need to 'reimagine' all three if we are to rise to the challenges that face us. Finally, I suggest some of the ways church leaders can help to equip their congregations for ministry.

Kingdom Learning is not, as I have said, a straight 'how-to-do-it' book, but nor is it a work of pure theory. What I am hoping for is that, by understanding what is going on when people learn, and thus by understanding better what is required to help them to learn, church leaders will be equipped to respond flexibly to the challenge of change, the challenge to reimagine ministry in order to participate more effectively in the mission to which God calls us.

Notes

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2 Ann Morisy, *Journeying Out*, London: Continuum, 2004, pp. 1–4.

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4 For the distinction between 'technical' and 'adaptive' situations, see the work of Ronald Heifetz in *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994; and Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Boston: MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009.

5 Archbishops' Council, 'Challenges for the New Quinquennium', General Synod Miscellaneous Paper 1815, 2010, § 1.

6 'Challenges for the New Quinquennium', § 11.

7 Archbishops' Council, 'Released for Mission', General Synod Miscellaneous Paper 1092, 2015, p. 3.

8 Adrian Dorber: 'Why is Local Ministry Important for a Mission-Shaped Church?', in *Local Ministry: Story, Process and Meaning*, ed. Robin Greenwood and Caroline Pascoe, London: SPCK, 2006.

9 Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation*, 2nd edn, New York: Random House, 2006, pp. 13–14 on *metanoia*; pp. 171–4 and 228–9 on hierarchy.

10 David Heywood, *Reimagining Ministry*, London: SCM Press, 2011.

11 This way of describing the relationship of church and kingdom is that of Lesslie Newbigin and first appears in 'On Being the Church for the World', in *The Parish Church*, ed. Giles Ecclestone, London: Mowbray, 1988, pp. 37–8; reprinted in *Lesslie Newbigin: Missionary Theologian*, ed. Paul Weston, London: SPCK, 2006, pp. 137–8. In the documents of Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* refers to the church as 'sacrament – a sign and agent of communion with God and of unity with all men' and the 'seed and beginning' of the kingdom: *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Austin Flannery, pp. 350, 353. According to the Lima document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 'The Church is called to proclaim and prefigure the kingdom of God'; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982, p. 16.

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13 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, London: Catholic Truth Society, 1913, § 24, 119–21; taken up by Steven Croft in 'Developing Disciples', General Synod Paper 1977, § 20, 40.

14 See the work of Ronald Heifetz and Peter Senge, mentioned in notes 4 and 9. For a briefer and more accessible introduction written from a Christian standpoint, see Hawkins, *Learning Congregation*.

15 Archbishops' Council, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*, London: Church House Publishing, 2003.

16 Archbishops' Council, *Shaping the Future: New Patterns of Training for Lay and Ordained*, London: Church House Publishing, 2006.

17 *Shaping the Future*, p. 4.

18 *Shaping the Future*, p. 6.

19 Diocese of Carlisle, *Growing Disciples*, 2011; General Synod Paper 1977, 'Developing Discipleship' § 33.

20 'Developing Discipleship' §§ 33, 37, 38.

21 'Developing Discipleship' § 33.

22 Update on 'Serving Together' for the joint meeting of the House of Bishops and Archbishops' Council, November 2016; emphasis in original.

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32 Graham Tomlin, *The Provocative Church*, London: SPCK, 2002, p. 69

33 Steven Croft, *Jesus' People: What the Church Should Do Next*, London: Church House Publishing, 2009, p. 8; and see also Peter Allen's opening chapter in George Guiver et al., *The Fire and the Clay*, London: SPCK, 1993, in which he explores the Christian's new identity in Christ.

34 Emil Brunner, *The Word in the World*, London: SCM Press, 1931, p. 138.

35 *Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church*, p. 58.

36 Francis Dewar, *Called or Collared?*, London: SPCK, 1991, pp. 5–6.

37 Ann Morisy, *Beyond the Good Samaritan*, London: Mowbray, 1997, pp. 17–18.

38 See, for example, Archbishops' Council, *Shaping the Future*, pp. 4–5; *Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church*, pp. 62, 64; Martin Davie, *A Guide to the Church of England*, London: Continuum, 2008, p. 108.

39 *Shaping the Future*, p. 4.

40 Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1991; see especially chapter 4, 'Work, Spirit, and New Creation'.

41 Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, London: SPCK, 2007, p. 205.