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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Pedagogical Theology, Ecclesial Language, Ministry Recognition Practice and Christian Learning

John Littleton

Independent scholar, Australia
Email: jjlittleton@bigpond.com

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Abstract

Pedagogical theology examines Church belief and practice through the lens of learning. The author examines Anglican ecclesial language and discipleship ministry recognition practice through the lens of learning. In this context, empirical parish learning community research findings indicate a link between ministry involvement, ministry leadership and growth in faith. This connection between doing ministry and growth in faith is strengthened when the word 'lay' is replaced by the word 'disciple' and the word 'commissioned' is emphasised. The importance of the sacrament of baptism informs these changes. Through baptism, people become disciples of Jesus; through baptism, disciples have equality of discipleship; through baptism and confirmation, disciples are commissioned. All disciples are given the best opportunity to grow in faith when they do ministry in a church culture which recognises that the primary ordering of ministry occurs in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation.

Keywords: Doing ministry; ecclesial language and ministry recognition practice; empirical research findings; growth in faith; pedagogical theology

Introduction

Pedagogical theology examines church belief and practice through the lens of learning.[1] Writing under the umbrella of the discipline of pedagogical theology, the author focuses on ecclesial language and discipleship ministry recognition practice in the Anglican Church of Australia through the lens of learning.

Four perspectives influence the decision-making in the paper.

[1]John M. Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning* (London: SCM Press, 1985); Mark Chater, *Jesus Christ, Learning Teacher: Where Theology and Pedagogy Meet* (London: SCM Press, 2020); Jen Smith, *Disruptive Inclusion: Why and How Christian Adult Learning is for Everyone* (London: SCM Press, 2024). A Review of Chater's Book and A Review of Smith's Book are available at https://www.tjhlittleton.com (accessed 11 October 2025).

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First, empirical learning community parish research findings on growth in faith, from Australia and overseas, are available. Based on quantitative and qualitative research methods, the findings indicated a link between ministry involvement, ministry leadership and growth in faith.[2]

Second, the sacrament of baptism is very important in the Anglican and other Christian traditions. Anglican theologian Bishop Rowan Williams, in *Being Christian*, described baptism as essential to being Christian. Former Anglican Archbishop of Adelaide Geoff Smith said in the 2021 Diocesan Synod, 'All who accept their baptism, who are followers of Jesus, are called to be disciples, ministers, fellow workers with Christ'.[3] All the baptised are disciples, learners, and ministers.

Third, equality of ministry of all the baptised in the People of God is acknowledged by the Anglican tradition, as illustrated by Anglican theologian Paul Avis when he wrote, 'All the baptised are level in status before God, having full and equal standing in Christ; all are called to discipleship and service'.[4]

Fourth, evidence about the teaching on baptism and confirmation as commissioning all members of the Church, using the ancient custom of the bishop laying hands on the head of each candidate in the context of the Holy Communion Service, is recognised in the Anglican Church. For example, the Anglican Church of Australia provides liturgically for the commissioning of all members of the Church in the Order of Service 'Holy Baptism Confirmation in the Holy Communion' in *A Prayer Book for Australia*.[5]

The combined learnings from these four perspectives helped the author examine ecclesial language and discipleship ministry recognition practice in the Anglican Church of Australia through the lens of learning, with a focus on Christian learning. The term Christian learning is often used in the paper and, for the most part, refers to the learning perceived and reported by the learners, individuals and groups, rather than the prescribed learning content taught.

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[2]John Littleton, *Enhance Learning in Parishes: A Learning Community Approach for Church Congregations* (Unley, Adelaide, SA: MediaCom Education Inc., 2017), pp. 13–15, 73; John Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together: Within and Beyond Church Communities* (Unley, Adelaide, SA: MediaCom Education Inc., 2023), pp. 61–69, 94–96.

[3]Rowan Williams, *Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer* (London: SPCK, 2014), pp. 1–19. The President of Synod October 2021 Pastoral Address for the 44th Triennial Synod, Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, p. 12. Available at: https://www.adelaideanglicans.lbcdn.io%3Euploads%3E2021%3Esynod%3Epresidentaddress (accessed 18 October 2025). Ten Australian Christian Church traditions recognise each other's baptism in a common certificate of baptism. John Littleton, 'The Anglican Tradition, The 'Sense of the Faith of the Faithful' (sensus fidie fidelium): a focus on Christian Learning with examples from The Anglican Church of Australia'. https://www.tjhlittleton.com (accessed 26 February 2026), p.19.

[4]Paul Avis, 'The Roles of the Ecclesial Orders in the Governance of the Church', *Ecclesiology* (7/2/2022), p. 1. Online.

[5]*A Prayer Book for Australia: The Anglican Church of Australia* (Alexandria, NSW: Broughton Books, 1995), pp. 50–71; Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together*, pp. 59, 72–73; John Dunnill mentioned this commissioning in 'Is Confirmation Necessary in Anglican Theology?' and outlined four Theologies of Confirmation, listing as number four 'Baptism confers salvation but confirmation is a 'lay-ordination or commissioning for adult discipleship (a distinctively 'twentieth-century' view).' John Dunnill, 'Is Confirmation Necessary in Anglican Theology?', Anglican General Synod Doctrine Commission Study Paper 1996, pp. 7, 10. from https://www.anglican.org.au (accessed 17 November 2025) under Our Work, Doctrine & Theology, Confirmation 1997, Study Paper Interim Copy.

The intent is to help disciples in parishes grow and experience positive change in their faith learning and behaviour, in their knowledge, understanding and practice of being in Christ through the Spirit. Growth in faith learning is the key factor. The proposed changes help growth in faith.

The word 'lay' is very dominant in Anglican Church life. The ecclesial language of 'clergy and laity' describes the traditional understanding of the orders of ministry. Deacons, priests and bishops are ordained. The laypeople are, by definition, not ordained, not clergy and not qualified.[6] In 1958, scholar Hans Ruedi-Weber commented, 'Who wants to be an is not?'[7] In parish ministry as a priest, the author often heard laypeople saying that they were only a layperson. The word 'lay' for some people may introduce negative feelings.

