

GENERAL SYNOD

Setting God's People Free: Becoming a Jesus Christ centred and Jesus Christ shaped church in the whole of life

November 2021

As a 'royal priesthood' (1 Peter 2:9), we are summoned – clergy and laity alike – through baptism to a common vocation of divine blessing that originates in Jesus Christ. Baptism is the mark of our incorporation into the life of the Church and a commissioning to participate in God's mission in the world. As such, the Church, as the whole people of God, clergy and laity, gathered and sent, are charged with continuing Christ's priestly work of blessing, mediation and reconciliation on behalf of the whole of humanity, to bear witness to, and participate in the mission of God.

(GS2056, Setting God's People Free p. 1)

Introduction and summary

1. In 2017 the Setting God's People Free report initiated a programme of work to implement a culture shift across the Church of England which would **encourage and equip lay people to follow Jesus confidently in every sphere of life; and affirm and enact the complementary gifting, vocation and mutual accountability in discipleship between lay and ordained followers**. In July 2019 an update report to General Synod (GS 2145) highlighted the progress that was being made through dioceses, worshipping communities and the networks that support the church in our collective mission; and work which has continued in spite of the recent challenges of COVID-19 (see appendix 2). The July 2021 Synod debate noted and affirmed the ongoing implementation of SGPF and, further, called upon:
 - the Archbishops' Council, the House of Bishops, and the dioceses to drive forward the changes in culture the report demands, especially in the area of lay and clergy mutuality and relationships;
 - to encourage further work to explore and broaden our understanding of God's kingdom in our daily lives to enable and embed the desired culture mentioned in this report; and
 - the Archbishops' Council to maintain focus on this as a strategic priority throughout the next quinquennium.¹
2. These recommendations are incorporated in both the ambition and priorities of the Vision and Strategy for the 2020s (GS 2223) **to become a Church that is centred on Jesus Christ and shaped by Jesus Christ through the five marks of mission**. This paper highlights the points of connection and, further, suggests areas of insight from the SGPF programme of benefit to the implementation of the priorities and bold outcomes discerned from this vision.
3. The clearest thread for continuance is encapsulated in the priority set on becoming a church of missionary disciples. However, for this to be fruitfully implemented, experience from SGPF suggests implementation retains a clear focus on culture change. Secondly, work to implement SGPF has necessarily encompassed a wide array of aspects of the life of the church from ministry and practices in worshipping communities, through to developing new

¹ July 2019 Group of Sessions Business Done , p.24

patterns to support faith in diverse contexts. As such, the ongoing task of shifting the culture of the church to better enable the whole people of God, in the whole mission of God in the whole of life, crosses all priority areas of the vision and strategy.

4. Given this, three areas of insight and ongoing action are highlighted as crucial dimensions for the implementation of the new vision and strategy. These are grounded in the activities and priorities of dioceses, worshiping communities and individuals that have emerged in seeking the implementation of SGPF in their contexts. These are:
 - Everyday Faith: prioritising 'finding and following God in daily life' in how we encourage being a church of missionary disciples
 - Enabling Ministry: resourcing ordained and lay roles that 'equip the whole people of God, of all ages, in their wider vocation and ministry'
 - Encouraging Discernment: developing 'spiritual practices that nurture communal and personal calling and vocation'

Continuing the shifts of Setting Gods People Free in the Vision and Strategy for the 2020s

5. The vision and strategy sets three priorities as central for our calling at this time to become a **Church that is Jesus Christ centred and Jesus Christ shaped by the five marks of mission.** These are:
 - 1) A church of missionary disciples
 - 2) A church where mixed ecology is the norm
 - 3) A church which is younger and more diverse

From this, six bold outcomes have been identified as a guide for addressing these priorities.

A church for everyone through:

- 1) Doubling the number of children and young active disciples in the Church of England by 2030.
- 2) A Church of England which fully represents the communities we serve in age and diversity.
- 3) A parish system revitalised for mission so there is a pathway for every person into an accessible and contextual expression of church.
- 4) Creating ten thousand new Christian communities across the four areas of home, work/education, social and digital.

Empowered by:

- 5) **All Christians in the Church of England envisioned, resourced and released to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the whole of life, bringing transformation to the church and world.**
 - 6) **All local churches, supported by their diocese, becoming communities and hubs for initial and ongoing formation**
6. The priority area to be a church of missionary disciples has clear resonance with the work developed through Setting God's People Free. All that has been undertaken in dioceses, worshiping communities and in resources for families and individuals, provides a rich foundation in forming and equipping the whole people of God to serve God's mission in God's world. The vision and strategy enhances our focus that being missionary disciples is to

seek to be a people who seek to live lives centred on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Such a life is rooted in our baptismal commitments as the people of God to ‘reject and resist evil’ and ‘shine as lights in the world’. In our contemporary context such a commitment is a choice to continue to ‘abide’ in Christ and to opt to take an ongoing stance in how this calls us to act in all aspects of life. As such, being intentional disciples requires a fuller vision of the calling we are given, a commitment to the ways in which we act as the church to fulfil these – in all areas of life and all spheres of society.

