

A Framework for

# Catechesis & Intentional Discipleship

in the Anglican Communion



## **A Framework for Catechesis & Intentional Discipleship in the Anglican Communion**

### **Introduction – a history of catechesis**

When Jesus called his first disciples he adopted a well-established rabbinic model of learning which involved ‘whole-life’ imitation and formation. Becoming a disciple was about much more than heard knowledge and understanding. It was, as St. Paul later explains, about receiving the life of God and being shaped by that Life. In Arabic the word *murshid* for a teacher means ‘a Guide to the right way’ and the early Christians were also known as the followers of ‘The Way’. Catechesis is about helping each other along the way, by example, by teaching, by the formation of spiritual practices and habits, and being immersed (baptised) in the mission of God.

From those earliest times the Christian Church found it useful to have recognised processes for helping enquirers, new believers, and those moving forward in faith to understand and live out their Christian faith. This has included some agreement as to the ‘essentials’ which mark out belief in a divine reality as “Christian”. This process can be referred to as catechesis and the ‘essentials’ as catechism.

The term catechesis is used from the New Testament onwards as a term for Christian formation and preparation for baptism and lifelong discipleship. The term is used for the period of formation beginning from first enquiry, through baptism, and on until we are fully established in the faith.

The word catechesis has at its centre the term “echo”. Good Christian formation is often based around knowing and repeating certain texts and phrases which become embedded in the heart and a means of transformation.

In the early Church catechesis was the work of several years of formation and instruction. To be baptised into a Christian minority was a serious decision. There was an annual cycle of formation leading up to baptism at Easter. This is the origin of the season of Lent: it was the final period of instruction.

The core texts for instruction were the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer although a wide variety of scriptures were used. There is some evidence that the commandments and the beatitudes were also used in this way. The pattern of formation was remarkably effective and led to the sustained growth of the Church, by the grace of God, as a minority community across the Roman Empire.

During the Reformation period the English Reformers faced a new challenge: the teaching of the recast and reshaped Anglican faith and identity to a population learning to read in the midst of a technological and political revolution. The key was the development of a simple catechism issued with the Book of Common Prayer in 1548 and revised in 1604 and again in 1662. This catechism was based on Martin Luther's shorter catechism. It is in a simple question and answer format making it easy to learn and remember. It is based around:

- The Apostles' Creed
- The Lord's Prayer
- The Ten Commandments

The familiar sentences about the sacraments were added at the 1604 revision.

The catechism was printed as a primer to help people learn to read. People would learn their letters first and then be introduced to their first text : the catechism.

All clergy were expected to give instruction in the catechism every Sunday by law. The pattern after ordination was first to pay attention to writing and giving your catechetical sermons which were continually revised and renewed.

**In producing this resource, we are encouraging churches across the whole Anglican Communion to revisit this part of our heritage and place much greater emphasis on the ministry of catechesis.**

Because the Anglican Communion is now a large and diverse international family of Churches which embracing many cultures and languages it is imperative that the actual catechism is translated into each appropriate language and culture. The faith itself does not change, and the Catechism that we find in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer remains the Anglican benchmark. However, as we prepare people for their Christian lives today there may be some things we need to add, and these may vary from culture to culture. Furthermore, the catechetical process itself must be developed locally by provinces (or even dioceses). As an expression of our 'unity

in diversity' the following framework for catechesis is offered as part of the current 'Season of Intentional Discipleship and Disciple-making'.

In tune with the current focus on discipleship the attached framework is couched in the language of discipleship but can easily be read and interpreted through the language of apostleship, the reign of God or the family of God.

## **A framework for Anglican/Episcopal Catechesis**



To be a disciple of Jesus Christ means to be someone whose life is shaped by Jesus and who therefore, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is called to reflect in their life the will of God in the world.

The Mission of the Church is the Mission of Christ. Anglican and Episcopal Christians live by the **Five Marks of Christ's Mission** which describe what this life looks like for Christian communities. These are the ministries and priorities which should be shaping every Anglican and every church.