The lay concept is not mentioned in the New Testament Canon; no distinction is made between laypeople and clerics. The first known use of the term lay is found in the First Letter of Clement from Rome around 96 CE. The emphasis in the New Testament is on the *laos*, the whole People of God with leaders: apostles, deacons, elders and household leaders.[8]

The author proposes that the word 'lay' be replaced by the word 'disciple'. Disciples are learners and ministers. People who are Christian are followers or disciples of Jesus Christ, his teachings and his way. The word disciple has its origin in the Latin word *discere* (to learn). The Greek word for disciple *mathetes* means learner or apprentice. Christian disciples are learners in the Christian faith and life.

The author also proposes that the word 'commissioned' be emphasised, as it includes all disciples. All the baptised are called and set apart for discipleship and service. All disciples are commissioned through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, which includes the laying on of hands by the bishop in the context of Holy Communion.[9]

The ordaining of deacons and priests occurs through the laying on of hands by the bishop as outlined in *The Ordinal* in *A Prayer Book for Australia*.[10] The commissioning of all disciples and the ordination of deacons, priests and bishops are interrelated. The foundational commissioning and blessing of the People of God is through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation.

The paper speaks to a church in transition, post-Christendom, and looks to a time when adult baptism-confirmation is general practice.

[6]Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together,* pp. 38–39.

[7]Hans-Ruedi Weber, ed. 'A Living Church', *Laity*, 'This is My Church', Bulletin of the Department on the Laity (Geneva: World Council of Churches, December 1958), p. 44.

[8]Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together,* pp. 14, 38, 75; also see John Littleton's book review on Bradly Billings, *Truly Called? Vocation in the Anglican Church* (Mulgrave, Victoria, Australia: Broughton Publishing, Pty Ltd, 2023), pp. 2–3. https://www.tjhlittleton.com (accessed 22 October 2025).

[9]*A Prayer Book for Australia,* pp. 50–71; Dunnill, 'Is Confirmation Necessary in Anglican Theology?' pp. 12–14. Dunnill endorsed confirmation for adults and 'argues that confirmation, while subordinate to baptismal initiation, can retain a place in the changing circumstances of Anglican ecclesial life. It does so as a fully adult rite signifying the personal affirmation of a mature (which does not mean perfect) faith and a recognition of this by the bishop as representative of the Church both local and universal through the laying on of hands – the objective correlative provided by tradition for that personal encounter with God known in some circles as 'conversion', in others as 'baptism in the Holy Spirit''.

[10]*A Prayer Book for Australia,* pp. 780–797. 'The Ordinal: The Making, Ordaining and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests and Deacons'.

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In this ecclesial language and ministry recognition environment, the church is to be understood as a community of equals through baptism with a diversity of ministries of service, recognising co-responsibility and servant leadership by all: everyday disciples, parish leader disciples, deacon disciples, priest disciples and bishop disciples.[11]

Pedagogical Theology

Pedagogical theology frames the discussion. The discipline of pedagogical theology is the theory and practice of learning for Christian growth, in the manner of John Hull, Mark Chater and Jen Smith, looking at the biblical text, church teaching, practice and language through the lens of learning. Chater described 'the discipline of pedagogical theology' as 'the theory and practice of fearless learning for Christian growth.' He used the word 'pedagogy' in a general sense to include the learning principles for children (pedagogy) and the learning principles for adults (andragogy). Pedagogy and andragogy are described in the one-word pedagogy.[12]

Theology can generally be described as faith seeking understanding. Pedagogical theology would then be faith seeking understanding through the lens of learning.

In *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* John Hull in 1985 used the term 'educationalization of theology'.[13] He argued that pedagogy could influence the way theology described the Christian faith to help it 'become more conducive to Christian growth'.[14] Hull drew attention to factors which hinder or harm Christian learning; aspects of Christian belief and educational practice which had 'a retarding effect upon adult religious learning'.[15] He presented the view (in 1985 but still informative in 2026) that the authoritative, hierarchical, high-status and instructional role of official teaching in the church made adult learning more difficult.[16] The teaching role in the church must enable learning and facilitate the growth of adults rather than control it; it must consider the ordinary learner as an enquirer rather than a recipient in a passive role and inferior to the designated teacher.[17]

Acknowledging and referencing Hull's work, Mark Chater and Jen Smith made their own contribution to the literature on pedagogical theology. In *Jesus Christ, Learning Teacher: Where Theology and Pedagogy Meet*, Chater, in 2020, examined the relationship between Christology and pedagogy. He argued that pedagogy has much to contribute to theology. Chater, by looking at the Gospels through the lens of learning, showed that Jesus, our Lord, was a learning teacher, like teachers today.[18] In *Disruptive Inclusion: Why and How Christian Adult Learning is for Everyone*, Smith, in 2024, by using biblical examples, showed how to read the Bible 'through the lens of learning' and the ways in which the Bible offered guidance on 'how learning happens' and shaped 'our understanding of becoming better

[11]Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together,* pp. 25, 39, 74.
[12]Chater, *Jesus Christ, Learning Teacher*, pp. 20–21, 186–188.
[13]Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning,* p. 209.
[14]Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning,* p. 209.
[15]Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning,* p. 201.
[16]Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning,* pp. 202, 208.
[17]Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning,* p. 208.
[18]Chater, *Jesus Christ, Learning Teacher*, pp. 183–193.

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learners'.[19] In turn, the author, acknowledging the work of Hull, Chater and Smith, contributes to the literature on pedagogical theology.

The Four Perspectives

The four perspectives considered are empirical research findings in the parish context, the importance of the sacrament of baptism, discipleship ministry equality through baptism and the whole church being commissioned through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation.

Perspective One: Empirical Learning Community Parish Research Findings

These findings indicated a link between ministry involvement, ministry leadership and growth in faith for disciples, learners and ministers. Research informs ministry practice.

The Research: Definition, Design and Outcomes

For the purposes of the research, a learning community in the parish context was defined as 'a community of faith where leaders and members, while respecting a diversity of abilities and perspectives, practise holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective learning processes'. In 'Enhanced learning in the parish context: a learning community approach', the author outlined his research project with 45 parishes in the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, South Australia, 2013–2014.[20] Survey One was about learning processes. Survey Two was about learning enhancement outcomes. Six focus groups were conducted.

