

# **Learning from Christ (How do we (be)come Christian?): Process is as Important as Content.**

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## **Abstract**

Learning from Christ is the theme. Interest in a learning community focus for Christian education in parishes increased in recent years. Christian education involves processes whereby people become and continue as disciples of Jesus the Christ. Learning community processes within a parish context have a key role in growing disciples. "How do we become and continue to be Christian within a faith community?" is the question explored. The paper describes ways in which learning community processes currently contribute to the theme of learning from Christ and ways in which learning from Christ was nurtured by a learning community perspective in the first four centuries of the early church. A focus on learning through attention to process as much as content in a learning community context provides one answer to the question about how we keep on learning from Christ in contemporary society.

Keywords: Christian education; congregation; becoming Christian; learning community; learning processes.

## **Introduction**

For many years I thought that an adequate parish vision would read: "We aim to be a worshipping, caring, learning and serving Christian community" (Glen Osmond 2018). Those words, derived from a first century church account of activities undertaken by believers (Acts 2: 42-47), describe the activities for an Anglican parish community today.

However, in recent years, my attention moved towards highlighting the word "learning" and emphasising the importance of viewing the parish as a "learning community". The word learning describes the inner core biblical activity in parish life, and informs the very important activities of worship, caring and serving. Learning from Christ is the most important activity. Disciples learn.

Disciples are disciplined and reflective learners as followers of Jesus Christ. The Gospels refer to the followers of Jesus as *disciples*, learners or apprentices growing in the Christian faith and life. Faith learning is a process of growing in the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith in and through Jesus Christ. By growth in faith learning, I mean the degree to which people report a change, that their knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith have grown or been enhanced (Littleton 2017, 49). They learn their way of being Christian and living in the Way and in the ways of Jesus the Christ (Seymour 2014).

*Christian education* has been generally defined as “The processes by which people learn to become Christian and to be more Christian” (Astley and Francis 1994, 3). Those processes are to have centre stage in church life. The ways and means by which human beings learn a Kingdom of God worldview in and through Jesus Christ are of paramount importance and have overriding priority in parish life. A worldview is defined “as a view of life, the world and humanity” (Van der Kooij, Ruyter and Miedema 2017, 172). The task is to help people become disciples of Jesus and grow into a kingdom worldview within a God inspired community, where “Christly gestures” are nurtured (Webb-Mitchell 2003).

Interest in a *learning community focus for Christian Education* emerged in recent decades (Hawkins 1997; Everist 2000; Fleischer 2004; Roberto 2010, 123-124; Groome 2011; Littleton 2008, 2017; Mitchell 2018, 62, 67). For the purpose of this paper, a learning community approach, 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 (Littleton 2017, 13-17).

*Holistic learning processes* are present where there is a shared vision of the whole parish, which combines the five parts of parish learning available in an Anglican parish structure: intentional individual learning, group learning, congregational learning, community engagement learning, and dialogical learning. *Collaborative learning processes* in parishes involve people in the sharing leadership in ministry and outreach responsibilities, when members work and learn together, enjoying and respecting the abilities and contributions of others in achieving a common task. *Theologically reflective learning processes* in parishes involve people in thinking and praying about their present life actions in the light of the biblical story and traditions, and then moving forward, renewed for future action (Littleton 2018a, 3-4).

## **Perspectives**

The emphasis on learning and learning community processes in Christian congregations has been highlighted in a number of ways in recent times and in ancient times. In the manner of Francis Young the first four centuries of the early church are discussed (Young 1996).

### *Recent times*

Simon Loxley alerted me to the insight that the core business of the church is learning when he wrote that learning is “of the essence of the Christian faith”... and that “It is possible to see the business of learning as that to which Christians are called” (Oxley 2002, 54, 69). Oxley also wanted churches to become learning communities (Oxley 2002, 44; Littleton 2018b).

Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop in the Episcopal Church USA, also placed a priority on learning. In June 2018, he invited the Episcopal Church into a new three-year initiative called *The Way of Love*, which focuses on seven practices for cultivating a Jesus-centred life. In order the seven Christian practices are: Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, and Rest. First, turn, pause, listen, and choose to follow Jesus.

Second, learn: “by reading and reflecting on Scripture each day, especially on Jesus’ life and teachings, we draw near to God and God’s word dwells in us” (Curry 2018). Details of all the seven practices are provided.

