

# **The limitations of the word ‘lay’ (laywomen, layman) when discussing discipleship and ministry amongst Anglicans in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Implications for Christian learning.**

**By John Littleton**

Abstract

Members of the Anglican Communion are discussing discipleship and ministry. Few seem to question the ‘lay’ terminology used in ecclesial language. For the author the word ‘lay,’ as in ‘lay ministry’ is passing its used by date. The paper invites Anglican Church members to think about moving away from the word ‘lay’ and towards using the word ‘disciple’. Focussing on the discipleship ministry of ninety-nine percent of church members, the scriptural background is considered before the ‘lay’ concept is outlined. Lay people today are usually defined negatively as Christians who are not clergy, not ordained and not qualified. From the literature examined the paper invites church members to discuss this negative definition of the laity. The paper argues that in their ministry ninety-nine percent of church members have a positive vocation and ministry within the People of God in the own right. They are incorporated and ordained through baptism, commissioned through Holy Communion, and qualified by their Christian faith and abilities, uniquely participating in the *missio dei*. Implications for Christian learning are discussed.

Keywords: discipleship and ministry, People of God, Anglican Church, the ‘lay’ concept, everyday disciples and parish leader disciples.

## **Introduction**

Members of the world-wide Anglican Communion are discussing discipleship and ministry.<sup>1</sup> For example, during the 2021 annual Synod for the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, Australia, Archbishop Geoff Smith spoke about helping the People of God grow in discipleship ministry. He said ‘I think in our contemporary church we may have forgotten that all the baptised are called to be disciples, ministers, sent into the world by Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. All who accept their baptism, who are followers of Jesus, are called to be disciples, ministers, fellow workers with Christ’.<sup>2</sup> The Church of England Faith and Order

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<sup>1</sup> John Littleton, ‘The People of God, Discipleship and Ministry in the Anglican Church Today and Tomorrow’, *Journal of Anglican Studies*, (2021), pp. 1-2. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355321000334>

<sup>2</sup> The President of Synod October 2021 Pastoral Address for the 44<sup>th</sup> Triennial Synod, Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, pp.10-14. Available at: <https://www.adelaideanglicans.com> (accessed 9 May 2022).

Commission published *Kingdom Calling: The vocation, ministry, and discipleship of the whole people of God* in 2020.<sup>3</sup> While this aspirational and inspiring report used the term ‘lay’, *Kingdom Calling* emphasised that lay and ordained ministries are equal in discipleship.

During these twenty-first century discussions on discipleship and ministry terms such as ‘lay ministry’ and ‘lay discipleship’<sup>4</sup> are used. Some terms taken for granted in the Adelaide Anglican Diocese are: ‘Lay and ordained leaders’, ‘Lay members of Synod’, ‘Lay Readers’ and ‘Lay Assistants’. To the best of the author’s knowledge only a few voices question the ‘lay’ terminology and are concerned about the use of the words, ‘lay’, ‘laity’, ‘layman’ and ‘laywomen’. In 1958 Hans-Ruedi Weber asked the question ‘who wants to be an “is not”?’<sup>5</sup> By asking the question he may have started the process of querying the word ‘lay’. Dictionaries define a lay person as a person who is non-clerical or not a member of the clergy, and a person who is without professional or special knowledge of a particular subject; that is unqualified and unordained.<sup>6</sup> Hendrik Kraemer wrote that ‘In current usage “lay” means: unqualified to speak or judge in various fields of knowledge and science’.<sup>7</sup>

The author is one of the voices to question the ‘lay’ terminology. Because of life experience, parish ministry and research on the parish as a learning community, the author no longer speaks the traditional language of the Anglican Church by using the term ‘lay’. The word ‘disciple’ is preferred. The word ‘disciple’ is used extensively in the Gospels and the Anglican documents referenced. The word disciple is a key word in the Christian faith. People who are Christian are followers or disciples of Jesus Christ who sent his disciples to disciple others (Mt. 28.19-20). The word disciple has its origin in the Latin word *discere* (to learn). A disciple is a follower of Jesus’ teachings and way of life. The Greek word for disciple *mathetes* means learner or apprentice. Christian disciples are learners in the Christian faith and life.

Anne Benjamin and Charles Burford, from the Roman Catholic tradition, are two more voices seeking another word for ‘laity’. In *Leadership in a Synodal Church* they wrote, ‘Too often, this common use of the term carries associated implications of ‘lay’ as opposed to ‘professional’. Likewise, it is past time for the Church to find a word to describe those who

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<sup>3</sup> *Kingdom Calling: The Vocation, Ministry and Discipleship of the Whole People of God* (Church of England Faith and Order Commission, London, Church House Publishing, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> *Kingdom Calling*, pp. 10,11,43.

<sup>5</sup> Hans-Ruedi Weber, ed. ‘A Living Church’, *Laity*, Bulletin of the Department on the Laity, (Geneva, World Council of Churches, December 1958), p.44.

<sup>6</sup> *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Australia: Oxford University Press, 2009, 5<sup>th</sup> edn).

<sup>7</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1958, Second Impression 1959), p.49; Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning Theology* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), pp. 64, 163.

are usually referred to as ‘unordained’. ‘Non-ordained’ is a negative, describing one thing that the faithful are not’.<sup>8</sup>

These questioning voices base their comments on the theology of the People of God.<sup>9</sup> People of God is a well-known biblical term used to describe and understand the inclusive, holistic, and serving nature of the Christian Church. The word *laos*, a people, a people group is used frequently in the New Testament; 12 passages refer to a People of God, for example, Acts, 15.14, 1 Pet. 2.9. The *laos*, the People of God includes all disciples, everyday disciples, parish leaders, deacons, priests, and bishops.<sup>10</sup> There is a basic equality of calling among all God’s people, a gathering of equals in discipleship. 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.<sup>11</sup> The church is a ‘community of discipleship’.

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Drawing on this understanding of the Church as the People of God, the paper encourages members of the Anglican Church to take a next difficult step, difficult as it may be hard to change church practices, to liberate themselves from the concept of ‘lay’ and the ecclesial language of using the word ‘lay’.

Language matters. Words express meanings which can empower or disempower those who hear or read them, building up self-esteem or putting people down. ‘Lay’ can be a put down word. Parishioners often state that they are only a lay person, only a member of the laity.

The paper explores the ‘lay’ language and the ‘lay’ concept issue, thinking about current lay ministry in the light of scripture, the lay concept, literature on the theology of the laity past and present and the People of God understanding of the Church, all in the cause of enhancing Christian learning; recognising that the negative term ‘lay’ describes about ninety-nine percent of church members. The clergy have their leadership role and constitute about one percent of church membership.

Members of the Anglican Church are invited to consider the ‘lay’ issue by participating in a theological reflection process. Encouraging Anglicans to think about this matter

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<sup>8</sup> Anne Benjamin & Charles Burford, *Leadership in a Synodal Church* (Mulgrave, Melbourne, Victoria: Garratt Publishing, 2021), p.4.

<sup>9</sup> Littleton, *The People of God*, pp. 3, 11-13; Benjamin & Burford, *Leadership in a Synodal Church*, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Littleton, *The People of God*, pp. 3, 9-11.

<sup>11</sup> Littleton, *The People of God*, p.3.

<sup>12</sup> WCC Commission on Faith and Order, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Faith and Order Paper No. 214; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013), p.6; *Kingdom Calling*, p. 83.

represents the unique contribution the paper brings to the conversation on discipleship ministry.

The paper follows Michael Trainor's process of critical reflection. In his writing on the Gospel according to Luke, Trainor outlined, in contemporary terms, the main features of Luke's theological reflection process in four dimensions: 'the situating, remembering, transforming, and actuating dimensions'.<sup>13</sup>

### **Current practice in lay ministry**

The situating dimension of theological reflection attends to the present experience in people's lives, for example, the ministry of lay people. Lay ministry amongst Australian Anglican parishes is practised within the life of the faith community and by participating in the life of society. Both are important expressions of lay ministry, church-based and world-based and they are interconnected through worship, the gathering of God's people for regular worship and the sending or scattering of disciples throughout the week to serve God in the name of Christ during their everyday lives.