The study demonstrated that the learning community processes – of holism, collaboration and theological reflection – when intentionally practised in parishes, enhanced learning outcomes in terms of the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith. A general trend across the spectrum of parishes, which participated in the research project, indicated that the greater the presence of learning community processes in a parish, the greater the likelihood that there would be growth and enhancement in faith learning, with a lesser presence of these processes tending to correlate with less growth and enhancement in faith learning. The research revealed a moderate, positive and clear association between learning processes and learning outcomes.

Christian learning is a process of growing in the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith in Jesus Christ. Growth in faith means the degree to which people self-report that their knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith have been enhanced; they report a change in their acquisition of knowledge, attitudes and skills in terms of the Christian faith.[21]

[19]Smith, *Disruptive Inclusion*, pp. 53–54, 63.

[20]John Littleton, 'Enhanced Learning in the parish context: a learning community approach', *Practical Theology* 11 4 (2018), pp. 320–333.

[21]Littleton, *Enhance Learning in Parishes*, pp. 15, 50–51.

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Two Key Findings

First, one key finding from the author's research project with parishes across the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide revealed that participants who regarded themselves as learners and ministers reported that they had grown in faith.[22]

One parish in the Diocese, which participated in the research project, named Parish Z for the purposes of this paper, where the learning community processes of holism, collaboration and theological reflection were well used, reported, through self-reporting and mixed-methods research, much growth in faith by individuals and the parish in their knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith. In Parish Z, the five research participants in the surveys showed that they understood themselves to be disciples, learners and ministers. They reported much or very much growth in faith. In this learning community parish 87% of the research participants reported much growth in faith.[23]

The findings from Survey One on learning processes and the findings from Survey Two on growth in faith outcomes, when graphed together, revealed that Parish Z ranked as number one on both sets of findings, being ranked as number one on the learning process score and ranked as number one on the growth in faith or learning enhancement score. Parish Z displayed the multiple characteristics that serve to define a learning community and reported strong patterns of growth in faith learning.

The five research participants from Parish Z also completed all the open-ended questions in the surveys and were the only parish to complete all eleven open-ended questions. These detailed responses showed that the individuals involved were capable of reflecting on and articulating in writing their faith experiences and ministry practice activities.[24]

An example from Survey Two designed to measure the individual's learning enhancement is included below in the footnote. In the question marked (a), participants were asked to indicate their score on a rating scale ranging from 'no growth' to 'very much growth'. The question marked (b) was designed to elicit open-ended reports.[25]

Six focus groups were conducted as part of the research. One focus group member from Parish Z commented on the sharing of leadership: 'It is a culture of invitation, of trust, in the priesthood of all believers, where everybody has a ministry

[22]Littleton, *Enhance Learning in Parishes*, pp. 66–67; Thomas John Harvard Littleton, 'Enhanced Faith Learning in Parishes', Thesis (DM), Adelaide College of Divinity, South Australia, 2016, pp. 107–127 (p. 117, Table 7.7) https://www.tjhlittleton.com (accessed 23 October 2025)

[23]Littleton, 'Enhanced Faith Learning in Parishes', pp. 117–118.

[24]Littleton, *Enhance Learning in Parishes*, p. 67.

[25]Littleton, 'Enhanced Faith Learning in Parishes', pp. 170, 175–176. *'Your responses for you as an individual* a. Over the last year, do you believe that you personally have grown in your Christian faith? b. Can you recall and remember an activity when you feel that you have learnt something new in your faith experience? This may be that you have acquired some new knowledge or understanding or practice of the Christian faith through your participation in an activity of the life of your parish. If yes, would you please name the activity when you felt that you learnt something new about the Christian faith, then briefly outline the activity and new learning?

to offer. It is a matter of discovering that and nurturing it and supporting it and getting it out there'.[26]

Second, another key finding from the author's research project showed a clear link between parish leaders and their enhancement of faith learning outcomes. The group responses from clergy and wardens to Survey One on learning processes indicated that 76% thought that being a leader was a great help to them in learning more as a Christian disciple. In responses to Survey Two on learning enhancement, 108 individual parish leaders (70%) indicated that their participation as leaders greatly helped them to learn more as Christian disciples.[27] Involvement as a ministry leader greatly assisted growth in faith learning.

These research findings are consistent with four other parish or congregational studies on the link between participation, ministry leadership and much learning: studies by Barbara Fleischer 2006, Christian Research Association (CRA) 2008, Craig Mitchell, 2018, National Church Life Surveys (NCLS) 2022.[28]

Disciples who think of themselves as learners and ministers participate, engage, lead, self-learn and recognise they have agency to act in the name of Christ. Like the research participants from Parish Z and the parish leaders, those who are aware of their calling and active as learners and ministers, co-workers with Christ, report that they grow in their faith. They learn a great deal through preparation and study, practice, reflective discussion and prayer; face-to-face and online learning, especially in learning communities and vital church and ministerially active parish environments. The 'growth in faith' indicator is a measure of church vitality. Parishes where 'people feel that their faith is growing' are vital churches, according to research findings reported by the NCLS. NCLS researchers reported that 'a growing, lively faith is at the heart of church vitality'.[29] Members of such churches are involved and engaged in discipleship, ministry and mission.

These research findings indicated that involvement as a leader in a parish greatly assisted growth in faith. A strategy of involving many church members as leaders for various aspects of parish life would be a means to enhance growth in faith.

Even though the research findings mentioned above emerged during a period of 'lay' language use, there are signs that once people recognise that they are disciples, learners and ministers, they grow in their faith. The positive nature of 'disciple' language is forward-looking in contrast to the negative 'lay' concept, not clergy, not ordained and not qualified.

These research findings prompted the author to consider making the word disciple his preferred option.

More research may be needed to add to the empirical evidence provided in the studies already mentioned. Yet, there are enough empirical findings to support the

[26]Littleton, 'Enhanced Faith Learning in Parishes', p. 126. This quotation from the focus group is used with permission.

[27]Littleton, 'Enhanced Faith Learning in Parishes', p. 123.

[28]Littleton, 'Enhanced Faith Learning in Parishes', pp. 132–133; Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together,* pp. 87–88, 94–96.

[29]Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together,* pp. 95–96; Ruth Powell, Nicole Ward, John Bellamy, Sam Sterland, Kathy Jacks and Miriam Pepper, *Enriching Church Life: A Guide to the Results from National Church Life Surveys for Local Churches* (North Ryde BC NSW 1670: NCLS Research, 2022, Third Edition), p. 24.