Recent research in Australian churches indicated that the use of learning community processes enabled *deep learning* in Anglican theological education (Saines 2009, 2015), *enhanced faith learning* in Anglican parishes (Littleton 2017) and grew *mission-shaped disciples* in Uniting Church congregations (Mitchell 2018).

Don Saines interviewed all six final year theological students on learning theology (Saines 2009 a,b). He concluded that the supportive and relational teaching environment of a learning community, including critical discussion and dialogue, was vital for deep learning to occur in theological education in the academy and the parish context. *Deep learning*, compared to surface learning of facts and information memorised, places an emphasis on understanding, finding meaning and personal transformation (Saines 2015, 306-307).

Findings from my research project conducted in the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, 2013-2014, demonstrated that a learning community approach *enhanced faith learning* in parishes. Research participants in parish learning community environments reported very much growth in their knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith when the learning community processes were intentionally used. Parish survey and focus group findings showed a spectrum of responses from across the 45 parishes surveyed. The general trend across the spectrum of parishes indicated that the greater the presence of the learning community processes in a parish, the greater the likelihood that much growth and enhancement in faith learning would be reported; and vice-versa (Littleton 2017,10-11,17-18; Littleton 2018a).

Craig Mitchell’s key research finding from interviewing leaders from 13 Uniting Church learning community congregations throughout Australia, was that “the intentional (re)forming of congregational Christian formation and education is core ecclesial practice for *growing mission-shaped disciples*. Christian education and Christian mission are seen as inter-related and interdependent”. Mitchell defined Christian education “as the theory and practice of teaching, learning and formation in life-long Christian faith and discipleship, both for individuals and communities of faith.” He showed “how congregations learn for, in and from their engagement in the mission of God” (Mitchell 2018, Abstract).

Disciples learn in various ways. The development of a learning community focus for Christian education also corresponded with a paradigm shift in *educational learning theory*, from an acquisition metaphor to a participation metaphor (Jonassen and Land 2012; Saines 2015). There was a fundamental move in learning theory from a traditional transmission of knowledge view to a more social and conversational understanding of learning; a culture of learning where everyone, individually and collectively, worked and interacted together in an ongoing manner to facilitate the learning process (Littleton 2017, 28-29). A learning community approach emphasises the learning theory participation metaphor.

At times, church leaders and membership have placed an emphasis on content to the detriment of learning processes; focused on content, telling and the transmission or acquisition of knowledge, rather than on listening, facilitating and using participatory learning processes. From a learning community perspective excellence in a parish or congregation is to be found in the learning processes as well as in the learning content (Littleton 2017, 17-18). *Process* is as important as *content* for disciples to learn. Isa Aron, writing from the Jewish tradition, stated that excellence in a congregation “resides not only in program but also in process” (Aron 2002, 2).

The work of Jeff Astley supports the contention that process has an essential and justified place in a learning community focus for Christian education. Learning involves a permanent change of attitude and behaviour in a person or a group of people. Astley used the term learning, not just as a topic learnt from teaching, but as a process (Littleton 2017, 50). Learning from Christ is influenced by the way it happens as much as by content learnt. Astley claimed “The product of learning is specific to the processes of learning, at least sometimes and to some extent.” He wrote “Christian learning is ‘learning the Christian Way’ along the (my) Christian way” (Astley 2002, 19-20).

By reference to Marshall McLuhan and his famous statement about the interaction between the medium and the message, Astley drew attention to the close relationship between “the medium (process) of communication and the material (product or message) being communicated” (Astley 2002,7). This understanding of the congruence between the process of learning and the content of learning is applicable when human beings are learning from Christ (Littleton 2017, 50).

A report on the use of the Bible in the life of the worldwide Anglican Communion was published in 2012. *The Bible in the Life of the Church* (BILC 2012) project began in 2009 and explored ways in which Anglicans engaged with and interpreted Scripture. The core message from the research included the statement:

A major finding of these investigations is that how Anglicans engage with the Bible turns out to be just as important as its content. This perhaps unnerving claim does not contest the unique place and authority which the scriptures have in Anglican life, but it does point out the significance, perhaps thus far overlooked, of the contexts in which and processes by which they are heard and read” (BILC 2012, 16).

