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A Case Study in Adult Discipleship: Stories of Apprenticeship to Jesus at an Urban Anglican (Episcopal) Church

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Abstract:

Anglican (Episcopal) churches around the world face a serious problem in discipleship and have called for a season of “intentional discipleship and disciple-making.” The Anglican Church of Canada renewed its emphasis on discipleship, providing some helpful resources, but there are no studies of how discipleship may be experienced at a congregational level. This study focuses on an Anglican church, identified as a leader in discipleship ministry. Through in-depth interviews and observations of formative events, I sought to discover how this congregation understood discipleship, engaged its Anglican tradition, lived and nurtured its reality in their urban context.

Introduction

Anglican churches in countries where the church has thrived, are nevertheless struggling with the challenge of discipleship. In his installation charge, Archbishop Jackson Ole Sapit of Kenya asked a series of important questions:

If Christians form 80% of Kenya’s population, why are our elections often violence-prone? Why is our society riddled with corruption, nepotism and a great level of social stratification? Why are environmental degradation, poverty and disease still ever-present realities? (Anglican Communion Office, 2019)

John Stott (2014) observed that while the church is “exploding” worldwide, feedback from church leaders on the ground is that it is “growth without depth” (p. 39). Canon Kafwanka, Director of Missions in the Anglican Communion, highlighted that it is the great divide between “professed faith” and “lived faith” in many parts of the Communion that is the challenge of discipleship (Anglican Communion News Service, 2015). Graham Cray, former Bishop of Maidstone of the Diocese of Canterbury in UK noted: “Discipleship is the most strategic issue facing the western church today” (quoted in Morgan, 2015, p. 38).

It is not surprising that the theme of the 16th Anglican Consultative Council held in Lusaka, Zambia (April 8-20, 2016) was “Intentional Discipleship in a World of Differences.” At this conference, a season of “Intentional Discipleship and Disciple-

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Making” was launched for all churches in the Anglican Communion and it will run until 2025 (Anglican Communion Office, 2019).

At the 42nd General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC), Mark MacDonald, the National Indigenous Anglican Bishop, said that in a changing world Anglicans must rise to the challenge and once more become a “community of disciples.” He highlighted that money has so influenced contemporary culture that life has become commodified. He lamented that the church’s response has sadly been “feeble,” and encouraged Anglicans to make important changes in their lives and witness (Gardner, 2019).

The ACC has some resources to help churches make practical choices so as to live generously, faithfully and intentionally. However, there are no studies on how discipleship is experienced at a congregational level. Some important questions are: How do clergy and members understand discipleship? What challenges do they experience? What strategies and pastoral leadership are needed to nurture discipleship? How do we know if people are growing as disciples? Studies of how specific Anglican churches are living these discipleship questions would fill this research gap.

In a recent six-month sabbatical, I asked my Anglican Bishop to recommend me two or three Anglican churches that focused on “discipleship” in Toronto, the largest and most diverse city in Canada. He named three churches which, according to him, are “doing a good job in discipleship ministry.” Due to limited time and resources, I decided to focus on one of these churches as a case study. The purpose of this case study was to investigate how discipleship was understood, envisioned, nurtured, and expressed among clergy and adult members at one Anglican church in downtown Toronto.

Literature Review

Jesus, Disciples and Cross Bearing

Michael Wilkins (1992) notes that the Greek word for disciple, *mathetes*, comes from a verb, *manthano*, “to learn.” First used to denote a learner or apprentice in a particular skill or craft (e.g. apprentice to a weaver, student physician, Plato to Socrates), it gradually shifted from learner of a skill to a pupil embracing a concept and being committed to a great teacher or master. By the time of Herodotus (C5 BC), *mathetes* referred to a person who was making a personal life commitment to the master, living out his practices. In the New Testament (NT), disciples within religious groups focused on learning as an imitation of the life and character of the religious leader, to actually become like him (chapter 4).

Dallas Willard (2011) points out that Jesus was very unorthodox and did not fit the standard model of the rabbi. Unlike the religious teachers of his day, Jesus had no “formal” education beyond the synagogue schools. Yet, the crowds were amazed for he had great wisdom (Jn. 7: 15) and taught with authority (Mt. 7: 28; Mk. 1: 22; Lk. 4: 32). Instead of vetting and accepting applicants, Jesus personally selected 12 disciples from very diverse backgrounds. While he retained the basic nature of the rabbi-disciple relationship of his day, he invested all of his life into his disciples and taught them about the nature of God and kingdom. His one condition was clear: all who follow him must

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deny themselves and take up their cross (Mt. 16: 24; Mk. 8: 34; Lk. 9: 23). The 12 disciples progressively engaged in doing as Jesus did, travelling all over Judea and Galilee preaching, teaching and healing. After his trial and death, and during his postresurrection appearances, Jesus assured them of his invisible presence. With the coming of the Spirit, Jesus continued to teach and lead through the formation of the early church.

Discipleship and Church

If disciples in Jesus' model made a life commitment to him as master, living out his practices in community, Alison Morgan (2015) proposed that "*discipleship is a form of apprenticeship undertaken in community*. It's practical, and it's corporate" (original emphases, p. 58). She encourages us to change our focus in discipleship, from emphasizing instruction, to considering who we are becoming. Kafwanka and Oxbrow (2013) highlight that discipleship is closely related to the Greek word, *metanoia* (change of mind), and urged the church to think of discipleship as involving "a lifelong whole-life reorientation with challenging implications for our self-identity, our belonging within community, our belief systems and our behavior" (p. 5).