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author's ministry experience and to hint at the possibilities of growth in faith. Growth in faith is likely to occur when the majority of Christians in the Anglican tradition regard themselves as disciples, learners and ministers and not just laity, confined by how they are defined.

The research findings outlined and discussed indicated a link between ministry involvement, ministry leadership and growth in faith for disciples.

Perspective Two: The Importance of the Sacrament of Baptism, All Disciples Are Learners and Ministers (To Minister is to Serve)

> In the *Catechism*, an outline of the Faith, as published in Anglican Prayer Books USA (1979) and NZ (1989), the question is asked: 'Who are the ministers of the Church?'
>
> The answers:
>
> 'The ministers of the Church are the lay persons, the bishops, priests and deacons.[30]
>
> 'They are the lay persons, deacons, priests, bishops: all the baptised'.[31]

In *A Prayer Book for Australia* 1995, those being ordained priest are asked the question, 'Will you encourage and enable those committed to your care to fulfil their ministry and mission in the world?'[32]

These Anglican Prayer Books, approved officially by the People of God through the Synods or conventions in their respective nations, categorically teach that baptism is the primary sacrament. A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. The sacrament of baptism is the foundation of the church and the source of discipleship ministry. In our baptismal commitment we turn to Christ and become disciples in response to our vocation or calling from God. All disciples, the baptised faithful, have a vocation: everyday disciples, parish leader disciples, deacon disciples, priest disciples and bishop disciples.[33]

Disciples in the Anglican tradition are learners and ministers. The vocation of the majority of disciples is to represent Christ wherever they may be and share in the worship and governance of the whole People of God. The vocation of the deacon, priest and bishop disciples, who make up about one per cent of disciples, serves the Christian community and enables ministry and mission.

The breadth of the baptismal commitment for all disciples is described well by Jos Moons, Roman Catholic theologian.[34] Moons outlined three dimensions of baptism:

[30]*The Book of Common Prayer* (Episcopal Church, USA: The Church Hymnal Corporation and The Seabury Press, 1979), p. 855.

[31]*A New Zealand Prayer Book* (Auckland, the Church of the Provence of New Zealand: William Collins Publishers, 1989), p. 931.

[32]*A Prayer Book for Australia,* p. 795.

[33]See Footnote 11.

[34]Jos Moons, 'Broadening the Baptismal Foundation of a Synodal Church: A Plea for a Baptismal Ethos'. *Studia canonica* 58 (2024), pp. 131–152. Rowan Williams also wrote about baptism: 'We begin with baptism:

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first, the spiritual-mystical dimension of being incorporated into Christ, formed in the likeness of Christ through the Holy Spirit; second, the ecclesial dimension of becoming a member of the body of Christ, having common baptismal equal dignity and identity and participating with an understanding of discipleship equality; third, the ethos dimension of growing an ethical way of living and developing lifelong learning habits. This call to lifelong learning for all ministers is endorsed by the renewal dedication statement at the conclusion of the Anglican baptism-confirmation-Holy Communion liturgy in *A Prayer Book for Australia.*[35]

It is, however, one thing for the church and its leaders to teach that all disciples are learners and ministers, involved in the discipline and ministry of serving in the name of Christ. It is quite another thing for individuals and parish communities to own that ministry for themselves.

Ways of helping people recognise and own their calling to ministry is an essential role for parish leaders and deacons and priests in partnership, talking about ministry through preaching and in conversation, for example. The self-awareness of and the self-understanding by individuals are necessary to appreciate that their role in an activity within and beyond the parish community is a ministry, done well or not so well; assisting refugees and the needy, working at the op shop, being a liturgical assistant, teaching children, being a warden and a member of the parish council or Synod, and leading an adult learning group, for example. Some church members, the author is told, express surprise when others say that the valuable work they are doing in their parish is ministry.

Some disciples are more self-aware and self-understanding than others. They understand or perceive or think and feel that the task or job they are doing is ministry. Those who are aware of their baptismal calling and active as learners and ministers, co-workers with Christ, are likely to report that they grow in their faith, as indicated in the research already mentioned.

Perspective Three: Equality of Ministry of all the Baptised in the People of God

Anglican ecclesiology, the study of the church, contributes to this conversation on the importance of baptism and baptismal equality amongst disciples. Anglican theologian Paul Avis wrote in the *Journal of Ecclesiology*, February 2022, 'A moments reflection teaches us that there is no hierarchy of callings in the body of Christ. All the baptised are level in status before God, having a full and equal standing in Christ; all are called to discipleship and service'. He noted that there is

with the fact that people are formally brought into the Christian community by being dipped in water or having water poured over them'. He then outlined how the baptised share in the life and death of Jesus, are open to the work of the Holy Spirit, care for human need, are reconcilers, seek justice and are vigilant about the vision of the Christian life and community, '. . . but still sinners'. Williams, *Being Christian*, pp. 1–16.

[35]*A Prayer Book for Australia,* p. 69. 'All who have been baptised and confirmed are called to study the Bible, to take part in the life of the Church, to share in the Holy Communion and to pray faithfully and regularly. We are called to share with others, by word and example, the love of Christ and his gospel of reconciliation and hope. We are called to love our neighbours as ourselves, to honour all people and to pray and work for peace and justice. I invite all of you to commit yourselves anew to this calling. **We will gladly do so, in the strength of the Holy Spirit.'**

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no spectrum of Christian callings. Then wrote, 'Considered biblically and ecclesiologically, the church is a perfectly level playing field'.[36]

In those words, Avis summarised and articulated the results of decades of prayerful writing on the topic of discipleship equality through baptism. The topic of baptismal equality amongst disciples has been mentioned for many years in reports from the worldwide Anglican Communion, the Lambeth Conferences of Bishops (1958–1998), the Anglican Consultative Council (1996) and the Church of England (2020, 2021).[37] For example, the equality of ministry was mentioned in the 1958 Lambeth Conference: 'Ministry and laity are one. There may be a difference in function but there is no difference in essence'.[38] The 1968 Lambeth Conference Report commented, 'The various patterns of ministry, ordained and lay, are thus equal; we cannot speak of an "inferior office" if that office is where God wants his servant to be'.[39]

The Church of England General Synod document 'God's People Set Free: Living as missionary disciples in the whole of life, bringing transformation to the church and the world' published November 2021, affirmed 'on the basis of baptismal mutuality, the equal worth and status, complementary in gifting and vocation, mutual accountability in discipleship and equal partnership in mission of lay and ordained followers'.[40]

In the early church, as reported in the New Testament, *ekklesia* was understood to be a gathering or assembly of equals in discipleship. Gal. 3.27–28 is a key text, which raises the issue of Christian identity and uses language from a baptismal liturgy with a focus on 'in Christ'. 'Unity in Christ is the basis of a new status (equality) and identity (children of God).[41]

The importance in the Anglican tradition of the basic equality of calling amongst God's people has been clearly stated repeatedly. The church is to be understood as a community of equals through baptism with a diversity of ministries of service, recognising co-responsibility and servant leadership by all.