7. The SGPF report differed from previous reports on the calling and vocation of the laity through identifying the distinct challenge of tackling a culture that did not enable and empower such an encompassing vision for the whole people of God. Given this, it is an imperative that this approach of addressing a change in our culture remain a clear thread in the implementation plans developed for the vision and strategy. The legacy of previous attempts to seek renewal of the whole church reminds us of the urgency to attend to this foundational issue.
8. The aspirations of SGPF also impinge on the priority of a church where a mixed ecology is the norm. First and foremost, work with pilot parishes has attested to how a focus on encouraging and enabling the whole people of God in our everyday faith serves to renew a sense of flourishing for the life of the church. Further, the recognition that communities that extend Christian presence across *home, work/education, social and digital* link with strands of current SGPF activity on **faith at home** and **faith at work**. These include the practices that shape home and family life and the development of chaplaincy provision or workplace fellowships. Work on SGPF has been directly addressing how worshipping communities best undertake ‘initial and ongoing formation’. Such communities may be lay-led, but the framing of SGPF pushes that parish-renewal, pioneering and planting Christian communities must lead to communities that enable the ministry and vocation of the whole church to serve God’s mission in the world.
9. There is clear evidence that engaging with younger generations is linked to a clearer identification of a ‘whole life gospel’ and a church that is concerned with seeking to play its part – gathered and dispersed – in seeking transformation.² As said in one of the vignettes, “It’s really a story we want to be a part of, but only if it connects with actual life – in all its fullness – which is rarely fixed in a building.” The aspirations of SGPF therefore chime with what is needed to better engage within this priority. Similarly, one of the principles developed in SGPF lies in paying closer attention to ‘lived experience of faith’ and shaping ministry response around this. This attention is also vital in becoming more representative of our communities – the focus on everyday faith attunes us to the insights, experiences and needs of ordinary people in everyday life.
10. Insights and activities from the work within SGPF will be useful across these aspects of the vision and strategy. These are outlined in more detail in appendix 1, but in summary are:
 - a. **Everyday Faith**. This phrase is being used by a growing number of dioceses as a way of encapsulating what a Jesus Christ centred and shaped ‘everyday life’ looks like and how this can be encouraged. To facilitate this, we should:

² See Perrin R, *Changing Shape: The Faith Lives of Millennials*, SCM (2020) short clip available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T58kP46s5Gw> [last accessed 13/10/21]

- **Prioritise activities and practices that promote ‘everyday faith’ in our approaches to ‘equipping’ missionary disciples**
 - **Continue to encourage and inform leaders on the importance of sharing everyday faith stories and in their role in modelling everyday faith as a priority**
- b. **Enabling Ministry** encapsulates a significant part of the shift towards mutuality of vocation and the role ‘ministry’ plays in animating the vocation and ministry of the whole of God. This requires we:
- **Prioritise ‘enabling ministry’ as the foundation for selection and formation in ordained and lay ministry roles to help in ‘equipping’ missionary disciples**
 - **Continue to embed approaches to leadership development and learning that facilitate culture change as part of the theological tasks of leadership and ministry.**
- c. **Encouraging Discernment** identifies a core principle to the approaches taken in implementing the aspirations of SGPF that attention to ‘spiritual practices’ lie at the heart of any ‘strategy for change’. This means we should:
- **Prioritise approaches that place spiritual practices and communal discernment of their holistic calling at the heart of strategies to renew and establish worshiping communities**
 - **Continue to develop practices that enable individuals and groups discern participation in the mission of God in the whole of life and links to networks and groups that support this.**

Conclusion

11. In the General Synod debate on the implementation of Setting Gods People Free in 2019, Pete Wilcox, the Bishop of Sheffield reminded us that whilst “notoriously difficult to engineer”, in his view, SGPF was begging to make a huge impact. Similar sentiments were expressed by several contributors to the debate and have been reinforced through ongoing feedback in the discipleship learning communities, pilot worshiping communities and individuals now drawing on the Everyday Faith resources and networks. This work necessarily continues in the new vision and strategy. The adoption of the general approach to culture change taken in SGPF and the insights from and impetus of current activities will enhance implementation.