In a classic work, *The Training of the Twelve*, A. B. Bruce (1871) identified three stages in discipleship, which are 'come and see,' 'come and follow me,' and 'come and be with me.' Bill Hull (2006) added a fourth stage to Bruce (1871), namely 'remain in me.' Robert Coleman (1963) in another classic, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, lists 8 steps in Jesus' training of the disciples: selection, association (shared life), consecration (obedience and loyalty), impartation (empowerment of the Holy Spirit), demonstration (modeling), delegation (sent out), supervision (checking), and reproduction (do what he did, and more).

Morgan (2015) observed that while the word "disciple" occurs frequently in the Gospels and in Book of Acts, it is not used either in the Old Testament or in the letters of Peter, Paul, James or John in the NT (p. 115). She concludes that the emphasis in the Gospels is on individuals responding to Jesus' call, but in the rest of the NT the concern is on the group learning to reshape their lives in light of that call. The church is the newfound group of disciples, the *ekklesia*, who are bound by shared loyalty and values to Jesus. For Morgan (2015), "the plural of disciple is church" and "if the church is not about making disciples, it is not church" (pp. 115-116).

Thinking on the church is shifting from program to process, and from a membership culture to a discipleship culture. Thom Rainer and Erick Geiger (2011) note that church vitality is not found in complexity (full-service churches with multiple programs) but simplicity. "A simple church is a congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth" (p. 60). This idea is akin to Rick Warren (2012), who emphasizes a church must be "purpose driven," not with programs, but through a process moving people from membership, to mature faith, to ministry, and to life purpose and mission. Michael Foss (2004) describes two models of church. In the "membership" model, church members pay their dues to support the pastor and keep the organization going. Clergy meets the spiritual needs of members, keeps them happy, and generally does ministry in culturally

accepted ways. In the “discipleship” model, the pastor is the spiritual leader and catalyst “through whom the Holy Spirit encourages, equips, directs and strengthens the faith of those they serve” (p 32). In this model, the church is a community of Christians serious about their discipleship, living out their mission in the world.

Challenges to Discipleship

Dallas Willard (2006) points to a lack of discipleship among Christians as the “great omission” in the church (p. xi). For Morgan (2015), the greatest challenge to discipleship in the contemporary church is “cross-bearing,” because our culture emphasizes health, security and the good life but “does its best to eliminate pain” (p. 186). Tom Sine (2009) suggests that the imagery of the good life and better future stems from the Enlightenment, which not only offers a compelling new myth to make sense of the world, but a vision of a better future we are all invited to share. For Sine, the marketers of our economy are now the brokers of meaning (p. 79).

Tom Beaudouin (2002) sees this as something akin to a new religion, “theocapitalism,” a spiritual discipline based on four laws: progress through rapid growth, security through possession and consumption, salvation through competition and freedom to prosper through unaccountable corporations (p. 362). These framing stories powerfully challenge the church even as it seeks to nurture disciples today. Stanley Hauerwas reminds us that to be a Christian “is to learn to live in a story you haven’t chosen” (quoted in Morgan, 2015, p. 216).

In contrast to our culture’s general aversion to pain, the Bible (and church history) often points to purification that comes with suffering (Jn. 15; Jas. 1: 2-4; Rm. 5: 3-5). Dallas Willard (2006) speaks of a “golden triangle” of spiritual transformation: (1) embrace the challenge of daily problems; (2) sensitive to “walk in the Spirit”; (3) practice the spiritual disciplines. Only then, Willard notes, will we shine like stars in a darkened sky and effectively witness to Jesus’ offer of a different world (p. 30).

Although Willard values Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s important warning about “cheap Christianity” in *The Cost of Discipleship* (1966), he felt that Bonhoeffer, who eventually gave his life standing up to Nazi Germany, may have unintentionally fostered a view that discipleship is meant for “super Christians.” Willard (2006) reminds us that discipleship is also about “flourishing,” and that there is a cost to “non-discipleship” too.

[Non-discipleship] cuts you off from abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, a faith that sees everything in the light of God’s overriding governance for good, a hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, a power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, non-discipleship costs you exactly the abundance of life that Jesus said he came to bring (p. 9).

Method

The use of single case studies is not for generalization to larger populations, but is a valid method to gain in-depth understanding into a phenomenon (Patton, 2002; Yin,

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2009; Starman, 2013). Thomas (2011) notes that the case is not selected based upon a representative sample, but rather is selected because it is interesting, unusual and striking (p. 514). Yin highlighted that a case study can be helpful when we are eager to answer the questions of “how” and “why,” when we cannot influence the behaviour of those involved in a study, and when we want to cover contextual conditions that may be relevant to the phenomenon under study (Yin in Baxter & Jack 2008, p. 545).

Starman (2013) argues that the case study is a type of qualitative research (p. 30). I used qualitative research in this study for a few reasons. First, I wanted to understand how clergy and adult members at this church make sense of discipleship. Jean Bartunek and Meryl Louis (1996) said that people who are insiders often have a view of the setting that is quite different from that of the outside researchers who are conducting the study (p. 15). Second, I wanted to observe and experience some of the “culture” of this disciple making church. McCurdy, Spradley and Shandy (2005) noted that being part of a cultural experience enables one to discern the complexities of a social group (pp. 67-79). Third, I hoped the rich and detailed descriptions would capture the most cogent perspectives, texture, and nuances of this faith community (Moschella, 2008, pp. 195-198; Fontana & Frey, 2003, pp. 695-727).