Parish leader disciples take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.<sup>14</sup> For example, each congregation in an Anglican parish in the Diocese of Adelaide has two wardens. The role of the warden, in addition to ensuring that regular worship services occur, is to co-operate with the parish priest in conducting the work of the parish and with others on the Parish Council to manage the property and governance of the parish. 'Parish Council together with the parish priest is responsible for the worship, ministry and mission of the parish under the leadership of the Parish Priest'.<sup>15</sup> The laity have members on a parish Nomination Committee and share with the archbishop and other clergy in the selection of a new parish priest or minister. Lay people represent the parish at the Diocesan Synod.

These responsible lay people bring their study and practice of the Christian faith, personalities, life skills, and their qualifications to bear on these significant roles within a faith community. A warden has considerable responsibilities to fulfill. To call wardens and

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Trainor, *According to Luke: Insights for Contemporary Pastoral Practice* (North Blackburn, Victoria, Australia: Collins Dove, 1992), p. 94.

<sup>14</sup> Littleton, *The People of God*, pp. 9-10, 11-12. Parish leader disciples, about nine percent of all disciples in parishes, relate to official church life, for example, parish councillors, wardens, Synod representatives, lay assistants. For Diocesan activities the term would be diocesan leader disciples.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas John Harvard Littleton, *Enhanced Faith Learning in Parishes*, Thesis (DM), Adelaide College of Divinity, 2016, p.92. Available at <https://www.tjhlittleton.com> (accessed 11 May 2022).

other ministry leaders, people who are without professional or special knowledge of a particular subject or unqualified is not applicable in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Leaders like wardens have agency and the term ‘lay’ is an inappropriate description of their discipleship ministry.

Everyday disciples represent Christ and his Church, bearing witness to Christ wherever they may be in the world.<sup>16</sup> Being Christian at work, in the family, in community engagement, in civic participation and response to social issues are part of their role as disciples. Recognition of the societal activities of parishioners in a parish time, talent and income stewardship programme is very uplifting: refugee support, helping displaced persons in Australia and in various parts of the world are some examples. Add to this list, the climate change debate, Rotary, Anglicare, and other community service activities, and one is amazed at the amount of community service everyday disciples contribute to society.

The term ‘lay’ is once again an inaccurate description of this kind of discipleship ministry. Everyday disciples of integrity bring their personalities, their study and practice of the Christian faith, their life skills, and qualifications to bear upon their ministry activities. They are qualified to speak and act as disciples and practitioners in their various fields of knowledge and expertise.

Serious everyday disciples and parish leader disciples do not take on their Christian faith and practice lightly. They are generally unpaid unlike most clergy disciples who are paid for their discipleship ministry service and sometimes referred to as professionals. Serious discipleship is not amateurish or a kind of dabbling in the topic or being unskilled or superficial. Discipleship is a commitment to lifelong learning and service in the name of Christ. All disciples, clergy, and laity are on a spiritual journey with Christ individually and collectively. There are various stages on the journey as people grow in their faith and practice. Across the continuum there may be degrees of growing: a little, some, much, very much growth. But all disciples are on a journey. They are encouraged and equipped to carry out their ministry, *diakonia* (2 Cor. 5.18; 2 Tim. 4.5).

Generally, members of the laity are highly respected in the church context. Church leadership and members may consider that the church has successfully and positively

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<sup>16</sup> Littleton, *The People of God*, pp. 9-10, 11-12. Everyday disciples, about ninety percent of all disciples in parishes, relate to daily life in many contexts. The paper advocates an inclusive, fluid, and holistic approach to language; a both/and perspective rather than an excluding either/or distinction. For example, parish leader disciples, deacon, priest, and bishop disciples also relate to daily life. All disciples work for the Kingdom of God. The terms used are a general way of describing discipleship life realities of the whole church.

redefined the term laity by regular explanation about and usage of the word. Even so, the negative definition of lay – meaning not trained, not qualified, and not ordained – whether acknowledged or not, remains to the detriment of understanding the essential vocation and ministry of most of the church membership.

### **Remembering Scripture**

The remembering dimension of theological reflection attends to the Christian tradition and memory in the faith community, ‘the Story’ in biblical terms.<sup>17</sup> The following new attitudes and behaviours (dispositions) in the early church communities provide biblical foundations for the move from ‘lay’ to ‘disciple’ language. The footnote references source research details about these biblical passages. In these biblical passages authors report on a new era focussed on the Way and the ways of Jesus. The People of God, as disciples, followed Jesus’ message and lived according to these dispositions: equity in participation, *diakonia*, *metanoia* and *baptism*. These attitudes and behaviours contrasted with the attitudes and behaviours experienced in the society of the time.

Understanding who are the true kindred of Jesus is essential. Jesus is reported to have defined the members of his new family or community as those who do God’s will. The only requirement to be a member of this new family of Jesus was to do the will of God (Mk. 3.31-35, written c.68-70 CE; Mt. 12. 46-50, written c. 85 CE; Lk 6. 46-49, 8.19-21, written c. 85 CE). In the Luke version, when told that his mother and brothers were waiting to see him Jesus is reported to have responded, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it’. In his commentary on this Lukan passage Trainor wrote, ‘The evangelist’s teaching about the various reactions to God’s word finds its positive response in the family of Jesus composed of his natural kin and all who hear and respond to God’s word’.<sup>18</sup> Membership of the People of God is decided not by kin ties, or any other ties, but through hearing and acting on the message of Jesus. Guidance on responding to God’s word is provided in the two commandments (Mk. 12. 28-34; Mt. 22. 34-40; Lk. 10. 25-37).

Equity of calling and discipleship is evident in the New Testament. Steven Ogden, drawing on the work of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and others, focusses on two aspects of the early church’s tradition: the concept of *ekklesia* and the Letter to the Galatians, 3.27-28,

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<sup>17</sup> Trainor, *According to Luke*, pp.108-115.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Trainor, *About Earth’s Child: An Ecological Listening to the Gospel of Luke* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press 2012), p.153.

written c. 50 CE.<sup>19</sup> The Galatians passage reads: ‘As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave and free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus’.

*Ekklesia*, an assembly or gathering, is a ‘discipleship of equals’. This ‘faith community is an open, inclusive, democratic space’, which God’s realm inspires. For Paul it was a ‘liturgical assembly’. *Ekklesia* was a very different space with few official titles connected with leadership and authority and not dependent on ‘empire thinking and practice’.<sup>20</sup>

Gal. 3.28 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)’.<sup>21</sup> Christ offered new perspectives on human identity and the way we see others in the liturgical and eucharistic assembly and in human society. It transcended racial, social and gender distinctions and introduced a new era, ‘a radically reshaped social world...equivalent to the ‘kingdom perspective’ which informed Jesus’ ministry’.<sup>22</sup> ‘In Christ, distinctions of race, class, and gender are irrelevant’.<sup>23</sup> The authors of the Letter to the Colossians written c. 62 CE agreed and informed the reader of the letter that holding to Christ was the central attribute for discipleship.<sup>24</sup>

*Diakonia* – to serve, to minister – is central. The synoptic Gospels reported that Jesus came to serve and that his disciples were to serve too. Following a conversation between Jesus, James and John about greatness, Jesus reminded his disciples that Gentile rulers ‘lord it over them’. Then he said ‘But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant (*diaconos*), and whoever wishes to be first among you must be a slave (*doulos*) of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve (*diakoneo*), and to give his life a ransom for many’ (Mk. 10.42-45; Mt. 20. 25-26; Lk. 22. 24-27).

In the early church disciples were encouraged to carry out their ministry, *diakonia* (2 Cor. 5.18; 2 Tim. 4. 5). Some disciples were appointed to a diaconal ministry (*diakonia*) and

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<sup>19</sup> Steven G. Ogden, *The Church, Authority and Foucault: Imaging the Church as an Open Space of Freedom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp.115-129.