Context and process are as important as content for disciples to learn from scripture (BILC 2012, 46-53, 178-183).

### *Discussion*

The paper explores the place of process and content when learning from Christ. From the perspective of a learning community focus for Christian Education, *learning processes* are as important as the *learning content*, in helping people become and continue to be disciples. As indicated previously, learning community processes - of holism, collaboration and theological reflection – when intentionally practised in parishes, enhance learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith. A learning community approach emphasises process.

It has special learning processes and ways of undertaking that learning on whatever topic, whatever the content (Littleton 2017, 17-18; Littleton 2018b, 106-108).

### *Ancient times*

#### *Jesus The Teacher*

The Gospel portrayals of Jesus as the Teacher are available for all to read. *Teacher* is one of the most frequently used titles to describe Jesus in the four Gospels (Stein 1994, 1). Jesus was a Jewish teacher/rabbi from a peasant background in Galilee during the earlier part of the first century, c 30-33 CE. Seeing Jesus the Teacher at work in the Gospels is indeed impressive (Littleton 2014).

A study of the Gospel accounts of Jesus the Teacher through the lens of a learning community perspective revealed, in contemporary terms, and albeit anachronistically, that Jesus was a facilitator of learning, one who used holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective learning processes (Littleton 2014, 2-12). Jesus was, in twenty-first century educational language, an inclusive teacher, relating to all kinds of people in a range of different venues and situations. He taught in collaborative ways, used interactive teaching style and facilitated learning for and from ministry practice. Jesus was a practitioner of theological reflection as illustrated in his many parables and elsewhere (Seymour 2014, 55-61, 141-143, 165; Littleton 2017, 9-10, 55-56).

Jesus told many parables. Robert Stein wrote “Scholars have frequently pointed out that this is the most characteristic element of his teaching, for not less than 35 percent of his teaching in the synoptic Gospels is found in parabolic form” (Stein 1994, 33). In using parables Jesus invited disciples and others to think about the story and the meaning for themselves. Douglas Oakman wrote that the “parables provide us with the most likely windows onto or insights into the intentions and interests of the historical Jesus” (Oakman 2012, 12, 20). Theological reflection was central in the ministry of Jesus, and a key learning process reported in the Gospels.

#### *First to Fourth Century Early Church*

In contrast to a study mainly on teaching content, such as a particular doctrine, Young explored educational processes of the early church: formation, personal growth and “corporate pilgrimage” (Young 1996, 229). She mentioned the processes used by New Testament Church during meetings in the synagogues and later in the household communities (Young 1996, 239). Evidence from the first century indicated that the early Christians used the existing systems of education and adapted classical educational processes to create a new approach based on the scriptures and the importance of the individual growing in Christ (Judge 1966, 32-44).

Early Christian leaders were aware of the educational approaches in the Jewish synagogues and continued similar approaches once they left the synagogue adapting them to the household assembly. The synagogue was an educational centre as well as a place of worship. It was a place for adult scriptural reading and exposition, a place for Jewish people to gather weekly and study the Law (Young 1996, 239; Knight 2008, 41). The synagogue worship service involved public prayer and the reading of the Torah and prophets, including the reading of the scriptures in a local language and

paraphrased in the spoken word (Chilton 2002, xx, 4-5, 101, 115). A sermon followed. Jesus gave a sermon on the Sabbath in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4, 16-21).

After leaving the synagogue the new Christian movement met in assembly, gathering together on the Sunday in homes where they were involved in the reading of scriptures and community correspondence, exposition, exhortation and teaching, prayer, sacred fellowship meals, baptisms, public policy debate as well as making major judicial decisions, approving appointments and installing officers (Acts 2, 42-47; Acts 18, 7-8; Burtchaell 1992, 287; Perkins 2012, 123-125). Children received the Christian education at home supported by the local activities and festivals. There was no suggestion that a separate Christian school system was needed (Barclay 1959, 11-48; Judge 1966, 33).

The life of the early church assembly was holistic and educative, inclusive of many learning processes.