### **The Five Marks of Mission are:**

- 1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.**
- 2. To teach, baptize and nurture new believers.**
- 3. To respond to human need by loving service.**
- 4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.**
- 5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.<sup>1</sup>**

These can also be the marks of an individual Christian life that is shaped by Jesus and reflecting the will of God – **a Jesus Shaped Life**.

This means that, becoming Jesus Shaped:

1. Every Christian will know, or rediscover, their calling to be a **witness to Christ** in their daily life. This will include telling the story of what their faith means but also witness through the lives they lead.

2. Every Christian will be able to **give a reason for the hope** that is in them. They need to know about their faith, understand its meaning and relevance, and live by its standards, and help nurture others to discover or rediscover their faith in Christ within the Eucharistic community.
3. Every Christian will be a **good neighbour** in their community and active in helping those who are in need and disadvantaged by acts of mercy, loving service and by charitable giving.
4. Every Christian will be committed to **building a better world** now and for the future. Transforming unjust structures within society they will actively seek ways to bring positive impact on their family, their neighbourhood, their community, and their nation, recognising our inter-dependence across the world and a belonging to each other that in Christ transcends the world's usual boundaries of nationality, ethnicity, tribe, language, gender, colour and class.
5. Every Christian needs to be aware of our dependence on and the need to **care for the environment**, locally and globally, and develop ways of living that do not exhaust or exploit God's creation.

Every province, diocese and parish of the Anglican Communion is called to produce, distribute and commend resources to help all Christians understand and live this **Jesus Shaped Life**.

We recommend that each church explores this Jesus Shaped Life under the four headings – **witness, belief, service and belonging**. The first three of these cover the five marks of mission,<sup>ii</sup> but there is an important fourth consideration: the experience of being a vital part of the Body of Christ, the Eucharistic community, allowing Jesus to live through us, which alone can empower us to witness, believe and serve. We will call this belonging.

*These four headings have been chosen because they represent the 'four points of entry' commonly recognised by sociologists of religion. People generally 'enter' a faith (a) to witness to a personal experience of the divine, or (b) through a more intellectual appreciation of a set of beliefs, or (c) through a moral alignment with the actions/service of a faith community, or (d) through a sense of belonging, or a desire to belong, to a particular group.*

So here are the four headings for each church to focus on -

1. **Witness (Marks of Mission No.1)**
2. **Belief (Mark of Mission No. 2)**
3. **Service (Marks of Mission No. 3, No. 4 and No. 5)**
4. **Belonging (The context for living out all the Marks of Mission)**

## **I. Witness** *To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom (MoM 1)*

Every Christian has two stories to tell –

- The story of what God has done in Jesus Christ
- The story of what God has done in their life.

Every Christian must know these two stories and be able to talk about them in friendly, accessible ways.

One of the first jobs of catechesis is to help Christian people reflect on the story of the gospel and set it within the wider story of the Bible. Regular bible study and encouraging people to read the bible prayerfully at home, in small groups and at church is one of the most important foundations of a Jesus shaped life.

Here are some resources that can help people read the Bible regularly

- **Add your own resources here, they may include:**
  - o The Bible Course (Produced by the Bible Society)
  - o A study Bible in your local language
  - o Daily Bible Reading notes (printed and online produced by many different agencies)

The best advertisement for the Christian faith is a Christian life. Alongside the daily discipline of reading scripture must be a daily commitment to prayer. When we pray the Holy Spirit forms Jesus in us. We become more like Jesus and the good things we see in him become evident in our lives. Of course we can never be completely like Jesus, but it is by a life of prayer that the Holy Spirit changes us. Teaching people to pray is, therefore, the other great step towards a Jesus shaped life.

Most important of all is the prayer Jesus taught his disciples when they asked him to teach them to pray. The Lord's prayer establishes for us a pattern of prayer which encompasses: awe and wonder at the character of God; alignment with the

Kingdom purposes of God in the world; expression of daily dependence; giving and receiving of forgiveness; seeking protection from evil; trust in the power and authority of God. This prayer is the prayer every Christian should know by heart.