<sup>20</sup> Ogden, *The Church, Authority, and Foucault*, p. 118.

<sup>21</sup> Ogden, *The Church, Authority, and Foucault*, p.119; Paul Collins, *Recovering The ‘True Church’: Challenges for Australian Catholicism Beyond the Plenary Council* (Bayswater, Victoria, Australia: Coventry Press, 2022), pp. 43, 46-47, 79-82, 84.

<sup>22</sup> Ogden, *The Church, Authority, and Foucault*, p.120.

<sup>23</sup> Frank J. Matera, *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville, USA: Abingdon Press, 2003), p.2085.

<sup>24</sup> Vicky Balabanski, ‘Neither Greek nor Jew...for Christ is all and in all (Col 3:11-17): A Bible Study’, Vicky Balabanski and Geraldine Hawkes ed. in *Receptive Ecumenism: Listening, Learning and Loving in the Way of Christ* (Adelaide Australia: ATF Press, 2018), pp. 5-14; Vicky Balabanski, *Colossians an Earth Bible Commentary: An Eco-Stoic Reading* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), pp. 1, 140-144.

exercised leadership with ‘authority and responsibility’ for ‘the work of ministry’ (Eph. 4.12; Acts 1.17, 25; Acts 6.3-6).

*Metanoia* – to repent, to change the inner person, to change one’s mind, purpose, and actions – is ‘the most important disposition necessary in the disciple who is to learn from Jesus’.<sup>25</sup> In his commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew Trainor noted that the essential criterion for discipleship was an openness to *metanoia*, repentance (to repent in Greek *metanoeo*) (Mt. 3.2, 4.17; Mk. 1. 15; Lk. 13. 3-5; Acts 2. 38, 3.19); openness to the realm of God’s presence (Kingdom of God); open to ‘an inclusive encounter with the divine presence’.<sup>26</sup> Trainor wrote ‘*Metanoia* literally means to change one’s attitude or thinking. This requires a preparedness to change; rather than rigidity and dogmatic certainty, the one who seeks out Jesus must be open, even flexible’.<sup>27</sup>

The baptismal disposition of turning to Christ is the Christian commitment. The letter I Peter written c. 90CE is about Christian identity as God’s People in Christ. It is addressed to ‘all of you’ (1 Pet. 5.5) and ‘all of you who are in Christ’ (1 Pet. 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’ (1Pet. 2.9). Biblical commentators suggest that this verse may have derived from a baptismal context.<sup>28</sup> Peter’s audience, whether of Jewish or Gentile background, as disciples, would have a ‘sense of self-worth’ in their new status through their baptismal commitment.<sup>29</sup> These verses add strength to the view that baptism into Christ is when disciples are appointed to their vocation. Baptism is a key benchmark of discipleship for the whole church.

These biblical accounts describe inclusive faith communities based on God’s purpose in Jesus Christ, where there was equality of discipleship, *diakonia*, *metanoia* and baptism, in contrast to communities with divisive and exclusive distinctions like patrician and plebian, first and second-class members. The ‘lay’ concept is not mentioned. John Stott wrote that the ‘overwhelming preoccupation of the New Testament is not with the status of the clergy, nor

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Trainor, *Voices from the Edge: Matthew’s Gospel in Our World* (North Blackburn, Victoria: Collins Dove 1992), p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Trainor, *Acts About Earth’s Children: An Ecological Listening to the Acts of the Apostles* (London: T&T Clark 2021), p.22.

<sup>27</sup> Trainor, *Voices from the Edge*, p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> Edward A. Maycock, *A Letter of Wise Counsel: Studies in the First Epistle of Peter* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1957), pp. 32, 48-49; Stephen Charles Neill and Hans-Ruedi Weber (eds), *The Layman in Christian History* (London: SCM Press, 1963), p.31; William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter: The Daily Study Guide Revised Edition* (Edinburgh UK: The Saint Andrew Press 1979), p.160; Collins, *Recovering The ‘True Church’*, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Jennifer Strawbridge (ed), *The First Letter of Peter: A Global Commentary* (London: SCM Press, Kindle edn, 2020), Loc 697-756.



with clergy-laity relations, but with the whole people of God in their relations to Him and each other'.<sup>30</sup>

This brief excursion into scripture supports the contention that in the early first century churches all members of the People of God shared in the ministry of Christ as disciples. Members of the People of God, *laos Theou*, were not referred to as laity (*laikos*) in the New Testament. *Laikos* is not a biblical word.<sup>31</sup>

### **c. 96 CE reference to the term 'lay'**

Hans-Ruedi Weber wrote that 'The first known Christian usage of the term is found in a letter addressed around 96 CE by Clement of Rome to the church in Corinth' (1 Clem. 40.5).<sup>32</sup> In ch. 40, v. 5 of the letter, Clement described church order and provided the information that 'Lay people are bound by the rules laid down for the laity'. The term for laity (*laikos*) gradually entered ecclesiastical language from the third and fourth century onwards 'usually referring to what is profane, distinguishing the laity from the priests/clergy and deacons'.<sup>33</sup>

George Huntston Williams remarked that until Clement used of the term 'lay' the 'Greek term was used as an adjective to distinguish the mass of people from their leaders'. Williams also commented that when Clement's letter was translated into Latin perhaps half a century later, the translator, 'though he wrote in Latin *lay ordinances (laicis praeceptis)*, he preferred for 'the lay man' the socially tintured phrase *plebius homo*'.<sup>34</sup>

The text of 1 Clement Chapter 40.5 indicated that these instructions about God's proper ordering of the liturgy in church life came from the Master, the Lord Himself and those that followed the instructions could not go wrong. 'For to the high priest the proper services are given, and to the priests the proper office has been assigned, and upon the Levites the proper ministries have been imposed. The layman is bound by the layman's rules'.<sup>35</sup> The good order indicated that the layman had a liturgical role.

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<sup>30</sup> John R.W. Stott, *One People: Clergy and Laity in God's Church* (London: Falcon Books, repr.1971), p.20.

<sup>31</sup> Littleton, *The People of God*, p. 3; Hans Kung, *The Church* (London: Search Press, 1968, 4<sup>th</sup> impression), p. 125.

<sup>32</sup> Littleton, *The People of God*, p. 3

<sup>33</sup> Littleton, *The People of God*, p. 3

<sup>34</sup> George Huntston Williams, 'The Ancient Church', in *The Layman in Christian History*, p.30.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Holmes ed., *The Apostolic Fathers in English* (Michigan, USA: Baker Academic, 2006, Third Edition), p.61.

Pope Benedict, when writing about Saint Clement, noted that in this letter ‘the Greek word *laikos* appears for the first time in Christian literature, meaning “a member of the *laos*” that is “of the people of God”’.<sup>36</sup>

*Laikos* is not a biblical word. During church history members of the laity have usually been seen as Christians who were not clergy.<sup>37</sup>

**The transforming dimension** of theological reflection results from ‘the dialogue between people’s present situation and the Christian tradition’,<sup>38</sup> the change, the renewal and the new possibilities and meaning. The paper now begins to reimagine an Anglican Church community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century which, the author suggests, does not need to keep the ‘lay’ concept, nor use the word ‘lay’.

### **Rediscovering A Theology of the Laity**

The rediscovery of the ministry of the laity in the late 1950’s inspired the work of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Anglican Church and other churches. WCC established a Department of the Laity (1956-1971) with a focus on the laity as the church’s representatives in the secular world. The Department published the Bulletin *Laity*, 1956-1968. The ministry of the laity was discussed during five Lambeth Conferences 1958-1998. Anglican Prayer Books 1979, 1989, described the vocation of lay ministers as representing Christ in the world and sharing the leadership of worship and governance in the Church.<sup>39</sup>

In December 1958 Bulletin *Laity* Hans-Ruedi Weber mentioned the predicament that ‘no generally acceptable definition of what the laity is exists today’... In the various churches a lay person is not clergy or the religious, ‘has not studied theology, or someone who has no church profession’. He asked the question ‘Who wants to be an “is not”?’ These definitions failed because they were ‘definition by comparison’ and confined to the life of the church. Weber argued that ‘the heart of the ministry of the laity lies in the Church-world relation’.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo* (Michigan USA and Cambridge UK, 2009), p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Littleton, *The People of God*, pp. 3, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Trainor, *According to Luke*, pp. 120-132.