Participants

After a successful review by the Research Ethics Board at my institution, I wrote to the rector (lead pastor) who welcomed my research. His only criterion was that I share my findings with his ministry team when I conclude. I set up interviews with each of the four clergy (pastors) who had specific leadership and ministry responsibilities (3 males; 1 female). The pastor in charge of small groups and discipleship connected me with some of the adults (8 male; 9 female), which I divided into 4 focus groups. The criteria for this selection were that they be adult members of at least a year, from diverse social-cultural backgrounds, balanced gender and age representations, and actively engaged in discipleship ministries. Patton (2002) outlined the merits of such a purposeful sampling of “information-rich cases” (pp. 242-243).

Data Collection & Analysis

I interviewed the clergy in the privacy of their church offices. The church provided a comfortable room for the focused group interviews. All interviews were taped, with assurance of strict confidentiality, and participants signed a consent form. Participants were told that the recorder could be switched off if anyone felt uncomfortable at any time during the interviews, but this option was not taken throughout the study. All the interviews lasted about an hour each.

The interview questions for clergy and focus groups were almost identical, with slight variations. To build rapport, I first inquired briefly into how they came to this church and what made them stay. I then asked about how they understood discipleship, any challenges they experienced, and pastoral and church support. Finally, I explored how the Anglican liturgy may have influenced their discipleship, and how they are growing as disciples.

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I was also a participant-observer in a number of events that the clergy and members said were important in discipleship. I consulted various publications and the website of the church to gather any information related to discipleship at this church. Throughout my field research I kept careful field notes, exercised self-reflexivity, and reflected on the events attended. The extensive field notes were drawn upon to enrich and triangulate data from the interviews (Fetterman, 2009, p. 93).

I used a semi-structured protocol which allowed the participants to elaborate on their lived experience of discipleship. Using a constant-comparison model of data analysis, the transcripts provided a basis of sifting and searching for what appeared the most relevant codes through identification of repeated words, phrases, constructs and ideas (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 173). Following Gay and Mills (2019), transition from codes to themes involved reflection on key questions, organizational review, and visually displaying the findings (pp. 570-575). At the end of the interviews of the 21 participants, no new data emerged that generated novel themes related to the study. As such, I considered the sample size to be adequate for the study (Silverman, 2006, pp. 306-307).

As requested by the rector, preliminary findings were shared with the whole ministry team at one of their weekly meetings. The pastors and ministry leaders acknowledged that the interim report was a fair representation of their core values and strategies for adult discipleship. They asked various questions which added valuable insights. The interim report represented a re-examination of data which strengthened the accuracy of the research (Fetterman, 2009, p. 117).

Findings

Through careful listening to the stories of the clergy and adult members and through participation in various faith formation events, I sought to discern how this church understood and nurtured discipleship, engaged its Anglican tradition, and lived its challenges in the world. Here are various themes that emerged.

How Discipleship is Understood

Seeking to Follow Jesus and Discipleship Covenant. In a review of ministries of the previous year and strategies for the future at vestry, the rector outlined the church's understanding of discipleship as seeking to follow Jesus in all of life, guided by the Discipleship Covenant, a rule of life in the *Book of Common Prayer* (General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, 1962). He emphasized that such a discipleship is central to their identity and *raison d'être*.

A Christian disciple is one who is learning to follow Jesus in every aspect of life.... A disciple's journey includes aspiring to our Discipleship Covenant, which means active involvement, worship, financial contribution to ministry, prayer and study, as well as sharing the Good News. ... We see discipleship as being at the center of everything we do, both individually and as a faith community (Rector's Report, Vestry, 2015).

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Members said that the pastors often referred to the Discipleship Covenant in their teaching. When new members are received, the clergy reviews the obligations in the Discipleship Covenant with them. It was interesting that almost all members (in various focus groups) were able to list some of the obligations in the Discipleship Covenant.

In Community. While discipleship is about following Jesus, there was a great emphasis that it has to be done in community. Two pastors highlighted that the “community” model (small groups) is essential because it enables people to discuss what it means for disciples to live out their commitment to Christ in their workplaces, families, and community settings. The clergy seemed adamant that “learning to follow Jesus” cannot be done alone. One pastor summarized it this way.

One of the reasons why we practice something called ‘small groups’ is not because we are trying to help people get to know each other because we are a large parish. It is that and that is important. We practice small groups because we want to learn to follow Jesus in our life together.

Discipleship as “following Jesus in community” seems to have got the attention of the congregation. One member said, “There is a huge emphasis on community, that discipleship is something you do with everybody or that you do with others. That is probably the message I have heard loudest here.”

In Process. Members shared that discipleship is also something “in process,” and that the phrase, “you are welcomed no matter where you are in your spiritual journey” is “preached a lot” and “almost a mantra” at the church. Reflecting on his long years in ministry, the rector shared that discipleship does not come easy. “It takes time to percolate down the lives of folks. I know the Holy Spirit does that. I have given up looking for ‘a disciple.’ I say, we are on this great adventure called ‘following Jesus’ or ‘discipleship.’ Why don’t you join us?”

Being a Disciple in Today’s World

To Be a Transformative Community for the City and Living Christ’s Values. Reflecting on what discipleship means today, the clergy pointed to the church’s vision, “to be a transformative community for the city.” With a central downtown location, the church regularly rents out office space to various businesses for corporate meetings. The clergy considers this an important public expression of discipleship, as people become familiar with the beautiful sanctuary and are introduced to its programs. Members, however, emphasized that discipleship today means living out Christ’s values. One person said: “What does it mean to serve Jesus and how do I live my life as a Christian in all the various things that God has given me to do as mother, wife, employee?”