Dr Nick Shepherd, Programme Director for Setting God’s People Free

Appendix 1: Everyday Faith, Enabling Ministry and Encouraging Discernment: Ongoing tasks for a Jesus Christ centred and Jesus Christ sent church

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

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

Everyday Faith: Being missionary disciples in the whole of life

1. **Everyday Faith** is being used by a growing number of dioceses as a way of encapsulating what a Jesus Christ centred and shaped ‘everyday life’ looks like and how this can be encouraged. It acts as a gathering focus for a range of activities and resources that seek to build awareness of, encourage reflection on, and shape resources for **‘finding and following God in everyday life’**. This includes all ages and seeks to fit a variety of contexts. Everyday faith embeds the culture change of ‘Sunday to Saturday Christian living’ as a core principle. Through the sharing of Everyday Faith stories testimony of Christian living is being more widely shared and enhances the vision of being a Jesus Christ centred church.
2. Activities used to promote everyday faith have begun to **change the conversation** around *being* church not merely *doing* church. This has been seen evident in approaches such as ‘Changing Lives Conversations’ in Canterbury Diocese and the use of ‘Everyday Faith Questions’ as a resource to start discussions around faith in the whole of life in schools, homes and churches in Bath and Wells.³ These small steps do make a big difference. A new resource channel on the Church Support Hub has been established to share these steps – as well as further ideas generated by dioceses and worshipping communities.

Prioritise activities and practices that promote ‘everyday faith’ in our approaches to ‘equipping’ missionary disciples

3. Whilst there have been increased stories of everyday faith in local church, diocesan and national church communications remain an ongoing challenge. Similarly, the ways in which we represent the church on our websites and signal the scope of mission in our reports still overly highlight the activities of gathering as a church or projects for mission to the detriment of stories that celebrate the ongoing activities of the church sent to serve Christ in the world. A key requirement to address this lies in the ways in which leaders, especially senior leaders, help to frame everyday faith as lens through which the life of the church is viewed. Such prioritisation shapes the visits people make, the questions asked around resourcing, and the language used in both sermons and policies.

Continue to encourage and inform leaders on the importance of sharing everyday faith stories and in their role in modelling everyday faith as a priority

³ See <https://www.churchsupporthub.org/everyday-church/>

Enabling Ministry: Jesus Christ centred people with Jesus Christ shaped lives

4. **Enabling Ministry** encapsulates a significant part of the shift towards mutuality of vocation and the role 'ministry' plays in animating the vocation and ministry of the whole of God.⁴ Enabling ministry acts as a gathering principle to affirm the vital role played by people called to ministerial vocations and conveys the vitality giving role of ministry in the life of the church.⁵ It helps to negotiate a key confusion around lay/clergy mutuality that reduces this to the area of ministry and leadership in the church. It is the recognition **of mutuality in ministry and leadership as the church** – in our differing callings and vocations across the whole of life that lie at the heart of the culture change being sought through SGPF.

5. The Ministry Council vision of *Ministry for Christian Presence* is grounded in encouraging and equipping the whole people of God. New criteria for ordained ministry now firmly place the gifting and equipping for such a commission in the criteria for discernment, selection and formation for ordained ministry. Pilot work with Theological Education Institutions (TEIs) has helped to identify shifts in practice that can begin to better inform a theological imagination for enabling ministry. Alongside this, dioceses have adapted approaches to both initial and continuing ministerial education to prioritise and equip ministry. Similar attention has been given to an expansion of lay ministry roles. However, a challenge remains that the encouragement of lay ministry is often conflated with the aspirations SGPF conveys of enabling the wider vocation and ministry of the whole people of God. Highlighting the importance all ministry roles play in equipping the church will help to negotiate this.

Prioritise 'enabling ministry' as the foundation for selection and formation in ordained and lay ministry roles to help in 'equipping' missionary disciples

6. The well-worn phrase that "culture eats strategy for breakfast, lunch and dinner" is recognisably true in cultivating communities of missionary disciples in the whole of life. Prioritising culture change is not an avoidance of the hard decisions, but recognition that we will not achieve transformation by strategic planning or investment in isolation. In the Diocese of Gloucester, a pilot programme with CPAS and LICC has developed an integrated approach to developing the changing shape of their leadership teams with work to nurture a church culture that encourages a 'whole of life faith'. Greater integration of approaches to culture change and leadership development are also being seen in diocesan strategies for learning communities in new Deanery and mission groupings.

Continue to embed approaches to leadership development and learning that facilitate culture change as part of the theological tasks of leadership and ministry

Encouraging Discernment: Serving Jesus Christ, shaped by the five marks of mission.