This recalling of and remembering the importance that the Anglican tradition places on discipleship equality through baptism has implications. On reflection, the teaching about discipleship equality may raise the issue of language equality. Does

[36]Avis, 'The Roles of the Ecclesial Orders in the Governance of the Church', p. 1

[37]Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together,* pp. 18–20.

[38]Lambeth Conference 1958, *The Encyclical Letter from the Bishops together with the resolutions and Reports* (London: SPCK and Seabury Press, 1958), p. 113.

[39]Lambeth Conference 1968, *Resolutions and Reports* (London/New York: SPCK and Seabury Press, 1968), p. 93.

[40]'Setting God's People Free: Living as missionary disciples in the whole of life, bringing transformation to the church and the world' (London, General Synod, The Church of England, GS 224, November 2021), p. 3.

[41]Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together,* pp. 13–14, 44–45, 76–78; Steven G Ogden, *The Church, Authority and Foucault: Imaging the Church as a Open Space of Freedom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 119; Paul Collins, *Recovering The 'True Church': Challenges for Australian Catholicism Beyond the Plenary Council* (Baywater, Victoria, Australia: Coventry Press, 2022), pp. 43, 46–47, 70–82, 84. Collins wrote about Jesus establishing 'a community of equal disciples', p. 43. The authors of the Letter to the Colossians informed the reader of the letter that holding to Christ was the central attribute for discipleship. Vicky Balabanski, *Colossians an Earth Bible Commentary: An Eco-Stoic Reading* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), pp. 1, 140–144; 'Lumen Gentium' in *The Documents of Vatican II*, Ed. Walter M Abbott, SJ (London, Dublin: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), Chapter IV, pp. 58–59.

discipleship equality need language equality? Perhaps it is time for the Anglican tradition to distance itself from the implications of the terms clergy and laity, which may imply and reflect inequality in discipleship ministry. Lay is negative, meaning not clergy, not ordained and not qualified, not having professional or specialist knowledge, a non-specialist and not equal in discipleship.

The time has come to ensure that ecclesial language reflects church teaching on the equality of discipleship. Positive language like the word disciple better reflects contemporary Anglican teaching and ecclesiology. It removes the negative lay concept which hinders Christian growth, especially should the word lay convey second-class status.[42]

The majority of church members should no longer be described as laypeople but as disciples of Jesus, free to be learners and ministers in their own right in the People of God, commissioned to participate in God's mission, qualified through their Christian faith, abilities and skills, and growing in their faith and practice. The People of God is a well-known biblical term used to describe and understand the inclusive, holistic and serving nature of the Christian Church.

Perspective Four: The Whole Church is Commissioned Through the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation

The author has a high view of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation set within the context of the Eucharist. The Anglican Church of Australia provides liturgically for the baptism-confirmation-eucharist continuum in *A Prayer Book for Australia*.[43] This high view was affirmed recently in 2025 while the author was participating in a moving and deeply meaningful Anglican Parish Church Service in Adelaide, where two adults, a young couple, were commissioned as disciples: called, set apart, incorporated into Christ, made members of the 'body of Christ' and committed to Christian learning through baptism, confirmation, the laying on of hands by the bishop and receiving the Holy Spirit, all within the Holy Communion Service, using *A Prayer Book for Australia* 'Holy Baptism Confirmation in Holy Communion' Order of Service.

[42]Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together,* pp. 6–7. In the 'Foreword' to this Littleton book Archbishop Geoffrey Smith, Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, mentioned the 1964 book by Mark Gibbs and T. Ralph Morton called *God's Frozen People – a book for and about ordinary Christians* (Fontana). Archbishop Smith commented, 'Gibbs and Morton argued that the church had become 'minister centred' with the clergy being 'first class' Christians and the laity 'second class' Christians, which obscures the fact that clergy and laity alike and together are the people of God. Nearly sixty years later that is sadly still true'. The author has also observed and heard about examples of behaviour in the Anglican Church of Australia where laity are considered to be of second-class status and unequal in discipleship; Gideon Goosen, *Clericalism: Stories from the Pews – A Workbook for Parishes* (Bayswater, Victoria, Australia: Coventry Press, 2020), p. 22. Goosen mentioned one effect of clericalism: 'feelings of being second class members of the church'; Caroline Miley, when writing on the 'One People of God? The Laity' noted 'There are far too many Christians who feel that they are only Christians in a private, inner, sort of way, and that the real work of Christian life should be undertaken by the clergy, who are, after all, 'professional Christians." In *The Suicidal Church: Can the Anglican Church be Saved?* (Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press, Australia, 2002), p. 152.

[43]*A Prayer Book for Australia,* pp. 50–71; see Footnote 9, Dunnill, 'Is Confirmation Necessary in Anglican Theology?' pp. 12–14.

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The author's own experience of being confirmed in May 1956 as a teenager aged 15 years serves as an example. He was born in September 1941 and baptised in November 1941. After confirmation preparation classes during 1955 and the consequent discussion at home, his parents and family thought that more preparation was needed. He withdrew from confirmation in 1955. After more preparation in the first half of 1956, he was confirmed and has vivid memories of a deeply moving and meaningful God presence experience. A strong motivation for Christian learning followed in the years ahead. The significant positive impact of the confirmation preparation, the confirmation event and the follow-up left a deep impression.