Cross Bearing. Two members felt that the church has not sufficiently emphasized “cross bearing.” One person, who had been at church for over a year, said he had never heard one sermon on Luke 14. While he acknowledged that “one cannot hit everything in

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the Bible in a twenty minutes sermon,” he felt this was a serious shortcoming. Another member, nodding in agreement, said that the biggest challenge in discipleship is “how to deny oneself in an age of having everything ... to know where to hold off.” Others in the group disagreed. One person shared that her “homework” at baptism classes dealt with practical issues. She said that once during a sermon, a pastor challenged the congregation: “Consider what is important to you. I know what’s important to you. Give me your credit card bill and your diary.” Another member said that the pastors have highlighted the challenges of a materialistic culture, but they “do not go super hard perhaps because they are sympathetic that people are in different faith stages.”

Holistic Discipleship. Along with the call for a greater emphasis on “cross bearing” and critique of materialism, there is a sense that a more holistic view of discipleship is needed. One pastor said that being a transformative community inevitably involves outreach, but it also includes engaging in messy relationships. This pastor was somewhat surprised that the curriculum in baptism classes did not include the last three obligations of the Baptism Covenant in the *Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada* (General Synod of the Anglican Church, 1985) which are: seek and serve Christ in all people; work for justice and peace; and stewardship of creation. This pastor sensed that “many members see church and discipleship primarily in a pietistic way, which is good, but Jesus calls us to a whole life experience.” For this pastor, the church has a vision of holistic ministry, but it can do more to promote works of justice, peace and creation care.

This sentiment for a more holistic discipleship was also raised in one of the focus group discussions. One member said:

... [P]art of our strategic plan, part of our mission, vision and values is to be a transformative influence in our city. I would suggest the things you are talking about ... are very internally focused. I think things like divorce care, dealing with cancer, dealing with depression... would tick a lot of the boxes around what is discipleship. It is outreach, it is evangelism, it is loving our neighbor.

How Discipleship is Nurtured

The clergy described their community as an “attractional” church, drawing members not only from the downtown core but also from outlying suburbs. They observed that their constituents appreciate a “low church” Anglicanism with a more “open” evangelical theology, and a range of Anglican services in a beautiful building in central downtown. With a significant amount of “downtown” community members there are many distractions and many have busy lives. This unique context presents particular challenges and opportunities for adult discipleship formation.

Small Groups. Small groups was first to be mentioned by the clergy and members as critical for discipleship. Members shared passionately about the benefits of their small group experience: different backgrounds and cultures, support, accountability, openness and honesty in dealing with hard questions of faith and life. What members appreciated

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most was the supportive forum to reflect together on what it means to follow Christ in daily life. One member summarized it well.

In small groups we actively ask and answer the question, ‘So how should we live, given what we’ve learned and what we seek to be? How does that work out in our lives?’ And when we talk amongst people we know as our confidantes... it really helps deepen the practical application of what are otherwise hypotheticals that you hear.

The pastor of small groups and discipleship shared his philosophy for small groups, emphasizing “word, worship, welcome and witness.” Small group leaders, locations and meeting times were prominently displayed in the church, and anyone can join by contacting any leader. This pastor regularly conducts “trial small groups” so new people can try small groups for a short time period, a kind of “on-ramp” into small groups. He also encourages small groups to do what they are good at rather than dictate a set structure and curriculum. For the clergy, small groups capitalize on the “one another” aspect of the Christian life. One pastor noted: “We find ourselves implicitly saying, ‘follow me as I am learning to follow Jesus.’” Another pastor said: “Such deep formation does not occur at Sunday worship; it happens in small groups. Worship is sustaining, but it does not always bring you deep.”

Despite its emphasis, it was somewhat surprising that only 13% of the members were involved in small groups.¹ When this was raised during my presentation at the church ministry team meeting, the clergy responded that many ministries in the church are structured as “small, accountability groups.” For example, they highlighted that the choir director does not just get members to sing beautifully together; he consciously nurtures discipleship and life together every week.

Christian Basics. During vestry, the rector said that as a “disciple-making community,” the pastoral leadership would focus on building the ministry through the strategic stewardship of resources.

To ensure the strategic use of our resources and exhibit the best possible stewardship, we are always reviewing our discipleship formation processes. This analysis includes Introduction to Jesus (ITJ), Turning to Jesus and Following Jesus, Baptismal Formation, Marriage Preparation, our worship services—all aspects of our equipping ministries (Rector’s report, Vestry, 2015).

Opportunities to learn the Christian basics abound at this church. Members highlighted that these short courses are designed to meet needs at different life and faith stages. In response to my question, “What drew you to this church, and what made you stay,” one member boldly declared: “Growth, personal growth. People come seeking answers to deep questions. They get full adult answers and they get interested in going deeper.”

¹ This figure was provided by the executive pastor.

The rector emphasized that the approach in Christian basics is intentionally different from the usual “classes.” The teacher is not a “talking head,” and learners are encouraged to engage in small group discussions. At an ITJ session, I saw how this worked. After a brief review of a Gospel passage, the pastor of discipleship invited participants to share their observations. “There are no stupid questions,” he emphasized. Drinks and sandwiches added to the congenial atmosphere as participants interacted and discussed Jesus’ teaching. As the study concluded, the pastor distributed the study guide and questions for the next week. Some participants stayed back to ask more questions, while others continued talking among themselves.