Finally, this witness overflows into the way we live each day. Being Jesus Shaped is not just about our live within the Christian community. It effects the way we behave at work, the values we bring to family life, the uses to which we put our leisure time, and how we act politically, environmentally, financially and in our wider relationships. This doesn't mean we reckon ourselves to be better than other people. But it does mean that the fruits of the Spirit are evident in our lives. We are more generous, self-controlled, peaceful, loving and faithful.

## **2. Belief**     *To teach, baptize and nurture new believers (MoM 2)*

The basic beliefs of the Christian faith do not change form one culture to another. In the historic texts of the worldwide Anglican Communion we affirm that the faith we teach and expound is the faith that we received, the same faith that was received by the first disciples of Jesus. The summary of the Christian faith found in the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer remains the benchmark of the Christian faith for the whole Anglican Communion, even though other Churches have developed their own versions using their own language, but not altering or amending, adding to or subtracting from the faith itself. This is very important. The Christian faith is not something we pick and choose.

There have been some developments in Christian doctrine; so for instance, all Anglican Churches now accept Ordination, Marriage and the Anointing of the Sick, for example, as sacraments of the Church alongside the two instituted by Jesus himself, Baptism and Holy Communion. But this is not understood to be a change in the Christian faith, but a recognition of something that was always there, but not always acknowledged or accepted. (We can note similar developments in doctrine in the bible itself, for instance the acceptance of gentile converts to Christianity that we read about in the Acts of the Apostles). When it comes to the core doctrines of the Christian faith there can be no disagreement.

These core doctrines are to be found in the creeds. The Anglican Church acknowledges three creeds as the boundary commission for our faith. They are –

- **The Apostles' Creed**
- **The Nicene Creed**

- **The Athanasian Creed**

Christians learning about their faith need to know and understand what the creeds say, especially the Apostles' Creed. Alongside the catechism of the national church, this creed can helpfully form the basis of any catechetical programme.

Here are some resources for teaching and understanding the basics of the Christian faith –

- **Add your local resources here**

As we observed with regard to witness, Christian belief is not just about believing, but also behaving. Any instruction in the Christian faith will include, for instance, looking at the Ten Commandments. This is the ethical standard Christians are expected to live by. We don't just learn what they are; we strive to live by them each day.

**3. Service** *To respond to human need by loving service; to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation; to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth. (MoM 3,4,5)*

The final three marks of mission speak about the Christian duty to respond to need, challenge injustice, and safeguard the creation. We are grouping these together under the heading service. Service is that aspect of a Jesus shaped life where the beliefs that we embrace overflow into shaping our life in such a way that we see the world as God sees it and, in the words of the beatitudes, "hunger and thirst for what is right." (Matthew 5:6) As someone once said, when the worship ends, the service begins.

Most Christians spend the majority of their lives in contexts of service, either on the farm or in the factory, caring for children or the elderly, as entrepreneurs, scientists, engineers or teachers, or perhaps working as a volunteer or political activist. It is in these 'normal' contexts of life that Christians need to help each other live Jesus Shaped Lives – sometimes in quite secular or hostile environments.

Christians will be involved in the ministry of service in many different ways according to their gifts, resources, passions, energy and circumstances, but no Christian is exempted. Every one of us is called to love our neighbour, to build God's kingdom of peace and justice in the world – after all every time we say the Lord's Prayer we



say “Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven” – and cherish and protect the environment.

Here are some resources for learning and understanding more about this aspect of discipleship –

- **Add your local resources**

#### 4. Belonging

The day to day work of discipleship, the lifetimes’ work of growing a Jesus shaped life, is nurtured in the local Church. Therefore, some of the disciplines of belonging to the Christian community within the local church are vital for healthy discipleship.