The three dimensions of the baptism-confirmation-eucharistic commissioning worship service are the gift of the Holy Spirit, initiation into the Christian community and the strengthening for Christ-like living.[44] By these sacramental means, God sets apart and commissions disciples to be a royal priesthood to bring Christ to the world.[45]

The laying on of hands on the heads of candidates by the bishop is included in the Order of Service. The laying on of hands was an ancient custom with Old Testament precedent (Num. 27.18–28). The practice conveys a sense of God's blessing, love and grace through the Spirit, blessing those asking for healing (following the example of Jesus healing people, Mk. 10.16, Mt. 19. 13–15), blessing, authorising and commissioning of the whole church and those ordained later, as deacon, priest and bishop.

Reports from the first-century church about the laying on of hands for baptisms and ministry appointments are recorded in the New Testament. Examples of the practice of laying on of hands for baptisms are found in Acts 8. 14–18, 19. 5–6. Heb. 6.2. 'On hearing this, they (about 12 people) were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them' . . . (Acts 19.5–6). The practice of the laying on of hands for formal ministry appointments can be read in Acts 6.6, 13. 2–3; I Tim. 4.14. Seven, including Stephen, were chosen to serve. 'They had these men stand before the apostles, who laid their hands upon them' (Acts 6.6).

The commissioning that occurs through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation emphasises some assumptions which further encourage that practice of setting apart individuals for the service of God and the People of God. Four assumptions put order to our thinking.

First, God-in-Christ sets apart the Church, the whole People of God, to participate in *missio dei.* In *A Theology of the Laity*, Hendrick Kraemer provided a comprehensive outline of the theology of the whole People of God. From Kraemer's

[44]See Footnote 34.

[45]The Letter 1 Peter is about Christian identity as God's people in Christ. It is addressed to 'all of you' (1Peter 5.5) and 'all of you are in Christ' (1Peter 5.14). The author of the letter draws on Old Testament metaphors (Exod.19.6, Isa 43.20–21) to describe the church. 'Christians are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' and their vocation is to proclaim, 'the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light' (1 Peter 2.9). Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together,* pp. 72–73, 76; 'The laity are the royal priesthood God ordains at baptism to bring Christ to the world, and 'out in the world' to transform the bread and wine of life'. Scott Cowdell, *God's Next Big thing: Discovering the Future Church* (Mulgrave, Victoria, Australia: John Garratt Publishing, 2004), p. 168.

perspective, the whole church is mission, the whole church is ministry and the whole church is *diakonia*. All the members, the total membership, the clergy and laity are equally involved. He wrote, 'The Church is ministry and therefore has ministries'.[46]

Second, a Christian is called and commissioned by God through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation to share in the ministry and mission of Jesus. In *Orders and Ministry* Kenan Osborne, when discussing the official teaching of the post-conciliar church in the Roman Catholic tradition, as written in *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium,* wrote that 'all baptised and confirmed Christians are called and commissioned by God to share in the threefold ministry of Jesus the Christ'.[47]

Third, through baptism Christ incorporates and commissions disciples to participate in his ministry through the community of the Church. 'Christ's Ministry and the Ministry of the Church' was the topic in the May 1963 World Council of Churches Bulletin, *Laity*. In the document the baptism of Jesus is described as his consecration to his vocation. The authors of the Bulletin article noted that Christ works through the ministry of the total membership of the Church and the ministers with a special function.[48]

Fourth, the primary calling of a Christian is through baptism. Bonaventure Kloppenburg from the Roman Catholic tradition considered this fundamental issue raised by Vatican II. He wrote

> Before someone is looked upon as either a layman or deacon or priest or bishop or even pope, he should be considered first of all a Christian or member of God's people. These terms express the basic condition, the primary state, the common element, the most important aspect . . . It is this common foundation on which all else rests, that the greatness, dignity and newness brought by Christ properly reside.[49]

All ministries are based on this common foundation of being Christian. In summary, through baptism and confirmation all disciples have the same calling to serve in the name of Christ. This calling is the common foundation of all learners and ministers in the Anglican tradition. It is the foundation of the church, the source of discipleship ministry and the inspiration for Christian learning. The calling to be a

[46]Hendrik Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1958), p. 137; Susan Wood made a similar point about the whole people of God when discussing the 'Baptismal Foundations of a Synodal Church'. She wrote, 'Baptism establishes the fundamental equality and unity of the people of God prior to divisions into various ministries and states of life and prior to a division between ordained ministers and lay people'. Susan K Wood, *A Synodal Church: The Christian Faithful on Pilgrimage* (New York, London, Dublin: Rowman & Littlefield, 2025, Kindle Book), p. 18.

[47]Kenan Osborne, *Orders and Ministry: Leadership in the World Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), p. 173; Wood, *A Synodal Church*, p. 41. Wood wrote that 'the entire body of the faithful shares in various ways Christ's triple office: as priest, as prophet (teacher, witness), and as king (servant, leader)'.

[48]Madeleine Barot and Ralph C. Young eds. 'Christ's Ministry and The Ministry of the Church' in *Laity,* 15 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, May 1965), pp. 14–29.

[49]Osborne, *Orders and Ministry*, p. 174.

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deacon and priest is a particular expression of this primary calling of all disciples in Christ.

More intentional teaching on, advocacy for and practice of the commissioning of all adult disciples is likely to enhance Christian learning in parishes. Much growth in faith occurs in the way that it was for parish leaders who were doing ministry, as shown in research findings already mentioned.

Disciples know that they are learners and doers of ministry. They engage in Christian formation, education and training instruction as people who are commissioned through baptism and confirmation, strengthened and sent out through Holy Communion and qualified through their Christian faith, abilities and skills, uniquely participating in the mission of God. A few of these disciples are also called to become deacons, priests and bishops, tasks required by and for the People of God.[50]

The commissioning of all disciples and the ordaining of deacons and priests/ministers are intertwined, complementary and very important and exist in mutuality and partnership. As Kraemer taught, the whole church community is ministry and has ministries. Holding all these ministries together expresses and enables the ministry, mission and enhancement of Christian learning for the People of God through Christ in the Spirit.

