

WORKSHOP

This workshop was due to be held during August 2020 in Adelaide but was cancelled due to the COVID-19 Virus. Details are provided below for information and interest to any who want to enquire further about the research topics and publications.

Diocesan Interactive Workshop

Learning Communities of Faith, Discipleship and Mission

Insights from recent research on Christian education in parishes - involving parish clergy & leaders

Faithfully factual: the role of research in the Church

Supported by Archbishop Geoff, Anglican Diocese of Adelaide

About the workshop (across four sessions):

Australian research projects on Christian education in parishes will be presented with opportunities for questions and discussion about the findings. We will participate in conversations on the following learning question: *How does your church/parish do Christian education?* This will involve listening to and learning from each other through the stories we tell. We will explore the benefits of evidence-based research and how it informs ministry practice. The research projects reported much growth in Christian faith, discipleship and mission. The workshop provides an opportunity to learn with others and reflect.

Sessions:

1. **A Learning Community focus for Christian education – The Rev'd Dr John Littleton** - Enhanced faith learning in the parish context.
2. **Christian education and Mission – Dr Craig Mitchell** - Christian formation and education: core ecclesial practice for growing mission-shaped disciples.
3. **Christian education and Gospel Literacy – The Rev'd Dr Mark Thomas** - The greater the knowledge of the Gospels the greater the likelihood of relating Jesus to life today.
4. **“Exchange of Gifts” across Parishes in the Diocese, facilitated by Ms Geraldine Hawkes** - when we reflect and open ourselves to listen to the gifts of others and to the Spirit.

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Prior reading below pages 2-3

Prior reading for 2020 Diocesan Interactive Workshop

Research Project: John Littleton

Findings from John's research project conducted in the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, 2013-2014 (227 people) 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 and fully 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; 2018). 'The body of Christ' image provided a biblical foundation for a learning community approach.

For the purposes of the research project, a learning community approach, customised for the parish context, was 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 processes" (Littleton 2016, 46).

Littleton, John. 2016. *Enhanced Faith Learning in Parishes*. Thesis, Doctor of Ministry, Adelaide College of Divinity, South Australia.

Littleton, John. 2017. *Enhance Learning in Parishes: A Learning Community Approach for Church Congregations*. Unley, Adelaide, South Australia: MediaCom Education Inc.

Littleton, John. 2018. "Enhanced learning in the parish context: a learning community approach." *Practical Theology* 11, 4: 320-333.

Research Project: Craig Mitchell

Craig'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 were seen as inter-related and interdependent". Craig 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).

Craig wrote, "Discipleship is an outcome of Christian formation and education, not a replacement for them... Formation and education permeate the church's practices such that it constantly learns to embody the mission of Jesus Christ. This is both gift and vocation for the church. Therefore, those who lead congregations, those who provide resources for congregations and those who educate ministry leaders should rediscover and reemphasise the understandings and practices of formation and education as vital for growth in Christian faith and growth in participation in the mission of God" (305).

Mitchell, Craig. 2018. *(Re)forming Christian Education in Congregations as the Praxis of Growing Disciples for a Missional Church*. Thesis, Doctor of Philosophy, Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia.

<http://growing-disciples.org.au/learning-to-grow-disciples/>
<http://growing-disciples.org.au/intentionality-in-christian-education/>
<https://vimeo.com/showcase/2793770>

Research Project: Mark Thomas

A broad working definition of TRANSFORMATIVE GOSPEL LITERACY:

"A transformative Gospel literacy includes substantial knowledge of the content of the Gospels, including the background, basic differences between them, the overall narrative and separate stories and the teachings of the Gospels. It is also able to make meaning of this content and the place of the Gospel story in salvation history, to appreciate the figurative and idiomatic use of language and to understand that the Gospels can be interpreted in different ways. Finally, it will result in a basic ability to apply the Gospels in a transformative way to one's own personal issues, behaviour and daily decision making; to social, community and global issues, and enable the disciple to both articulate the Gospel story and stories and respond to simple, basic questions about the Gospels" (204).

The thesis explored and analysed what a sample of Adelaide Anglican laity (130 respondents) knew about the content of the Gospels, how they understood and interpreted the Gospels and the difference the Gospels made to their own lives and their Christian influence in the lives of others. Some of the findings: "It might be reasonable to infer that the laity in the Diocese of Adelaide have difficulty in recalling the content of the Gospels and understanding it within a wider context" (192). Mark wrote "The greater the knowledge of the Gospels the greater the likelihood of relating Jesus to moral, social and global issues" (200).

Thomas, Mark. 2018. *Adelaide Anglicans and the Gospels: A mixed-method inquiry through the lens of transformative Gospel literacy*. 2018. Thesis, Doctor of Ministry, Charles Sturt University, NSW.

Exchange of Gifts: Geraldine Hawkes, facilitator

In this session there will be an interactive conversation amongst participants focused on the *learning question: How does your church/parish do Christian education?* Two pre-invited responders from two different parishes open the conversation by sharing what they discovered through the learning question after visiting and listening to the answers that two pre-invited people from two other parishes gave prior to the workshop event. The facilitator then invites other participants to enter the conversation. The conversation moves forward collaboratively through information and content learning towards deep learning outcomes related to Christian education. Concluding with a time to ponder a short Gospel passage.

Before coming to the workshop all participants are invited to be ready for a conversation about Christian education (CE) in their parish: what are they doing in CE? What do they think they are doing? This 90-minute session will be like another research project in providing evidence about many CE approaches from a variety of parish contexts.

Geraldine Hawkes, previously Ecumenical Facilitator for the South Australian Council of Churches (SACC), is experienced in facilitating "Exchange of Gifts" conversations. The seating arrangement and process for learning about CE will be in the round. Time for reflection is part of the process. By reflecting and opening ourselves to listen to the gifts of others and to the Spirit, "it is hoped that we will discover creative and imaginative processes and responses" to the critical issue of Christian education in our church, and so be drawn closer into our purpose and unity in Christ (SACC "Exchange of Gifts" 2017 document, 1).

Geraldine Hawkes. 2018. "Nurturing and Nourishing a Receptive Disposition Through Process" in *Receptive Ecumenism: Listening, Learning and Loving in the Way of Christ*. Eds. Vicky Balabanski and Geraldine Hawkes. Adelaide: ATF Theology, 89-98.