### *Pauline communities*

The educative and learning community process emphasis is highlighted by the work of E.A. Judge and Claire Smith in their writing the first century Pauline communities. E.A. Judge used the term “*scholastic community*” to describe the educational activity of these churches (Judge 1960, 1960-1961, 8-9; Schloer 2008, 117-118). Smith examined the place and practice of educational activities in three early Christian communities portrayed in 1 Corinthians (c.56 CE), 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus (c.100 CE), using the vocabulary of ‘teaching’ as a window to the social worlds portrayed in the texts. She concluded that these communities could be best described as “*learning communities*” (Smith 2012, 1, 61). The adjective “learning” acknowledged that members of such communities learnt from God, the ultimate teacher from whom all learn (Smith 2012, 390-391, 393).

Smith’s study showed that all aspects of community life were shaped by educative activities. The communities were “unified and transformed by the gospel and the work of the Spirit” (Smith 2012, 385). The educational aspects were not only intellectual and rational, but also verbal, enacted, interpersonal interaction and reflection, and involved public Christian gatherings. Smith’s study showed that the educative activities were formal academic exercises but also involved worshipping, announcing, revealing, remembering and a central role for personal relationships and human interaction as well the experience that God was an essential participant in the educational environment of these faith communities in the first century (Smith 2012, 389-391).

In the concluding sentence of her book Smith wrote:

From a detailed study of literature created and used by early Christians, it has shown that early Christian communities portrayed in four letters of the NT might faithfully and productively be characterized as scholastic or learning communities (Smith 2012, 393).

In these early Christian communities the whole life of the congregation constituted the educational programme. The approach was holistic, reflective and concerned how best to help all participants become and continue to be Christian in their context. Learning from Christ was the central task; a kind of adult education; “the individual’s growth towards a full development “in Christ” ” (Judge 1966, 35, 41).

### *The Gospels*

The educative and learning community process emphasis was evident through the Gospel portrayals of Jesus as the Teacher and in the Gospel faith communities.

A main challenge for the leadership and members in the different Gospel communities was to help people learn to become Christian disciples and continue to be disciples in a community of faith within their contemporary society. Educative activities were central to the life of the early Christian communities of the Jesus movement; along with worship, caring and serving. The process is well described by using Thomas Groome’s words: informing, forming and transforming (Groome 2011, 94). Becoming a disciple involved information, formation and transformation.

Theological reflective processes were evident in the life of the early church faith communities. The early church followed the example of Jesus in practising theological reflection.

The Gospels went through three stages in the process of their formation. Throughout those stages a reflective disposition was evident. Following on from the ministry of Jesus, and the oral preaching and teaching about Jesus by the early church leaders in their communities and circumstances, the third stage happened when the need for a written record of the story of Jesus was recognized. The Jesus tradition was adapted, after reflection, for the circumstances and membership of the faith communities involved. As Michael Trainor indicated each of the Gospels was written: “*from* a unique faith perspective about Jesus; *for* a specific community; *with* a particular historical and cultural situation in mind” (Trainor 1995, 21).

The theologically reflective learning processes used in the Gospels according to Matthew and Luke provide examples.

### *Theological reflection in the Gospel according to Matthew (Written c. 85 CE)*

The Matthean community consisted predominately of people with Jewish background. The community continued to reverence the Jewish law, interpreting it in the light of Jesus’ teaching. Jesus was seen as Teacher of Israel and was presented throughout the Gospel as a great teacher, like Moses. Matthew reshaped the material to “redefine Judaism in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus” (Trainor 1992b, 9; Perkins 2012, 190). Matthew the teacher taught the reader/listener about Jesus whose teachings were relevant to their circumstances.

John Falcone provided a realistic and contextualized way of describing theological reflection when he used the term “reworking the text”. Through his analysis of the Gospel according to Matthew, Falcone argued, that Matthew reworked scriptural texts just as Jesus reworked the Old Testament biblical texts in his local context. Falcone

wrote “Jesus calls his disciples to rework and re-purpose scriptural texts, and the Gospel writer, Matthew has put these instructions into practice in the text” (Falcone 2016, 1, 12, 15). As portrayed in the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus reflected theologically and invited his disciples to rework the biblical texts in their local context and time.

### *Theological reflection in the Gospel according to Luke (Written c. 85 CE)*

This gospel was written for Luke’s Christian community, which existed two generations after the original ministry of Jesus and consisted of people and issues not even dreamed about by Jesus and the first generation disciples. Luke took the traditions about Jesus and “reshaped (them) in the light of the present needs of the community” (Trainor 1991, 3; Trainor 2012, 40, 55; Perkins 2012, 213). A great diversity of people belonged to Luke’s community, people who were Gentile and represented the wealthy elites as well as the urban workers and the rural peasants. All walks of life worshipped together and this raised new issues to be considered in the light of the Jesus tradition. Men and women from all social categories were called to discipleship (Trainor 2012, 26-39).