Some clergy shared that members from the outlying suburbs found it hard to attend the mid-week Christian basics sessions, and that this was true even for members who live downtown. They see many members with demanding work and social schedules, and this is most evident with young families. One father commented: “Sunday is a very busy day. Our Sunday routine is we go to church, we come home, we do homework for an hour, have lunch. I usually try to get 4-5 hours of my work in. I invariably have birthday parties to get the kids to. Sunday is a working day....”

Some members shared that while Christian basics was helpful, it did not provide a comprehensive faith foundation. One person said: “My observation is there is no Christian education framework here. ... ITJ is an introduction to Jesus; it’s not catechesis, it’s not the fundamentals.”

Prayer. The third factor in discipleship formation was prayer. The rector said: “Prayer ministry is very important. We’re more and more intentional about praying.” Different groups pray specifically for the Sunday morning worship services, and a prayer chain shares “prayer lists” each week. The ministry team devotes a good part of the weekly meeting to prayer and Bible study, and every board meeting always begins and ends in prayer. Members also highlighted this emphasis on prayer. One member said, “You asked about leadership. One thing I don’t think we’ve mentioned is that our leaders... engage very energetically in prayer.”

Service. While Christian basics did not draw as many members as the clergy desired, the “outreach-service” events attract many. Adults and youth regularly volunteer with “Cornerstone,” serving food to the downtown community. The “Café ESL,” an English class for international students at the church drew about 70-80 volunteers to tutor about 250 internationals on a weekday evening. A small group of members met regularly to discuss how to help a new Syrian refugee family the church was sponsoring. Members at this church seemed to long for a more practical discipleship.

Conscious of the positive impact of “service” in discipleship, the clergy take extra effort to ensure “accessibility.” One pastor said they constantly reflect on these questions.

Are we accessible in our language? Are we making it easy or intuitive for people to jump into various aspects of our church life? How do we share faith and then create ways by which people can take that with them and integrate these principles into their own life in service, work, and business?

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Anglican Tradition and Impact on Discipleship

I wanted to know how, if any, the shape of life in the Anglican tradition may have impacted discipleship.

Mystery and Ongoing Conversion to Christ. The clergy were convinced about the formative aspects of the Anglican liturgical tradition. One pastor said: “We have in communion the mystery of faith, where when words fail, there’s still Jesus. ... [W]e are blessed and sent out every Sunday to go love and serve the Lord.... Our actual liturgy has got a lot of the shape of what it takes for discipleship.” Another pastor said that the the liturgy “by a repetitious fashion, schools us in a kind of ongoing conversion to Christ.” He noted that the liturgy can be “rote and formulaic,” but this can happen in any tradition. Members appreciate the Anglican liturgy because of its “mystery.” One member said: “For me, it’s like coming home. I go to the 11AM service, but I really prefer communions.... You just feel cleansed from the inside out, which is a really weird way to describe it. And then the connection you feel ... that part of it is very important to me.”

Grounding and Tradition. One of the members said that the regular ritual can dilute one’s experience of worship. However, many others expressed deep appreciation for the tradition. For them, the Communion, Creeds, Confession and the Lord's Prayer provide a "grounding" to faith. One member summed it up well:

It’s the ritual, the regularity, and the sense of depth and tradition ... there is a greater sense of connection to centuries past. There’s a stronger connection to the Fathers of the Church, the Doctors of the Church and the whole intellectual and theological developments going back to the beginning and the Councils.

I asked about possible reasons why adults in this church, some from very different traditions, are receptive to the liturgy. The clergy and members shared that there seems to be a general “disenchantment” with some aspects of the free church (e.g. inadequate reading of scripture during worship; topical sermons; “feel good” songs and messages).

Are People Growing as Disciples?

Lived Faith. My last question was an inquiry into the evidence for growth in discipleship. For the clergy, the best indication of growth came from personal conversations with members and what they observed in small groups. They discerned growth in personal prayer, an “inward to outward” orientation, and a concern for “lived faith” which includes a desire for integrity in the marketplace, being a winsome witness, and service in various ministries of the church.

One pastor observed that the “young, urban, professionals” in the church are an exciting group in that "they take initiative when they see a need." After a spiritual inventory, and realizing that their gifts were in administration, a group of young adults decided to be in charge of the worship services at “The Bridge.” In addition, these young adults brought together some prominent Christian business leaders to teach them and

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share their stories about integrity in the marketplace. Members were cognizant that “numbers,” while important, was not as good an indicator as a desire for personal involvement. One member said: “Size wise, the number of people who show up on Sundays is an easy one, but we don’t know if it necessarily gets to the heart of it. I think engagement is a big one ... as I say the number of opportunities to get involved.”

As I concluded this section of the interview, one member, a senior member of a business corporation downtown, volunteered a last word.

One last comment, a big change for me anyway. It used to be you don’t talk about religion and politics when you are out with your friends. Now, I feel excited about it, so ... when you are talking to people, I would say, ‘Have you thought about coming to the Bridge? It’s a phenomenal experience, you should really try it.’ Going back to what we said, ‘It doesn’t matter where you are on your spiritual journey, just come and have coffee.’

Critical Incidents. Michael Patton (2002) highlighted the importance of "critical cases" in qualitative research. “Critical cases” are incidents “that can make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things” (p. 236). The clergy and members highlighted two critical incidents as evidence of their growth in discipleship. The first happened about two years before this study. Two of the church’s most creative and dynamic pastors were reassigned by the Bishop to other parishes in rather short notice. Many members felt a great sense of loss, and everyone was concerned that it would negatively impact the church. However, the church regained its footing after a short time. One member explained it like this.