<sup>39</sup> Littleton, *The People of God*, pp. 6-7, 9-10.

<sup>40</sup> Weber, ‘A Living Church’, pp. 44-45.

Hendrik Kraemer's significant and readable work on *A Theology of the Laity* provided an early and comprehensive outline of a theology of the whole People of God. It was a book of its time and is a book for our time, drawing our attention to the "Lay Issue," the renaissance of seeing the laity as an 'essential part of the church, and not primarily an insufficiently tapped reservoir of man-power'.<sup>41</sup> For Kraemer the terms 'lay' and 'laity' described 'the ordinary member of the church,' men and women.<sup>42</sup>

In the first paragraph of the penultimate Chapter Five Kraemer wrote, 'God is concerned about the world. In all that had happened in Christ, the whole of mankind is in God's view...the Church does not primarily exist on behalf of itself, but on behalf of the world'. 'As the salt pervades all the waters of the ocean, so this eager, interested concern for the world should pervade the Church in all its manifestations'.<sup>43</sup>

From Kraemer's perspective the whole church is mission, the whole church is ministry; all the members, the total membership, clergy, and laity equally involved. 'The Church is ministry and therefore has ministries'.<sup>44</sup> The missionary and ministerial vocation of the laity may have been a new discovery but 'to give it shape and form in the reality of the Church' was the task ahead. For the Church this meant 'a readiness to revise its total outlook and its structure. For "ministry" and laity it means a laborious adventure of learning new lessons and finding new ways'.<sup>45</sup>

The section on 'The Primitive Diakonia' is as particularly pertinent today as then. After examining the life of the early church through a Bible study Kraemer focussed on 'the principle of diakonia' usually translated 'ministry' but better translated 'servantship'.<sup>46</sup> He concluded that the whole Church is *diakonia* from the example of Christ's *diakonia*. All members of the Church are baptised with the 'diaconal' seal. The whole People of God, the *laos*, including the laity, share in that ministry. The laity are the main actors when the focus is 'on the relation of the Church and the world.' Most of the church membership, the laity, are

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<sup>41</sup> Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity*, p. 37.

<sup>42</sup> Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity*, p.14.

<sup>43</sup> Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity*, pp. 127-128.

<sup>44</sup> Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity*, p. 137.

<sup>45</sup> Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity*, p. 136.

<sup>46</sup> Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity*, pp.138-139.

at the frontiers, ‘where the real dialogue between Church and the world becomes an event’; where people are ‘serving Christ by serving others’, dispersed and living in the world there playing ‘a more decisive role than the clergy can’.<sup>47</sup> The ministry of the laity was as essential an aspect of the Church as that of the clergy, but ‘collaboration between theologians, ministers and laity are absolutely necessary in order to enable the Church and its membership to *speak* with a new voice and *act* with new vigour and vision at the present day’.<sup>48</sup>

The May 1963 Bulletin *Laity* discussed the topic ‘Christ’s Ministry and the Ministry of the Church’.<sup>49</sup> The baptism of Jesus the Christ was consecration to his vocation. The total ministry of Christ through the whole Church in and for the world was the focus of this issue of the Bulletin. Christ works through the ministers with a special function and the ministry of the total membership of the Church. Through baptism Christ incorporates and ordains disciples for participation in his ministry through the community of the Church which is set apart from the world.<sup>50</sup> The authors of the Bulletin stated that ‘baptism is the basic ordination of each Christian,’ and that there are ‘subsequent ordinations’ for special ministry tasks. The authors then commented that ‘in most churches the incorporation aspect of baptism has – at least in theory – been maintained while the ordination aspect has to a great extent been lost’.<sup>51</sup> In the early Church, for example, towards the end of the second century CE, Tertullian wrote about baptismal ordination of the laity.<sup>52</sup> Baptismal ordination will be discussed again later.

### **Failure to achieve**

The excitement about the rediscovery of the ministry of the laity in the 1950-1960’s within the WCC ecumenical circles and member churches did not continue as much as those with the original enthusiasm for such ministry might have hoped. The laity were ‘understood as

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<sup>47</sup> Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity*, pp. 172, 174, 181.

<sup>48</sup> Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity*, p. 187.

<sup>49</sup> Madeline Barot and Ralph C. Young eds. ‘Christ’s Ministry and the Ministry of the Church’ *Laity* 15 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, May 1963).

<sup>50</sup> Barot and Young, ‘Christ’s Ministry and the Ministry of the Church’, pp. 14-19.

<sup>51</sup> Barot and Young, ‘Christ’s Ministry and the Ministry of the Church’, pp. 19-22.

<sup>52</sup> Neill and Weber, *The Layman in Christian History*, pp. 30-32; Tertullian, ‘Tertullian on the Priesthood of the Laity’, *De Exhortatione Castitatis*, 7, in Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder (eds.) *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, Fourth Edition, 2011), pp. 75-76.

the church's advocates in everyday situations in the world, outposts in the common quest for a Christian presence in society'.<sup>53</sup>

Writing 30 years later Konrad Raiser gave four reasons for the disappearance of this important understanding of lay ministry from ecumenical discussion. First, 'the institutionalisation and diversification of the ecumenical movement'. Second, a change in perspective happened within ecumenical discussion to focus on struggles in the churches and peoples of the South, rather than Europe and North America. Third, ecumenical discussion became more ecclesiastical and concerned about ordained ministry with the more active involvement of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches in the ecumenical movement. Fourth, the more traditional model of church gained hold where the laity were seen in some sense as inferior. Raiser wrote 'The laity are the "ordinary" church members as opposed to the specialists and experts, which in the church means the theologians, the professionals or full-time church workers and the ordained ministers'.<sup>54</sup>

The Anglican Communion too had different perspectives with a focus on issues relating to gender and sexuality from the 1990's onward.<sup>55</sup>

Scott Cowdell commented that lay people and clergy he encountered were not keen on the empowerment of 'lay Christians struggling to be faithful in the world of work'. He wrote 'And perhaps many clergy are simply unable to enthuse about lay independence and lay ministry not being theirs to control'.<sup>56</sup> Others have commented that the topic of lay ministry in everyday life may take some clergy and laity out of their comfort zones.

The authors of the 2020 Church of England *Kingdom Calling* Report also raised the issue of the failure of the church to achieve the practice of lay discipleship in daily life. The Conclusion included this section.

The challenge identified in the introduction was that good theology regarding the vocation, ministry and discipleship of the whole people of God has been presented many times over the past hundred years, with a particular weight since the 1960's. Yet in the case of the Church of England at least, such theology has struggled to achieve a sustained and consistent purchase in the thinking, praying, planning and living of clergy and laity alike.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Konrad Raiser, 'Laity in the Ecumenical Movement' *the ecumenical review*, 45,1 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, January 1993), p.377. Konrad Raiser was the general secretary of the World Council of Churches.

<sup>54</sup> Raiser, "Laity in the Ecumenical Movement", pp.375-377.

<sup>55</sup> Jeffrey W. Driver, *A Polity of Persuasion: Gift and Grief of Anglicanism* (Eugene, Oregon, USA: Cascade Books, 2014), p. 27.

<sup>56</sup> Scott Cowdell, *God's Next Big Thing: Discovering The Future Church* (Mulgrave, Victoria: John Garratt Publishing, 2004), p.167.

<sup>57</sup> *Kingdom Calling*, p. 88.