Discussion

Using the framework of pedagogical theology, the author has examined the Anglican 'lay' ecclesial language and the discipleship ministry recognition practice through the lens of learning. Empirical parish learning community research findings on growth in faith inform the exploration. The findings from Parish Z church members and the examples from parish ministry leaders showed that those who regarded themselves as learners, active and leading in doing ministry reported that they had grown in faith.

Those findings connect with the three theological factors which influenced the author to undertake this study. Through the sacrament of baptism people become disciples of Jesus and are described as learners and ministers. Through baptism disciples have equality of discipleship in the Church, the People of God. Through baptism and confirmation all disciples are commissioned.

When disciples do ministry and practise discipleship equality, there is growth in faith, as there was growth in faith for Parish Z disciples and active parish ministry leaders in the research findings previously described. This linking of theology to learning outcomes for disciples is conducive to Christian growth and helps enrich faith learning in congregations and parishes. As the Australian NCLS findings show, 'Vital churches are churches where people feel that their faith is growing'.[51]

[50]Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together,* pp. 59, 61–62. *A Prayer Book for Australia,* pp. 779–797. 'The Ordinal: The Making, Ordaining and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests and Deacons'.

[51]Ruth Powell et al., *Enriching Church Life,* p. 24; Dunnill, 'Is Confirmation Necessary in Anglican Theology?' pp. 8, 11. Dunnill wrote about the 'motif of development', growth in faith, 'commitment' and 'growth in the power of the Spirit' as important elements in the rite of confirmation. The word confirmation derives from the Latin word *confirmare,* to confirm, to strengthen, to make firm or firmer. Confirmation is about growth in faith.

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Growth in faith learning is a key factor. The 'growth in faith' indicator is a measure of church vitality. The changes in ecclesial language from 'lay people' to 'disciple' and the emphasising of the word 'commissioned' encourage deeper engagement in doing ministry, and that helps growth in faith.

Upgrading Anglican ecclesial language to disciple and emphasising the ecclesial discipleship ministry recognition practice of commissioning has other important consequences too.

The celebration of commissioning adults through baptism and confirmation heightens the experience and deepens the impact of the event on Christian learning. Introducing this practice counters some current trends which focus mainly on the very important vocations of deacons and priests, while only briefly mentioning the vocation of all disciples as learners and ministers.[52] Correcting this imbalance in emphasis in Anglican church life is a task yet to be tackled. The effort needed for the church community to gain information about this new practice and come to terms with its significance will be formidable. The process might seem like a steep learning curve and take many out of their comfort zones. Nevertheless, implementing the teaching on disciples as learners and ministers, the teaching on equality of discipleship through baptism and the teaching on commissioning through baptism and confirmation in contemporary Anglican parish communities is a way forward to form vital churches like Parish Z and other like parishes.[53]

Alternative Considerations

Implementation may not come easily. Three main lines of resistance exist.

First, there are those who think that the word lay does not need to be changed. The word 'lay' should be redeemed and retained rather than discarded. Anecdotal evidence noted by the author in conversations here and there suggests that many church leaders and members are not concerned about the definition of laity. In their experience, clergy and laity are already partners in ministry and mission.

Second, the words clergy and laity are used but not emphasised. Some parish leaders sit loose to the clergy and lay language, not really using it. The teaching in the parish focuses on Jesus Christ. Other parish leaders retain the terms laity and clergy in a functional and official sense but emphasise and talk up the *laos*, the people of God's understanding of the church and the universal priesthood of all believers.

Third, for some the use of the word 'disciple' is controversial. Roger Walton's research findings in England suggested that the word disciple is 'not their preferred

[52]For example, John Littleton's Book Review of Bradly Billings, *Truly Called? Vocation in the Anglican Church*, p. 2. https://www.tjhlittleton.com (accessed 20 October 2025). On the colourful cover of *Truly Called?* The words *Vocation in the Anglican Church* are printed as the sub-title. This significant and helpful book is mainly about the very important vocation of the clergy. The topic 'Vocation in the Anglican Church' includes all disciples. Even though Billings briefly mentioned that through baptism all disciples have a vocation to ministry the cover sub-title does not represent the contents of the book. It could read 'Vocation of the Ordained Ministry in the Anglican Church'.

[53]See pages 5–8.

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description of their Christian faith commitment.'[54] Some Christians do not see themselves as disciples because they associate the term disciple with the first followers in the New Testament. During his research Walton found that some participants thought 'the first disciples, later 'apostles', were special and their calling different in kind from the faith to which contemporary Christians are called'.[55]

Nevertheless, one strength in using the word disciple is that the words discipleship, disciple and discipling are used across the networks of the worldwide Anglican Communion.[56] The biblical term disciple also resonates with the interest today in lifelong learning and will gradually enter Christian vocabulary, if it is not already there, more permanently once it is more regularly explained.

In writing on the laity, Fredrica Harris Thompsett commented that keeping the status quo might be a way forward.

> Despite the fact that it is theologically sound to refer to the 'ministry' of the laity' ... What is at stake is not the task of convincing persons that they are 'ministers'; rather the basic goal is encouraging persons to live authentically as 'Christians' in their daily life. In the global village of the twenty-first century, the exact ordering of ministry will surely not be critical as the ethical witness of laity in a post-Christian world.[57]

The variety of viewpoints expressed in this section of the paper may or may not represent the current scene in the Anglican Church of Australia and beyond in relation to tackling the issue of 'lay' ecclesial language and the matter of the whole church being commissioned. The difficulty is that keeping the status quo in official Anglican church life and governance and retaining the dominance of the negative lay concept may not be conducive to Christian growth in general and Christian learning in particular.

Even though the laity are highly respected and their essential roles valued enormously in the church context, the language used still suggests that laypeople are unqualified and unordained. Yet the 'lay' people are clearly not lay, non-specialists. Their participation in church and civic life indicates that they are qualified through responsibilities – wardens, parish council and ministry leadership – in the family, at work and on social issues. The Anglican tradition, even in the 21st century, may be too centred on the ordination of church leaders and not place enough value on the commissioning of all disciples. Inequality may exist among disciples who have a variety of roles and do essential tasks. From a definitional perspective, the negative description of laity may expose clericalism in the church, where laity are compared

[54]Roger L. Walton, 'Ordinary Discipleship' in *Exploring Ordinary Theology*, Eds. Jeff Astley and Leslie Francis (Surrey, England/Burlington, USA; Ashgate, 2013), p. 179.