7. **Encouraging Discernment** identifies a core principle to the approaches taken in implementing the aspirations of SGPF that attention to 'spiritual practices' lie at the heart of

⁴ See Kingdom Calling, GS Mic 1254 at <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/22047> [last accessed 13/10/21]

⁵ See *Vision for Christian Presence*, GS 1224 at <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/17937> [last accessed 13/10/21]

any 'strategy for change'. An assessment of the 'things that make a difference' in dioceses, worshipping communities and for individuals share a common feature of moving from 'concepts to practices'. This includes greater attention to how historic Christian practices better inform and form the sending of the whole people of God. In addition, a rise in the adoption of rules of life, the popularity of online resources for prayer and reflection, and the wide uptake of resources such as personal discipleship plans all affirm that an array of practices, renewed and new, are required to enable people to 'find and follow God in their daily lives'.

8. Within worshipping communities approaches such as Partnership for Missional Church have been aligned with the vision of SGPF to find ways to enable communities to discern their calling in mission.⁶ Similar approaches that embed spiritual practices are being utilised to help shape worshipping communities as missional communities. These approaches share a common thread of collaborative discernment and identifying the ways in the which partnership and community connections are crucial to serving the mission of God. These approaches set the five marks of mission within the attitudes of being a simpler, humbler and bolder church. In the Diocese of Durham, among others, similar practices form part of an intentional process for worshipping communities entering a vacancy process to first help these people discern their sense of vocation and calling. This incorporates a wide view of where the service of God's mission is discerned in different life stages and contexts. From this, the appropriate ministry roles can be identified to support and equip this local vision.

Prioritise approaches that place spiritual practices and communal discernment of their holistic calling at the heart of strategies to renew and establish worshipping communities

9. One of the main barriers to the implementation of SGPF has been identified as 'the gravitational pull of the church'. There is a clear tension in how the demands of sustaining ministry and the upkeep of our valuable builds can compete with attention and resources that focus on engagement in God's mission away from the projects and activities of a local church. As we seek to be shaped by the five marks of mission, identifying this as including the church's participation in this mission in our daily lives is a distinct challenge. However, several dioceses have, or are in the process of, introducing mechanisms to integrate and support a balanced view of personal and corporate mission. In the personal discipleship plan process developed by Oxford Diocese, attention is given to help people identify their gifts and a balance and prioritisation of involvement in ministry roles, church projects and serving God in daily life.⁷ To accompany this, spiritual practices that aid ongoing reflection and discernment of God's activity are being developed for school, home and work contexts. A central aim of the new Everyday Faith digital portal will be to provide wider engagement to such resources and clearer connection with the networks for ongoing support.

Continue to develop practices that enable individuals and groups to discern participation in the mission of God in the whole of life and links to networks and groups that support this.

⁶ See https://issuu.com/churchmissionsociety/docs/cms_pmc_report_v5-screen_pages [last accessed 13/10/21]

⁷ See Oxford website. These are also embedded in Everyday Faith portal.

Appendix 2: Levers for change and approach to culture change developed through the SGPF Discipleship Learning Communities

1. The focus on culture change within in SGPF is also accompanied by a clear articulation that such a shift requires focussed areas of implementation to help achieve this. Four such areas were identified as priorities for the SGPF programme:
 - National championing of the two over-arching culture shifts – by Rachel Treweek (Bishop of Gloucester) and Dr Jamie Harrison (Chair of the House of Laity).
 - A national portal (digital resources) to inspire and support every member of the Church of England in ‘all of life discipleship’ and vocational journey.
 - A learning community of ‘pilot dioceses’ that are prioritising both culture shifts.
 - Re-modelling the selection, training and ongoing ministerial development of clergy in line with the priority of lay formation and discipleship.

This work was guided by a model of culture change focussing on the levers that can be applied across the church to nurture the fruitful behaviours, supportive structures and effective leadership. A learning document from this work will be available in December 2021.

2. In dioceses and through networks of partner organisations, a national network of Disciple Enablers has been set up to continue the approaches to action/learning and peer-support gained through the four cohorts of Discipleship Learning Communities. The Discipleship Learning Community process has enabled 29 dioceses to evaluate and explore the actions they need to take to enable and equip the whole church – young and old – in our callings across society. Half of these dioceses now have well advanced action plans in this area, with others continuing to develop these.
3. Following extensive piloting work, a national digital portal to resource ‘everyday faith’, integrated with existing digital campaigns and diocesan resources, will be launched late 2021, with the ambitious target of engaging 100,000 users by the end of 2022. This will provide an accessible and adaptable digital portal from the CofE, offering innovative digital delivery of tailored resources, from a range of providers, that equip and encourage an everyday faith – designed to help people find and follow God in everyday life, share this journey in community, and live as effective witnesses.
4. Through the work of the Ministry Team, the new selection and formation criteria for ordained ministry have now been introduced alongside extensive consultation and training with TEIs, Diocesan Vocations Teams and Advisors. In addition, the SGPF team has engaged with a small group of TEIs to explore what changes in approach to formation and training might best set a culture of ‘enabling ministry’. The finding of this research will be used to shape ongoing work with the sector in 2022.