An outline of theological reflection in the Lukan community is illustrated in Trainor’s work. In writing on the Gospel according to Luke and the book of Acts, Trainor focused on the faith education method of theological reflection, as articulated in Luke 1:1-4 for example. These verses placed Luke within “the classical mould of a Hellenistic writer or historian” (Trainor 1992a, 19-35). Trainor outlined, in contemporary terms, and “albeit anachronistically”, the main features of Luke’s theological reflection process in four dimensions: “the situating, remembering, transforming and actuating dimensions” (Trainor 1992a, 94-95). These dimensions “form the heart of a contemporary educational or theological praxis drawn out of a first century Christian community” (Trainor 1992a, 94).

Trainor commented on the significance of the work of Luke in following the example of Jesus by dealing with pressing pastoral situations.

Jesus brought God's word-deed to bear upon life's realities. Jesus was presented as the great teacher par excellence who, in his own prophetic ministry, reinterpreted the Tradition (from the Jewish Scriptures) to highlight the action of a faithful God. Like Jesus, Luke too, sought an interpretation of the Jewish and Christian heritage that would better respond to the questions facing the community.

Trainor wrote “...like Luke, we need to discern what God has done in the past, to see how this has been remembered in our Tradition and to understand what it means in the light of the present” (Trainor 1992a, 88).

In this brief account, ways that first century churches balanced process with content through reflection have been outlined.

### *The catechumenate in the early church*

An educative and learning process emphasis is further highlighted when we explore the development of the *catechumenate in the early church* during the second to fourth centuries. Francis Young concluded that in the first four centuries the church was,



albeit anachronistically, a learning community. Young's work provided a general overview of the Church's adaptation of the classical notion of *paideia* (education) as a full rounded individual and community educational learning process based on scripture, liturgy and leading towards character formation in Christ. Her thesis was that "The church was a lifelong, 'comprehensive', learning community" (Young 1996, 230, 237, 240).

From those centuries we have a variety of examples of the catechumenate to study. Origen of Alexandria, 185-253 CE, drawing on contemporary methods of literary interpretation, outlined three reflective educational processes in the understanding of scripture, which could relate to learning differences in catechumens. Origen invited catechumens to reflect theologically on scripture, moving from content and contextual learning towards deep behavioural learning in Christ (Young 1996, 234-237). Methodius, Bishop of Lycia, explored of the *Mater Ecclesia* image in his work *The Symposium*, written c. 270-290 CE. Methodius wrote *The Symposium*, a treatise on the perfect practice of Christian virtue, in the style of a dialogue, like Plato (Musurillo 1958, 3-5, 10-11).

The lectures by Cyril of Jerusalem, 313-386 CE, (Young 1996, 230-234) aimed to instruct the catechumen (catechumen meant someone under instruction) not only in correct doctrine, but also with the intention of transforming the whole person; character formation based on scripture in the context of "Christ's School" the church, where the issues and ethics of life were discussed and debated. The travel records of the Blessed nun, Egeria to Jerusalem, 381-384 CE, provided evidence of the teaching content, the catechumenal processes and the catechetics used in the Jerusalem Christian community during the Lent to Easter period then. (Wilkinson 1971).

In working through the periods of the catechumenal process Augustine of Hippo, 354-430 CE, showed considerable regard for learning content and learning process. Through his use of sermon, scripture, liturgy, polemics, letters and the use of metaphor, storytelling and explanations, Augustine showed that he was a practising catechist, aware of the life and needs of catechumenal candidates, educated and uneducated. Harmless wrote that Augustine simply "reminds us that Christian initiation is ultimately an apprenticeship in the love of God and the love of neighbour" (Harmless 1995, 79-381).

The image of *Mater Ecclesia* was described in the work of Methodius. Reflection on the image of motherhood led educators to use nurturing and caring educational behaviours to help the congregation form new Christians (Musurillo 1958, 65-67, 111-116; Cranswick 1976, 63-64, 223).