The Report claimed that a failure in theological imagination was ‘one of the reasons why good theology in this area has not borne consistent fruit in practice and experience.’<sup>58</sup> The Report sought to redress that failure in theological imagination.

This paper contributes to overcoming the failure to achieve meaningful practice of lay ministry discipleship in daily life by exposing the limitations of the word ‘lay’ and suggesting that the word ‘disciple’ be used. The negative ‘lay’ concept may have been a factor contributing to the failure to achieve positive outcomes in the discipleship ministry of everyday disciples.

## **Fertile Ground**

Recent developments in Church thinking and practice have created fertile soil to help all God’s People grow towards the use of new ecclesial language. Discussing the word ‘lay’ may trigger new insights, especially when fertile ground exists to help church members be receptive to letting go of the ‘lay’ concept and to create a readiness for making the next step, recognising that ‘disciple’ is an adequate word to describe church members.

A Learning Community Approach draws attention to the issue of equity and participation in ministry discipleship. Equity and participation are essential ground conditions for understanding the need to stop using the term ‘lay’.

Literature on a learning community focus for Christian education (learning and teaching) in parishes, with an emphasis of equity and participation, began to appear late in the twentieth century and onwards.<sup>59</sup> A learning community, customised for a parish context, is defined as: ‘a visionary community of faith where leaders and members, while respecting a diversity of abilities and perspectives, practise holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective learning processes’.<sup>60</sup>

The parishes and congregations within the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide provide the context for the author’s ministry work as a retired minister who is a learning community practitioner and researcher with an ecumenical outlook. A learning community practitioner and researcher understands that the opportunity for all learners to participate in learning is a

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<sup>58</sup> *Kingdom Calling*, p. 88.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas R. Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership* (Louisville, Kentucky, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); Norma Cook Everist, *The Church as a Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education* (Nashville, USA: Abingdon Press, 2002); John Littleton, *Enhance Learning in Parishes: A Learning Community Approach for Church Congregations* (Unley, Adelaide, South Australia: MediaCom Education Inc., 2017); Craig Mitchell, ‘(Re)Forming Christian Education in Congregations as the Praxis of Growing Disciples for a Missional Church’, Thesis (PhD), Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia, 2018.

<sup>60</sup> Littleton, *Enhance Learning in Parishes*, p. 13.

hallmark of a learning community approach. To respect learners, pedagogy (learning principles for children and younger people) and andragogy (learning principles for adults) are practised. There is equality of access to learning. All disciples, as learners, are equipped for ministry, learning to participate and contribute. Equality of discipleship is a characteristic in a learning community in a parish context.<sup>61</sup> Equality of discipleship suggests that the word 'lay' is no longer suitable as it suggests an inequality of discipleship.

A new enthusiasm for mission entered the life of the Australian churches later in the second half of the twentieth century and onwards under the heading 'Mission-Shaped Church'. The church is to be Mission-Shaped; an active participant in God's mission, the '*missio dei*'.<sup>62</sup>

Disciples participate in God's mission activity through Jesus Christ. The church has the task in mission of 'finding out where the Holy Spirit is at work and joining in'<sup>63</sup> The task is to be 'God and world focused' rather than only 'church and task focused', wrote Rosemary Dewerse. A common saying about mission: '[i]t's not that the church of God has a mission but that the God of mission has a church'.<sup>64</sup>

The discipleship ministry of everyday disciples in the world is part of this environment of discovering what God is up to and joining in. All disciples participate in *mission dei*, so the separate negative description of the 'lay' person becomes redundant.

Cowdell, writing as a parish priest and an Australian Anglican academic theologian, made a compelling case of locating lay ministry primarily in the secular world of work. In writing about the 'emerging church' he dealt with among other things the potential of many more laity living faithful lives of service aware of God's presence in the world.

He wrote that too often lay ministry is seen as activity only within the Church context. 'Sadly, in this era we tend not to think of lay people having ministries in their workplace, home, family, club and community, even though the laity are sent from the Church to those places week in, week out to 'love and serve the Lord'.<sup>65</sup> Lay ministry is in the real world where 'God builds up the world through the work and life of ordinary people' who go about

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<sup>61</sup> Littleton, *The People of God*, p.13.

<sup>62</sup> Alan Nichols ed., *Building The Mission-Shaped Church in Australia* (Sydney, Australia: Anglican General Synod Office, 2006), p.1.

<sup>63</sup> Kirsteen Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission* (London: Epworth Press, 2009), p.1.

<sup>64</sup> Rosemary Dewerse, 'An Ongoing Journey', *Australian Leadership* (Unley, Adelaide, SA: MediaCom Education Inc., November/December/January, 2012-2013), pp. 12-13.

<sup>65</sup> Cowdell, *God's Next Big Thing*, p. 162.

their life as ‘a humanising presence’, recognising that what they do ‘Monday to Friday’ is lay ministry.<sup>66</sup>

Cowdell wrote that ‘lay people already preside. But they preside at the altar of the world, not the altar of the Church. The laity are the royal priesthood God ordains at baptism to bring Christ to the world’.<sup>67</sup> In Cowdell’s words the ‘lay’ are a ‘royal priesthood God ordains at baptism’. The definition of ‘lay’ as not ordained is thus inappropriate.

The concluding four lines of 2020 *Kingdom Calling* Report summarise the essential message. ‘Every calling in Christ, then, is a calling towards the kingdom. It is also a calling of the kingdom: God’s reign is itself an invitation, an opening. In order to receive it, we need to lift up our eyes to see how far it extends, and the space it provides for the vocation, ministry and discipleship of the whole people of God’.<sup>68</sup>

This holistic Report sees the church serving as sign and instrument of the kingdom through the daily lives of all its members, in their living out of social and relational vocations in their life circumstances as well as through ministerial vocations of the clergy. ‘The church is located in every situation where the followers of Christ are acting in ways that point towards the kingdom and make space for it to touch and shape human lives.’<sup>69</sup>

The centrality of baptism for the theology of calling and vocation is affirmed in the Report. The participation of all the baptized in the ministry of Christ, their different roles and responsibilities in the church as ministries are affirmed. ‘For everybody, bishops, priests, and laity together, the great sacrament of our common calling is our baptism, which signifies our glorious new life in Christ’.<sup>70</sup>

The Report recognizes the variety of ministries each is called to exercise – social, relational, and ministerial – and celebrates ‘the richness of these without creating a hierarchy.

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<sup>66</sup> Cowdell, *God’s Next Big Thing*, pp. 163-165.

<sup>67</sup> Cowdell, *God’s Next Big Thing*, p. 168.

<sup>68</sup> *Kingdom Calling*, p. 92.

<sup>69</sup> *Kingdom Calling*, p. 90.

<sup>70</sup> *Kingdom Calling*, p. 33.



Ministry is about our life and witness in every aspect of our daily life – not just the things we do in church.’<sup>71</sup>

Equipping people for their discipleship in daily life through a far greater focus on Christian formation is recommended in the Report. ‘This will include learning to follow patterns of life and discipline including prayer, Bible reading and daily reflection’. At the heart of all this is our relationship with Christ’.<sup>72</sup>

The Church of England ‘Everyday Faith’ website provides easily usable digital resources for the ministry discipleship of all the followers of Jesus the Christ.<sup>73</sup> 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, is a follow-up document to *Kingdom Calling*. ‘God’s People Set Free’ document affirmed ‘on the basis of baptism 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’.<sup>74</sup>

The *Kingdom Calling* report has similar theme to Kraemer in his book *A Theology of the Laity*. Each is a publication of its time and place, each holistic with a starting point of looking at the whole People of God, the vocation and ministry of all members. The sacrament of their common calling is baptism.

## **Anglican Ecclesiology**

The term ‘lay discipleship’ is a non sequitur? It is not logical to place the words ‘lay’ and ‘disciple’ together.