When they left ... there were some deep concerns as to what would happen because their leadership was so exemplary, and the ministry team dynamics and chemistry was so well-formed... that somehow the community would really suffer a big hit, that numbers would die down, that momentum or energy would die down. We have noticed a little bit of a dip, but overall not much at all.

The second critical incident involved fairly complex logistical challenges moving “The Bridge” worship service back to the main sanctuary because it had outgrown its meeting space. The move involved many departments and leaders, requiring changes in venues and schedules. According to a long-standing member, this would not have happened years ago as “there’s too much bad, old church attitude.” Yet, everyone worked through the frictions and challenges resulting in a smooth transition. One pastor said:

Three years ago, I don’t think we could have done it. I think there would be a lot of resistance. But this time, there is sadness because people love that space, but they know we are about mission, we are about hospitality and invitation, and we can’t do it (where we are). So, to me, there’s just a deepening sense of putting ourselves aside.

In summary, the clergy and members understand discipleship as “learning to follow Jesus in community.” This involves committing to the Discipleship Covenant, but it is also seen as a “process” in their spiritual journey. Some members would like a greater emphasis on cross bearing, and for the clergy to more consciously highlight the dangers of materialism. While the church has a holistic view of discipleship, some feel it could do more to promote justice, peace, creation care and healing. Small groups, Christian basics, prayer and service are important strategies in discipleship. However, the busy life and work schedules of members result in low participation for small groups and Christian basics. Some members call for a more structured catechesis for faith formation. The Anglican liturgical tradition provides mystery and grounding, and many see discipleship principles embedded in the liturgy.

Discussion

This church understands discipleship as seeking to live Christ’s values and doing so in community. This view challenges popular understanding in some churches today. In a survey of clergy in the Anglican Diocese of Gloucester in 2011, asking what they considered the most important elements of discipleship, clergy from all contexts and traditions selected ‘Bible study,’ ‘prayer’ and ‘worship’ as the top three activities of a disciple. ‘Personal morality’ was rated at the bottom of the seventeen options, along with ‘witness’ and ‘faith at work’ (Anglican Diocese of Gloucester, 2011). In contrast, Kafwanda and Oxbrow (2016) urge the church to think of discipleship ultimately as transformation (*metanoia*), a whole-life reorientation challenging implications for our identity, belonging within community, belief systems and daily behavior (p. 5).

The clergy shared that a practical expression of this discipleship is in their vision, to be “a transformative community for the city.” They see this as gospel outreach to the downtown business community. However, some members, including one clergy, would like the church to expand this view to include ministries to the divorced, broken, terminally ill, depressed, and works of justice, peace and creation care. John Stott (2014) speaks of a “radical discipleship” which not only withstands the challenges of pluralism and postmodernity, but is also engaged in creation care, stewardship and simplicity in a world of great need (pp. 8-11). Dwight Zscheile (2012) encourages churches to constantly ask “*what is God up to in our neighborhood?* How do we join with it? What is our unique calling, both personally and communally? How are we gifted to contribute?” (original emphases, p. 76). Graham Cray (2011) notes that when Christians live kingdom values, the church powerfully demonstrates a “future in advance’ community ... modeling and ministering an imperfect foretaste of the new heaven and new earth” (p. 24).

This church may need to do more to highlight the role of cross bearing and to counter consumerism. Alison Morgan (2015) observes that in the developed world which emphasizes the good life, consumerism is perhaps the strongest obstacle to discipleship (pp. 188, 226-228). Tom Beaudouin (2002) and Tom Sine (2009) point to different framing stories which powerfully challenge discipleship in postmodernity. While the clergy seemed to be sensitive to people in different faith stages, they may need to more

consciously help members identify different narratives in the dominant culture, evaluate them, and find their part in God's larger story.

With regards to strategies for discipleship formation, this church strongly focused on small groups, Christian basics, prayer and service. Small groups in discipleship formation is well supported in the literature. Alison Morgan (2015) points out that the traditional sit-in-a row Sunday services are inadequate to nurture disciples in a secularized society. She highlights that "even committed Anglicans no longer find them helpful" (p. 238). Morgan believes the small groups approach is not just following Jesus' model with the 12 disciples, but that the early church was a community of disciples living and proclaiming Jesus and the kingdom.

Dallas Willard (2002) highlighted that "the greatest contemporary barriers to meaningful spiritual formation into Christlikeness is overconfidence in the spiritual efficacy of regular church service. They are vital, they are not enough, it is that simple" (p. 250). Henderson (1997) noted that John Wesley developed the small group model to structure his early Christian communities, and this has enabled the Methodists to establish many permanent and holy churches worldwide (p. 30). Graham Cray notes that in today's culture that is likely to be corrosive rather than supportive of discipleship, it is corporate disciplines and support which are needed (cited in Morgan, 2015, p. 242).

The leadership devotes much of its energies and resources to develop the Christian basics and learning is emphasized in discipleship. While this meets a general need with people in various life and faith stages, there seemed to be significant sections of the congregation who were not able to attend the midweek sessions. Even small groups, with its appeal in support and accountability, faced a similar problem with only 13% of members involved. The clergy did not know how to respond to this challenge and seemed resigned to the fact that in urban Toronto people have very busy work and life schedules.