These are -

- **Worship:** our communion with God

The chief joy and duty of any disciple is to bring worship and praise to God. The breaking of bread and sharing of wine in the Holy Communion (also called the Eucharist or the Lord’s Supper) is an act of worship which constitutes our belonging within the Body of Christ, His church. Other sacraments mark our entry into and ministry within the church. It is a mark of disciples that they come together regularly, in small groups and large assemblies to worship God.

- **Fellowship:** our community with each other

We learn from scripture that Jesus did not call individuals to be mentored but groups of disciples who would grow into a supportive and outward looking community. Christian fellowship is essential for the nurture of new disciples and the growth in faith of all. Christian fellowship is never exclusive but always open to others, especially the marginalised.

- **Stewardship:** our commitment of time, talent, energy and money

A part of our discipleship is the understanding that all we have is gifted by God, we do not own it but rather are stewards entrusted with its wise use. Many of Jesus’ parables remind us that this applies to our time, our strength and energy, our skills and abilities, our homes, money and all the other resources we have. We often find ourselves in acquisitive and possessive cultures but are called instead to live lives of

joyful generosity. A central part of the journey of discipleship is discovering how rewarding it is to become an agent of God's generosity – caring for creation, using every resource to God's glory and even giving away ourselves.

- **Learning:** our ongoing growth in discipleship

Every church needs to become a school for disciples. The Lambeth Conference of 1988 said that “unless Christians are encouraged to ‘go to school’ with Christ, to be nourished by his teaching and sacraments, and to grow into his likeness (Eph. 4.11-16) they cannot bear the fruits of discipleship.” The Church is a life-long learning community and a mark of a disciple is an enquiring mind which is always ready to learn new things, to listen, to be challenged and to seek wisdom.

Christian learning is not restricted to knowledge of the Bible, although this is core, but extends to increasing our knowledge of every aspect of God's good creation. Our discipleship is enriched as we study how human being function (anthropology and psychology), how they live together (sociology, economics, international relations), what they believe (Islam, Buddhism, humanism, etc.) and how we can all experience the “life in all its fullness” that Jesus promises in John 10:10 (physics, engineering, ecology, medicine, food science, art, poetry, music, sports science and much much more). All of this learning, when offered to God, whether it be in schools, colleges, homes or from personal study, is a part of our Jesus Shaped Life – our Christian discipleship.

- **Mission:** our participation in God's life in His world

We have sometimes made the mistake of thinking of mission as a special activity undertaken by a few Christians that God calls especially for this purpose. That is not what the Bible teaches. Firstly it is not our, or the church's, mission – it is God's mission into which He invites us as participants. God is actively involved in his creation as both ‘sustainer’ and ‘redeemer’ and through Baptism every Christian is ‘ordained’ as a participant with God in this work of sustaining and redeeming creation.

This ordination, or commissioning, for mission at Baptism ensures that the Church is always outward looking, never self-serving. As a community of Jesus Shaped people we look out to the world around us to sustain and redeem all that God, at creation, declares ‘good’. Sustaining happens in mother and toddler groups, through hospital visits and environmental care, and as churches work with the homeless and

prisoners. Redemption happens as when broken people find healing in the Christian community, when the Gospel is shared with those who have never heard of Jesus, and when greedy consumerists are released by God into joyful generosity. We are called to join God's mission within the family, in our local community and in the most distant parts of our world.

Here are some resources for learning and understanding more about this aspect of discipleship –

- **Add your local resources**

## Resources

Many additional resources for catechesis can be found in the Discipleship Resource hub on the Anglican Communion website at:  
<https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/anglican-witness/discipleship-path.aspx>

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<sup>i</sup> We are indebted to Steven Croft in this section of the paper, drawing heavily on his, as yet, unpublished paper, A Short History of Catechesis

<sup>ii</sup> The Mission Department has gathered various study resources on the Marks of Mission in one place on the [Anglican Communion website](#). This could be our starting point. We continue populating this section with Marks of Mission resources wherever we find them.