A viewpoint to discuss through dialogue within Anglican church life is that everyday disciples and parish leader disciples are ordained and qualified, and so can no longer be described as ‘lay’. They are ordained through baptism, commissioned from the eucharist and qualified through their Christian faith, abilities, and skills. Baptism is considered as incorporation and ordination of all the People of God, who are commissioned to a ministry of

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<sup>71</sup> Kingdom Calling, p. 93.

<sup>72</sup> Kingdom Calling, p. 94.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Everyday Faith’ <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/everyday-faith> Accessed May 17, 2022.

<sup>74</sup> ‘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 2248, November 2021), p. 3.

service in church and society, set apart as the Church is set apart.<sup>75</sup> The bishop ordains those disciples who are called to a subsequent special ordination.

Paul Avis explained that Anglican Ecclesiology holds the sacraments of baptism and eucharist together. He wrote ‘Baptism is the sacrament of membership of the body of Christ...the foundational act of Christian initiation which is consummated in the Eucharist.’<sup>76</sup> ‘Baptism unites the believer with Christ. It is, therefore, the foundation of the Christian life and the Christian ministry’.<sup>77</sup> Baptism ‘incorporates us into his divinely appointed body, the Church, and we participate in his threefold messianic office as prophet, priest and king. Baptism therefore makes all Christians into a holy, royal priesthood’.<sup>78</sup>

Avis wrote ‘A baptismal ecclesiology is needed alongside a eucharistic ecclesiology because baptism and Eucharist are the two foundational and generative moments in the Church’s life’. ‘They need to be brought together in an ecclesiology that reflects and embodies the unified totality of Christian initiation that begins in baptism and is completed in the Eucharist.’<sup>79</sup> Avis’s writing recalls the earlier discussion about baptismal ordination.

In sacrament of baptism a person turns to Christ and becomes a disciple. During the sacrament of Holy Communion/Eucharist disciples receive God’s gifts of bread and wine as effective signs of the reality of Christ’s living and real presence. Christ offers himself to the church, the People of God, to nourish and strengthen them for ministry. A priest presides at the parish Eucharist. From there, through the act of dedication of offering to serve God, and the dismissal, all disciples are sent, commissioned to ‘go in peace to love and serve the Lord in the name of Christ’<sup>80</sup>; strengthened through Holy Communion to partake in a ministry of service.

Recognising that all disciples learn through the liturgy of the Eucharist enriches the equality in discipleship theme.

Provost H.C.N Williams, former Provost of Coventry Cathedral, England, wisely said that we need to ‘actualise’ in our lives what we ‘ritualise’ at the altar during Eucharist.

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<sup>75</sup> Barot and Young, ‘Christ’s Ministry and the Ministry of the Church’, pp.16-20.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism: Essentials of Anglican Ecclesiology* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2007), p. 113.

<sup>77</sup> Paul Avis, *The Anglican Understanding of the Church: An Introduction* (London: SPCK 2000), p. 67.

<sup>78</sup> Avis, *The Anglican Understanding of the Church*, pp. 73-74; The ‘priesthood of all the baptized’ is also discussed in ‘Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches: Dialogue of the Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches in South Australia’ (Adelaide: 2008-2010), p. 9-10; Paul Lakeland, *The Liberation of the Laity: In Search of an Accountable Church* (London, New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc. 2003), pp. 90-91, 285. ‘Baptismal priesthood’ referenced, Anthony M. Maher, ‘Theology and The People of God’ in Anthony M. Maher (ed) *Theology And The People of God: So We Pray, So We Believe, So We Live* (Strathfield, NSW, Australia: St Pauls Publications, 2021), p. 58.

<sup>79</sup> Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism*, p. 103-104, 116; Gerard Kelly, ‘The Sacraments: Signs of Salvation’ in Maher, *Theology and the People of God*, p. 291.

<sup>80</sup> *A Prayer Book for Australia: The Anglican Church of Australia* (Alexandria, NSW: Broughton Books, 1995), p.144.

During an address on the theme of Reconciliation in 1978 he said, ‘The true picture of humanity at ease before God is that constantly presented to us at the Eucharist. When we kneel at the altar rail, we are ritually ‘at one’ with one another, and at one, in our acknowledged need of what God can give us... When we kneel there it simply does not matter who is kneeling beside us – black or white, old or young, rich or poor, male or female. We are equal one with another, equal before God’.<sup>81</sup> Disciples need to live that equality out in daily life.

Charles Sherlock outlined the shape of God’s mission in liturgy as used in the second order of Holy Communion in *A Prayer Book for Australia*, the Anglican Church of Australia. He wrote about the shape of the liturgy: **gather, listen, pray, ‘do this** for my remembrance’ and be commissioned to **go out** into the world.<sup>82</sup>

All disciples are equal before God in the Holy Communion and learn together through the liturgy the shape of God’s mission in Jesus Christ; a mission in which they all participate. When we receive Holy Communion, it does not matter who is next to us – lay or clergy. The concept of ‘lay’ is not needed in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Anglican ecclesial vocabulary except as interesting historical information which belongs to another age, to a Christendom era.

## Discussion

The discussion brings the narrative to the actuating dimension, which expresses in action the outcomes from reflection in the previous dimensions.

One of the questions in the Saturday *Adelaide Advertiser* Newspaper Cross Quiz, 22/1/2022 provided up to date evidence of the negative definition of the laity.<sup>83</sup> Question: ‘What is a male member of a church who is not a member of the clergy?’ Answer: ‘Layman’. In 1993 Marlin VanElderen wrote: ‘In reflecting on the laity, a layperson at least is tempted to adapt a remark attributed to Abraham Lincoln: the Lord must prefer them; that is why he made so many of them’.<sup>84</sup> Millions of lay people do indeed deserve a positive definition of their calling and status.

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<sup>81</sup> H.C.N. Williams, ‘Reconciliation: 2 Corinthians 5.18-20’ (Coventry, UK: Address 1978). Taken from the author’s notes written from a printed copy of the address lent by Provost Williams when the author was on a short-term relator course at Coventry Cathedral June 1978.

<sup>82</sup> Charles Sherlock, *Australian Anglicans Worship Performing APBA* (Victoria, Australia: Broughton Publishing, 2020), pp. 39-40.

<sup>83</sup> Crossquiz, *Adelaide Advertiser* Newspaper, January 22, 2022, p. 52.

<sup>84</sup> Raiser, ‘Laity in the Ecumenical Movement’, p. 373.

Stories heard about clergy expressing superiority over lay people provide some anecdotal evidence for the need to call out and overcome inequality of discipleship in parishes. A mature disciple lives, works and ministers but still comments that he/she is only a lay person. Others are not concerned about the lay concept because in their ministry they are affirmed and experience equality in discipleship.

The discipleship ministry of most of the church membership should be defined positively, by what it is, rather than by what it is not. The 1958 Lambeth Conference stated that ‘Ministry and laity are one. There may be a difference in function but there is no difference in essence’.<sup>85</sup>

The word ‘disciple’ affirms individuals and expresses a positive attitude; avoids negativity, low self-esteem, and counters clericalism. The greatest honour is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ; a follower of Jesus, his teachings and way, which involves lifelong learning in the knowledge, understanding and practice of ministry in the Christian faith through Jesus the Christ.

However, using the word ‘disciple’ in this context has strengths and weaknesses. Some church members do not like using the word. Roger Walton wrote that it is ‘not their preferred description of their Christian faith’.<sup>86</sup> Others suggest that the word ‘lay’ be redeemed and retained rather than discarded. A number may not see themselves as disciples because they associate the term with the New Testament. ‘The first disciples, later ‘apostles’, were special and their calling different in kind from the faith to which contemporary Christians are called’ Walton wrote.<sup>87</sup> A strength is that the words discipleship, disciple and discipling are used across the networks of the world-wide Anglican Communion. The biblical term disciple also resonates with the interest in lifelong learning. It will gradually replace the word ‘lay’ and enter into ecclesial vocabulary once it is explained and used.