John Roberto (2015) encourages churches to reimagine faith formation for the 21st century, reconceptualizing learning in multiple settings (self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large group, church-wide, in the community and world) and in multi-platforms (physical and online environments). In addition, the church may need to challenge some members with full and busy schedules to consciously make time for a deeper life with God. Tom Sine (2008) encourages churches in a time-stressed world, to find creative ways to carve out time and space to be truly known, deeply loved, and radically challenged to follow Christ in all of life (p. 261).

Some members call for deeper learning than what is available in Christian basics. J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett (2010) noted that catechesis was the early church's lengthy process of discipleship. New believers were taught the story of the Bible, life and teachings of Jesus, the Lord's prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and how to be part of God's new community (pp. 75-88). The clergy may want to consider a more structured catechesis for a comprehensive faith foundation, which would also benefit many of their members who come from a non-Anglican tradition. One member said that while newer members really love the church community, quite a few did not connect well with the liturgy, baby baptisms, or the practice of drinking wine from the same communion cup.

A danger in emphasizing “learning” in discipleship is that it can sometimes give the wrong impression that commitment to Jesus is merely about acquiring information. Michael Wilkins (1992) warns that “sometimes, our discipleship programs thwart true discipleship—we can become so involved in our programs that we isolate ourselves from real life” (p. 22). The clergy seemed aware of this and have adopted a discussion pedagogy, but one wonders if this is enough. Alison Morgan (2015) emphasized that Jesus’ disciples “learned on the hoof” (p. 87 *et passim*). Siew (2013) and Harris (1998) note that community service can have a deep impact on faith. It was interesting that the service opportunities at this church (e.g. Cornerstone, Café ESL) draw a big response.

James K. A. Smith (2009) notes that the “schooling model” of Christian discipleship is inadequate because people are more than cognitive beings. He points to the shopping malls, sports stadiums and cinemas with their powerful cultural liturgies that shape desire (*eros*) and deform faith. For him, Christian education is the formation of a peculiar people who “desire” the kingdom of God and thus undertake their vocations as expression of that desire (p. 86). Smith (2016) views discipleship as a “rehabilitation of our love” and emphasizes worship as the heart of Christian formation (pp. 22-25).

The clergy and members found the Anglican liturgical tradition helpful in discipleship formation, but for different reasons. The clergy discerned discipleship themes within key aspects of the liturgy, while members appreciate the mystery and historical link to faith. Anglican scholars note that the younger generation is increasingly attracted to Anglican worship. Dwight Zscheile (2012) highlight that people today are longing for moorings, with a genuine desire to be formed. He said: “Episcopal worship embraces ancient elements, which provide a depth and rootedness that is increasingly appealing to people adrift in a culture of the new and the next. . . . many young people yearn for more stable anchors of wisdom and meaning” (p. 103). Robert Webber and Ruth Lester (2013) point out that many younger evangelicals are moving into Anglicanism for the same reasons. Elizabeth Jordan (2015) notes that Anglican discipleship is expressed clearly in the sacraments, where the journey that began in baptism is nurtured in the Eucharist each week (p. 157).

The major indicators of growth in discipleship at this church are changed lives, service and a transformed congregational culture. The power of changed lives is affirmed by this beautiful quote: “Therefore, where Christians live out their faith (‘intentional’ discipleship), new disciples are formed (disciple-making), to the extent that discipleship and disciple-making are a product of each other” (Kafwanka and Oxbrow, 2016, p. 6)

Conclusion

This study examined how one Anglican church in urban Toronto sought to realize its vision “to be a transformative community for the city,” and live its mission of “equipping disciples to make disciples.” The purpose is not to generalize to other churches for each has a different context, but to examine a case in-depth. I wanted to understand how the clergy and adult members at this church understood discipleship, engaged its Anglican tradition, lived and nurtured its reality in their unique set of circumstances. Several themes are evident in the narratives.

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Clear Discipleship, Focused Vision

First, this church has a clear understanding of discipleship, with a focused vision and set of values. At vestry, the rector reiterated these values as he reviewed the year and strategized ahead. He reminded the congregation about what discipleship means (following Jesus), emphasizing that it is corporate (to be done together), practical (Discipleship Covenant), and involves an open process (everyone welcomed no matter where they are in their faith journey). The rector summarized the church's mission succinctly: "We see discipleship as being at the center of everything we do, both individually and as a faith community" (Rector's report, Vestry, 2015). Amidst huge cultural shifts impacting the church, Robinson (2008) calls for strong pastoral leadership with clear understanding of why they exist and a biblically informed vision and community supported clarity about purpose (pp. 80-130). Chan (2015) notes that congregations can only be "intentional disciple-making churches" when there is a clear understanding of discipleship and focused pastoral vision (pp. 55-61).

Integrated Pastoral Leadership

Second, this focused vision-mission provides a strong integration in the rector's pastoral leadership. When asked about strategies for nurturing discipleship, he said it is essential to get the senior leadership and ministry team "on the same page." He is "relentless about going through their vision, mission and values together." At the weekly ministry meetings I attended, pastors and ministry leaders recited the church's vision, mission and core values as they ended the meeting. At this church, small groups, Christian basics, worship, children, youth and family ministries, and outreach are strongly integrated. All the pastors see their ministry as contributing to growth in discipleship. The pastor of discipleship said:

So, it's interesting that I am referred to as "pastor of discipleship." In some ways, that feels kind of redundant. What is the pastor doing if not encouraging others in their discipleship? I get it. That's just a special focus perhaps, but it's not that I am responsible for all aspects of discipleship here because we see ourselves as a ministry team involved in discipling.