In his research Jim Cranswick detected a community "structure for the welcoming and testing of converts, a period of probation with teaching, followed by a secondary inquiry and immediate period of preparation for the *Baptisma*". *Baptisma* included what we mean by baptism, confirmation and first communion performed in one liturgy (Cranswick 1976, 1, 154). Through the catechumenal stages of development the chief role of the Christian community was to be "reproductive" or to be continuously making Christians. A certain proportion of the community, after a period of formation, became sponsors and took responsibility for the catechumens, journeying with them, joining together in a learning situation; a kind of ongoing

catechesis as the catechumen learnt and lived the characteristics of the new baptismal way of life in Christ (Cranswick 1976, 90-93, 225).

The individual Christian life and the community life of the congregation provided an *attracting influence* in the society of the time. Hence there was a need for congregations to have a means by which to form and nurture new Christians in that *missionary context* (Cranswick 1976, 226-227). The Church was counter-cultural in that it offered a worldview and community life very different from the dominant worldview and social/cultural perspectives then. People entering into the life of the Christian church from a different worldview were given a chance to turn towards and learn a new way of living life in Christ through undertaking the stages of the catechumenate within an active faith community.

John Elias, in summary, described the processes used in the catechumenate:

All in all, the catechumenate included the various components of education developed up to the time: community or fellowship to support learning, proclamation of the word of God, learning by active participation in the liturgy, and educative witness of a serving community. Since all members of the community participated in the initiation of new members, this form of liturgy and education became a way in which all members continued their education in the faith (Elias 2002, 23).

### *Discussion*

The early church, through the examples mentioned, showed a strong emphasis on education and formation for individuals, groups and congregations, used collaboration, revealed a capacity for theological reflection and a concern for mission. It maintained a balance between scriptural content and learning process. Through the use of such processes, the early church could be described, albeit anachronistically, as a community of learners (Littleton 2017, 17-18); or as Young concluded, a learning community.

The catechumenate, in the ancient practice of the church, was recognized and restored by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) in the Roman Catholic Church, and later in the twentieth century by the Anglican Church and other churches (Elias 2002, 24). The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA 2018, ix, 3, 5), suited to modern missionary activity, is well established in the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide (Cronin 2013) and practised nationally and internationally. The catechumenate is also available within the Anglican Church (GBRE 1999; Hosler 2018). A study of the outline for the Christian Initiation of Adults shows a use of collaborative, reflective and holistic learning processes; individual, group and congregational learning from scripture, and learning through liturgy (RCIA 2018, 14).

The restoration of the catechumenate during the twentieth century was significant. It spoke volumes about the contemporary value of the learning community processes used in earlier times for Christian formation. Recognition of effective formation learning processes for a missionary situation, then and now, is recommendation indeed.

The discipline of Christian education in parishes is viewed differently through the lens of a learning community approach. That approach provides a way to structure parish ministry and mission around learning processes that foster much growth in the Christian faith. The approach provides a methodology to use when content is considered; when topics like discipleship and mission are discussed. Small group programmes would use the three learning processes (Littleton 2017, 9). Over time, building on the examples presented in this paper, a learning community focus for Christian education may be handed on to future generations as a customary way of nurturing faith formation.

### *Conclusion*

The paper addresses the question of how to become and be Christian within a faith community and offers a way to answer the question.

The history of Christian education indicated, “The Church in each age needs to be faithful to both the Christian tradition and its historic situation” (Westerhoff and Edwards 1981, 3-8). The contention in this paper is that Church communities need to focus on process as much as the content of the Christian tradition to enhance growth in faith (Littleton 2017, 2018a). That conclusion is supported by reference to ways in which learning community processes enhanced Christian discipleship formation in recent times, and ways in which discipleship was nurtured by a learning community perspective in the first four centuries of the early church. Francis Young concluded that the early church in those centuries was a learning community. Claire Smith characterised the first century Christian communities she studied as learning communities.

In light of the viewpoint expressed in this paper, a faithful church may decide to use learning community processes to explore the practice of Christian discipleship in a secular society (Taylor 2007; McEvoy 2015). The tradition of a learning community focus for Christian education helps disciples to keep on learning from Christ, the “truly human” one (APBA 1995, 123); helps people to become and be Christly human(e) in contemporary society. A focus on learning through attention to process as much as content in a learning community context provides one answer to the question about how we keep on learning from Christ in contemporary society.

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