The paper invites Church members to consider moving from negative ‘lay’ language towards learning to use the positive ‘disciple’ language. The Catechism in *A New Zealand (Anglican) Prayer Book* 1989 describes the ministers of the Church as ‘lay persons, deacons, priests, bishops; all the baptised’.<sup>88</sup> This paper describes the ministers of the Church without

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<sup>85</sup> Lambeth Conference 1958, *The Encyclical Letter from the Bishops together with the Resolutions and Reports* (London: SPCK/New York: Seabury Press, 1958), p. 113.

<sup>86</sup> Roger L. Walton, ‘Ordinary Discipleship’, in Jeff Astley and Leslie Francis eds. *Exploring Ordinary Theology* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), p. 179.

<sup>87</sup> Walton, ‘Ordinary Discipleship’, p. 179.

<sup>88</sup> *A New Zealand Prayer Book* (Auckland, The Church of the Province of New Zealand: William Collins Publishers, 1989), p. 931.

using the word 'lay'. The ministers of the Church are 'everyday disciples, parish leader disciples, deacon disciples, priest disciples, and bishop disciples; all the baptised'.

**Criteria for understanding the ministry discipleship of everyday disciples and local leader disciples.**

The following characteristics derive from the viewpoints and literature presented in this paper,<sup>89</sup> and the conviction that discipleship and ministry are to be based on an understanding of the church as the People of God.

These characteristics serve as criteria by which to define the significant ministry discipleship of everyday and parish leader disciples in their own right:

A common calling by God in Christ invites all disciples to be the People of God.

The People of God, the whole Church, participate in the *mission dei*.

The whole Church is set apart for God's purposes through Jesus Christ.

God is concerned about the whole world, the human, and the natural world.

All disciples, the whole Church is mission; the whole Church is ministry; the whole Church is *diakonia*.

Disciples rely on God's grace and serve others with their gifts and abilities.

An equality of discipleship exists through baptism into Christ.

An equality of calling and ministry is practised; there being a variety of ministries.

Incorporation and ordination for all disciples occurs through baptism and their commissioning through the Eucharist/Holy Communion.

Disciples are qualified through their Christian faith, their knowledge, abilities, and skills.

Deacons, priests, and bishops are called to a subsequent special ordination.

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<sup>89</sup> Summary: The People of God, the whole Church, all disciples are set apart. God ordains all disciples through baptism as a holy and royal priesthood to bring Christ to the world. The whole Church is mission. The whole Church is ministry. The whole Church is *diakonia*. People are incorporated into the 'body of Christ' and ordained through baptism and commissioned through the Eucharist/Holy Communion to serve God in the name of Christ. Baptism is the incorporation and ordination of each Christian disciple. The totality of Christian initiation begins in baptism and is completed in the Eucharist. Equality in discipleship exists with a variety of different ministries and leadership. Some disciples are called to a subsequent special ordination to become deacons, priests, and bishops. Littleton, 'The People of God', p. 17.

God in Christ sets apart and ordains the whole Church, that is the whole People of God, all disciples, and the bishop ordains those disciples who are called and set apart for a subsequent special ordination as deacon and priest.

### **Definition proposed**

Considering these characteristics, the following positive definition is offered for discussion.

‘Everyday disciples and parish leader disciples are set apart, ordained, and commissioned, and are qualified through their Christian faith, knowledge, abilities, and skills’.

This positive definition has implications for Christian learning.

### **Christian learning: Implications**

The recovery of equity in discipleship participation enhances Christian learning by improving the self-esteem and confidence of disciples. The positive definition of everyday disciples and parish leader disciples helps people to feel good about themselves, interested, excited and keen to learn from Christ and so gradually become ‘competent and confident disciples of Christ’.<sup>90</sup> A new and different disposition is born, a positive set of attitudes motivate.

Even though disciples may be at different stages, ages, and backgrounds the learning environment for this new disposition becomes more like the early church communities, more like *ekklesia*, *diakonia* and *metanoia*, before the lay concept was introduced and before reference was made to clergy and laity. In such a community today Christian education (learning and teaching) is ‘essential’. The role of the disciple with a subsequent special ordination by a bishop is to serve the whole learning community of disciples as an enabler and facilitator who is a leading member of the People of God and part of the learning and teaching team; leaders who are willing to encourage and enable all disciples, as The Anglican Ordinal states, ‘to fulfil their ministry and mission in the world’.<sup>91</sup> At times the minister may hand over leadership to others in the team.

In the era of the ‘lay’ concept Christian education was ‘necessary’ to ensure that members of the Anglican Church knew the basic knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith. They needed to be educated, as in important annual Lenten Studies.

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<sup>90</sup> The President of Synod 2021 Pastoral Address, p. 10.

<sup>91</sup> *A Prayer Book for Australia*, p. 785.

Generally, clergy decided the Christian education programme for a parish, possibly sometimes in consultation with the parish council. Such learning topics are described as prescribed. Occasionally a parish might undertake a needs assessment activity to discover the ascertained learning needs and interests of all disciples.<sup>92</sup>

John Hull drew attention to factors which hinder or harm Christian learning. In his work *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* Hull discussed some aspects of Christian belief and educational practice which had ‘a retarding effect upon adult religious learning’.<sup>93</sup> He presented the view (in 1985 but still informative in 2022) that the authoritative, hierarchical, high status and instructional role of the official teaching role in the church made ‘adult learning all the more difficult’. The teaching role in the church must enable learning and facilitate the growth of adults rather than control it; must consider the ordinary learner as an enquirer rather than a recipient in a passive role and ‘inferior to that of the teacher’.<sup>94</sup>

In the manner of Hull, the author observes that the lay concept may also be a factor which hinders Christian learning in adults. Inequality of discipleship creates an environment where church members, except for the very keen individuals and groups, feel less worthy as a lay person, let others decide the learning requirements, rely heavily on the clergy, and participate. The word ‘lay’ hinders learning by suggesting that ‘lay’ is second best, not clergy, not ordained and not qualified! A research project might be needed to further explore this observation.

In this era of a new disposition, where all disciples are learners and ministers, Christian Education is ‘essential’. In the People of God there are ‘as many ministers as members.’<sup>95</sup> Learning is essential for all ministers as their significant ministry continues. Reflective practice motivates learning. Intentional discipleship ministry and leadership in a learning

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<sup>92</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney eds. *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, USA: Abingdon Press, 1998), pp.196-252; John Emmett, *Minister as Educator: Exploring Aspects of the Educational Role of Ordained Ministers A Workbook* (Collingwood, Victoria: Uniting Education, 2002), pp. 50-53; John Littleton, ‘A Learning Community Focus for Christian Education,’ *Religious Education* 103. 5 (2008), pp. 568-578; Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, Sixth edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2007). Research Methods like: Observation, Interviewing, Focus Groups, Questionnaires and Surveys, Data from National Church Life Surveys, Action Research.

<sup>93</sup> John M. Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* (London: SCM Press, 1985), p.201.

<sup>94</sup> Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?*, pp.202-211.

<sup>95</sup> Andrew Dutney, *Angels in this Wilderness: Reflections on the Journey of the Uniting Church in Australia* (Unley, Adelaide; MediaCom Educations Inc, 2020), pp.35-37.

community parish enhances Christian learning.<sup>96</sup> Growth in ministry progresses at the best pace and by the appropriate learning methods for each person.

Christian educators understand that education is an important component in every aspect of a congregation's life.<sup>97</sup> John Westerhoff, for example, wrote 'The whole life of a congregation offers times and places in which Christian learning may occur'.<sup>98</sup> 'Catechesis is an aspect of every activity within the church'. In the same way the vocation and activities of everyday disciples and parish leader disciples provide opportunities for learning. Education, with a balance between ascertained and ascribed learning needs, is an essential and inherent component in discipleship ministry.

For everyday disciples and parish leader disciples the essential educational component suggested may consist of at least three aspects: core faith, skills, and ethics.