The rector emphasized that "equipping disciples to make disciples" integrates everything they do:

We do not do 'spontaneity' here, unless it's the Holy Spirit generated spontaneity, meaning everything is integrated. So, what does ITJ have to do with the sermon series? What does the sermon series have to do with Baptismal Formation or Marriage Preparation? Where are the connections? How do we keep connecting the dots?

Members discerned this integrated, discipleship-focused ministry approach. One member said he stayed at this church because there is "a strong sense of vision and the

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large pastoral team seems to be really, really well-organized. They are all on the same page.”

Clear Strategies

Third, the values derived from the vision and mission statements are developed into purposeful strategies for discipleship. Convinced that discipleship can only be effectively nurtured in a supportive, accountable community, the pastoral team spends significant time to develop and nurture small groups and leaders. There is a strong emphasis on learning the Christian basics for people at different faith and life stages. Pastors ensure there are ample opportunities to serve and that these are easily accessible. The structure is flexible so that new ministry initiatives are adopted if someone discerns a need in the community. Pastors constantly think about creative ways in which members can integrate Christian principles into their lives, work, and business. Through all these, the pastoral team is conscious of the power of prayer, which undergirds all their work.

Anglican Liturgical Tradition

Fourth, the clergy consciously harnesses the strengths of the Anglican liturgical tradition to foster depth and commitment for members. The Discipleship Covenant in the *Book of Common Prayer* (Anglican Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, 1962) is promoted as a framework for lived discipleship. Convinced that discipleship themes are embedded in the liturgy, the clergy reads the words carefully during worship. Members appreciate the mystery of the Eucharist, and the regular recitations of the Creeds, Confession, and the Lord's Prayer provide a rhythm and grounding to their faith.

Areas for Growth

Some members call for a greater emphasis on “cross bearing” and for the clergy to be more vocal against a consumerist culture. Most of the clergy view the church’s vision “to be a transformative community for the city” as gospel outreach, but some members feel this should include engaging with some of the pressing issues downtown, including justice and creation care for a more holistic discipleship. While small groups are emphasized, only about 13% of the congregation are involved. Many members are part of ministry-based “groups,” but one wonders what is done specifically for discipleship formation there. In a busy downtown context, the clergy may need to do more to alert members to the dangers of the “trap of constant work,” challenge them to forego some upward mobility, and sacrifice time for a deeper life with God. Combating a “life of busyness” may be the major challenge to discipleship for many adults in this urban church; this could be their “cross-bearing.” Christian basics are helpful, but a structured catechesis would lead to a more comprehensive faith foundation, which also benefits many members from a non-Anglican tradition.

Limitations and Further Research

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This study would be stronger if the interviews included some of the other ministry staff (e.g. children, youth, outreach) instead of just the pastors with specific leadership and ministry oversight. While the focus group interviews were rich and textured, the information may add some valuable contrast if other ministry “groups” were included (e.g. parish council, choir, prayer, men’s and women’s ministries). This study emerged various factors impacting discipleship formation at one urban Anglican congregation. It would be interesting to see how generalized these findings are in the wider Anglican churches in urban Canada through a follow up quantitative study.

Closing Remarks

In closing, Jay Sidebotham (2015) may provide a helpful framework to gauge discipleship ministry at this church (pp. 501-503). He cited research which identified a small number of churches out of 2000, which exhibit a distinct level of spiritual vitality in the US and outlined best practice principles of congregations that thrive. First, it is essential to “get people moving,” launching members in their spiritual journeys, providing “on-ramps” for deeper connection with their faith community and a deeper sense of God. Second, scripture is “embedded” in the church’s culture. People intentionally engage scripture in all aspects of community life, and for all ages. Third, there is a faith “ownership” where in response to the grace of God, every member takes responsibility for growth in their spiritual journey. Fourth, these churches “pastor the community,” seeking to serve Christ passionately among all people in a variety of projects. Fifth, they have leaders with a “heart” for God, because the vitality of the body is dependent on the spiritual health of pastoral leaders, especially the senior leadership.

Although this church can do better in “pastoring the community,” it exhibits each of the other traits well. Perhaps its greatest strength is a pastoral leadership with a “heart” for God, evidenced by a certain depth of spirituality, strong reliance on prayer, a deep self-reflection, and a healthy kingdom perspective in ministry. At the conclusion of my interview with the rector, he said:

... [W]e are learning to relax.... This phrase is pulled out a lot, ‘I guess I am just watering these days ... or I am planting.’ We are trying to encourage one another. You have no clue... the kingdom perspective on this, that whatever seeds are planted now might not sprout for 40 years. We just don’t know, and that’s not our problem; our job is to be faithful with what we are doing now. So, that changes the perspective. ... So, to your question again, I revisit that and ask, ‘Have I grown in all of this? Is my faithfulness and discipleship healthy?’

We all live “storied lives”; it’s the way we structure and understand our world. Moschella (2008) insightfully notes that the heart of pastoral ethnography is listening (and watching) as people express and enact their faith through stories, interactions and rituals. Most people long to be heard, but we need to empower them so they are “heard to speech” with a voice that is authentic, honest, and transformative (pp. 141-142). I invited these individuals to tell their “stories” and to engage in “self-interpretation” with a focus

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on “faith-in-action.” I hope these stories of Anglican clergy and adults seeking to follow Jesus in a busy, urban, postmodern context inspire you.

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