[55]Walton, 'Ordinary Discipleship', p. 179.

[56]Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together,* pp. 12–13. For example, the Anglican Communion document 'Intentional Discipleship and Disciple-making: An Anglican Guide for Christian Life and Formation' (London: The Anglican Consultative Council, 2016). 'Intentional Discipleship' under the heading of Mission available from https://www.anglicancommunion.org (accessed on 21 October 2025).

[57]Fredrica Harris Thompsett, 'The Laity' in *The Study of Anglicanism*, Stephen Sykes, John Booty, Jonathon Knight (London: SPCK, 1998, Revised edition), p. 288.

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with clergy in having discipleship responsibilities. Clericalism elevates clergy above laity and divides laity from clergy.

To limit the influence of the negative definition of the laity, to limit inequality within ministry practice, to discuss the commissioning of all disciples and to improve Christian learning, the whole systemic governance language of the Anglican tradition could be changed.

To make a start, upon reflection, members of the Anglican tradition could decide to stop using the words 'lay', 'layman', 'laywoman' and 'lay Synod representative'. The author no longer uses the word 'lay'. The word 'disciple' is preferred. For the author the word 'lay', as in 'lay ministry', is past its used-by date. The author and a few others from the Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions question the continued use of the lay language.[58] Begin to use activity-based language. For example, use the words 'liturgical assistant' instead of 'lay assistant' and 'wardens, parish council members' instead of 'lay leaders'.

Practicalities - Two Categories of Church: Negative and Positive

From the perspective of the church practices examined in the paper, the church might be described, from a negative viewpoint for most members, as an 'is not' church or described, from a positive viewpoint for all members, as an 'inclusive' church.

In an article on 'The Living Church', Hans-Ruedi Weber, in 1958, wrote about the ministry of the laity and asked the question, 'Who wants to be an "is not"'?[59] Who wants to be defined in comparison to the clergy as someone who is not clergy and not ordained? Weber continued then to write about the ministry of the *laos,* the whole people of God and the ministry of all baptised Christians.

Weber's question then is pertinent now. There will always be exceptions. But in practical terms from a definition perspective, church leaders and Christian educators relate to the baptised and confirmed as people who, in this 'is not' church, are not ordained, not clergy, not qualified, not ministers and not equal in discipleship. Church leaders and teachers with this negative attitude towards the majority of the members of the church then hand on or pass on the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith. The ministry of the laity is thought by some to be derived from those ordained as deacons and priests. Such a description may seem like a caricature of the church, and yet this kind of negative disposition towards 99% of the church membership has enough veracity in Anglican life and polity to be worth consideration.[60] Except for keen parishioners and those who like this way of

[58]Bruce Kaye, *Frozen Institutions: Questions for the Church after Christendom* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2022), p. 99; Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together,* pp. 11, 39, 82; Miley, *The Suicidal Church*, pp. 152–153; Anne Benjamin & Charles Burford, *Leadership in a Synodal Church* (Mulgrave, Melbourne: Garratt Publishing, 2021), p. 4; Richard R. Gaillardetz, 'The Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry within an Ordered Communion' in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry,* Ed. Susan K. Wood (Collegeville, Minnesota, USA: Liturgical Press, 2003), pp. 26, 43–44, 47; Geoffrey Robinson, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus* (Mulgrave, Melbourne, Australia: John Garratt Publishing, 2007), pp. 293–295; Wood, *A Synodal Church*, p. 10.

[59]Weber, 'A Living Church', *Laity,* p. 44

[60]See Footnote 42.

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learning, this negative attitude towards the church is not conducive to Christian growth and learning for many people.

This paper presents an image of a positive and inclusive church wherein, in practical terms from a definition perspective, church leaders and Christian educators relate to the baptised and confirmed as disciples who are commissioned, qualified, learners, ministers and equal in discipleship. Church leaders and Christian educators with this positive attitude towards other disciples in the learning community of the People of God share their faith in Jesus the Christ and enable ministry and mission, listening and learning with others through Christ in the Spirit. This inclusive attitude church is more conducive to Christian growth and learning for many people. Those many commissioned through baptism and confirmation and those few ordained as deacons, priests and bishops learn and minister together through partnership and mutuality in the cause of Jesus the Christ.

These brief summaries draw together the main themes of the paper and describe, through a focus on learning, the attitudinal practicalities of being two ways of church. The contrast invites reflection on attitudes within current ministry practice. The contrast also promotes thought about potential ways of transitioning and reordering ecclesial language and ministry recognition practices to be more conducive to Christian growth and learning.

Other questions might be considered when looking at the negative and positive descriptions of church. Which church do I belong to? Which church would I like to belong to? Which church would I leave?[61]

Conclusion

The author is charting new territory by introducing a different ecclesial language and emphasising the commissioning narrative. The author is asking the People of God in the Anglican tradition to think about changing to approaches which are likely to be more conducive to growth in faith.

In the manner of pedagogical theology these long-held Anglican practices have been examined through the lens of learning. Empirical parish research findings were outlined. These research findings showed a link between ministry involvement and engagement, ministry leadership and growth in faith. Growth in faith learning is a key factor.

The sacrament of baptism also influences the changes. Through baptism people become disciples of Jesus and have equality of discipleship. Through baptism and confirmation, disciples are commissioned.

Growth in faith happens when disciples do ministry, are involved as leaders, are affirmed as equal in discipleship and are recognised as being commissioned. These

[61]Church attendance in the Australian Anglican tradition has been in general decline during the last few decades. A recent example of this trend is found in the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, South Australia, where Diocesan Church Attendance Statistics showed a declining attendance amongst worshippers across the four Archdeacon Regions. https://www.adelaideanglicans.com (accessed 22 October 2025) under Governance, Synods, *2025 Synod Papers,* pp. 19–20.

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three practical and positive initiatives – involvement and equality and commissioning – help form a church culture where disciples experience growth in faith through Christ in the Spirit.

All disciples are given the best opportunity to grow in faith when they do ministry in a church culture which recognises that the primary ordering of ministry occurs in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation.

The greatest honour is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, a learner and minister in the cause of Jesus, serving in the name of Christ; a follower of Jesus, his teachings and way, which involves lifelong biblical learning in the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith through Christ in the Spirit.

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