1. Core faith is described as the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith in Jesus Christ. Disciples would be biblically literate, theologically reflective, ethically intelligent and members of a worshipping community. Essential learning happens through Christian practices: prayer, Bible reading and study, worship, helping the needy, care of creation, pastoral care, leadership, hospitality. Essential learning for disciples called to a subsequent ordination is, for example, outlined in an Adelaide Diocesan Booklet 'Intentional Ministry Discernment Guide'.<sup>99</sup>

In the light of baptismal ordination and the eucharistic commissioning attention may be given to the Orders of Service for those sacraments and the Confirmation Service. A review of the Service for adult baptism may be needed.

2. Skills in the life contexts of disciples apply to ministry as well as to growth in theological reflection and spirituality 'in the same serious way in which they continually develop their secular expertise and skills'.<sup>100</sup> A Rule of Life like *The Common Discipline* of Coventry

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<sup>96</sup> Littleton, *Enhanced Faith Learning in Parishes*, pp. 123, 132-134; John Littleton, 'Enhanced learning in the parish context: a learning community approach', *Practical Theology* 11, 4 (2018), pp. 9-10.

<sup>97</sup> John Littleton, *A Handbook on Leading Learning in Congregations: A Christian Learning Community Perspective Leadership audit included* (Unley, South Australia: MediaCom Education Inc., 2010), pp. 22-25.

<sup>98</sup> John Westerhoff, III, *Inner Growth Outer Change: An Educational Guide to Church Renewal* (East Malvern, Victoria, Australia: Dove Communications, 1979), p. 58.

<sup>99</sup> Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville, Kentucky, USA: Geneva Press, 1999); Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville, USA: Abingdon Press, 2007); *Intentional Ministry Discernment Guide* (Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, May 2002), p.11.

<sup>100</sup> Mark Gibbs, *Christians with Secular Power* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 33.



Cathedral <sup>101</sup> helps a disciple live a balanced life. Study and discussion of Gibbs and Morton's recommended five ways that a person could exercise discipleship at work may assist: <sup>102</sup> serve your neighbours, the people you work with; serve your customer; serve the organization you work with; serve the community where you work and where you live; serve your calling – be the best teacher, mechanic, nurse, builder, Mayor, receptionist, plumber, volunteer, labourer, banker, IT specialist, CEO, journalist, parent... These disciples work with many others in society on issues facing humanity. <sup>103</sup> Respectful conversations about recognising where the Gospel values are being expressed in society might be included. <sup>104</sup>

3. Respectful conversations about ethics and ethical choices could support disciples in their daily decision-making. Discipleship involves keeping abreast of moral issues in society.

For example, in *Morality Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times* <sup>105</sup> Jonathan Sacks is an ethically intelligent and wise guide. The central theme of his book is that 'we have had for some time now too much 'I', too little 'We'; too much pursuit of self, too little commitment to the common good'. <sup>106</sup> Applied to our post-Covid future this means that we need to be guided by a sense of 'We are all in this together' rather than 'What is in it for me?', and to 'enhance the structures of our togetherness, a togetherness that had been weakened by too much pursuit of self'. <sup>107</sup> Sacks focusses on a morality which recognises a commitment to the common good, a love of neighbour, the stranger, the poor and needy; where there is 'a concern for the welfare of others, an active commitment to justice and compassion, a willingness to ask not just what is good for me but what is good for all-of-us-together'. <sup>108</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> H.C.N. Williams, *Basics and Variables: The future of the Church in the modern world* (Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press, 1970), pp. 108-123.

<sup>102</sup> Mark Gibbs and Ralph Morton, *God's Frozen People: A Book for – and about – Ordinary Christians* (London: Fontana Books, 3<sup>rd</sup> impression, 1964), pp. 9-15.

<sup>103</sup> Littleton, *The People of God*, p. 15; Collins, *Recovering The 'True Church'*, pp. 84-91; Maher, *Theology And The People of God*, pp. 29, 40, 396.

<sup>104</sup> Keith Rayner, 'Reflection on the Theology of Ordained Ministry in Secular Employment', in James M.M. Francis and Leslie J. Francis (eds.) *Tentmaking: Perspectives on Self-Supporting Ministry* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998), pp.287-295; H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1956); Maher, 'Pastoral-Practical Theology: A Theology of Hope' in *Theology And The People of God*, pp. 383-396.

<sup>105</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2021).

<sup>106</sup> Sacks, *Morality*, p. 337.

<sup>107</sup> Sacks, *Morality*, pp. 338, 341.

<sup>108</sup> Sacks, *Morality*, pp. xi, 1, 20-21, 310, 322-323; Luke Holohan, 'Christian Ethics' in Maher, *Theology and the People of God*, pp.307-322.

Disciples with a new disposition reimagine theology. All disciples are theologians. In theological education a distinction is made between academic theology, as practised in the academy, and ordinary theology of the majority membership of the church. Jeff Astley used the term ‘ordinary theology’ to describe ‘the articulation of ordinary people’s religious understanding’. His research interest was in the God-talk of people who have not formally studied theology but who speak and think about God. Astley affirmed the importance of the theology of all church members.<sup>109</sup>

Let us name theology by what it is rather than by what it is not (not academic) and recognise that all Christian disciples and ministers are theologians and involved in ‘a process of thinking about life in the light of the faith that Christians engage in because of their calling’.<sup>110</sup>

Disciples with the new disposition recognise holistic consultation so that all disciples are involved in discussion and decision-making. A great deal of consultation is a consequence of baptismal ordination and eucharistic commissioning of everyday and parish leader disciples. Leading learning in congregations involves conference as well as developing a learning community focus for Christian education.<sup>111</sup> Leaders habitually consult all the members of the congregation often. When the author was farewelled on retirement as parish priest, a former warden mentioned that, in guiding the parish community through many changes, the author had shown great sensitivity and an innate reliance on consensus. The warden noted that this reliance on consensus was a great characteristic to have when change is needed; ‘gentle but persistent consensus –canvassing all views and encompassing all emotions’.<sup>112</sup>

These ways of redefining and reimaging the discipleship ministry of most members of the Church bring the narrative of the paper into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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<sup>109</sup> Astley, *Ordinary Theology*, pp. 1, 56, 86, 157, 163; Astley and Francis. *Exploring Ordinary Theology*, pp. 1-2; Maher, *Theology And The People of God*, pp. 43-44, 51, 64-66.

<sup>110</sup> Howard W. Stone & James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis, USA: Fortress Press, 2006 Second Edition), pp. 1-4; Astley, *Ordinary Theology*, pp.162-163.

<sup>111</sup> Littleton, ‘A Learning Community Focus for Christian Education’, p. 568.

<sup>112</sup> Littleton, *A Handbook on Leading Learning in Congregations*, p. 22.

## Conclusion

A new mindset may let go of the 'lay' concept. The author proposes that the negative definition of lay be replaced by a positive definition of ministry discipleship by everyday disciples and parish leader disciples. The paper invites church members to consider putting aside the negative 'lay' language and instead learn to use the positive 'disciple' language. In other words, ponder the question: How do we in the Anglican Church recognise, value, and name the ordained and qualified status of ninety-nine percent of disciples in the People of God?

Everyday disciples and parish leader disciples can and deserve to be described by what they are rather than by what they are not, not clergy, not ordained, not qualified. As Weber wrote 'Who wants to be an "is not"?'.<sup>113</sup>

Everyday disciples and parish leader disciples are ordained, commissioned, and qualified to serve Christ in their own right. They are baptised persons and participants in the Holy Communion/Eucharist and sent to go 'in peace to love and serve the Lord in the name of Christ'.<sup>114</sup> Such positive language helps to improve self-worth and confidence, generates enthusiasm, and enhances Christian learning. It honours the discipleship ministry responsibilities of the majority of the members of the People of God as they serve in the name of Christ.

John Littleton 10/8/2022.

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<sup>113</sup> Weber, 'A Living Church', pp. 44-45. Also see Footnotes 5 and 40.

<sup>114</sup> *A Prayer Book for Australia*, p. 144.