



licc.

SUSTAINING CHANGE

Key Ingredients for Sustaining
Whole-Life Disciplemaking

During the service, the lounge has a live link-up for
parents with restless young ones

Through the storm,
He is Lord,
Lord of all.

Through the storm,
He is Lord,
Lord of all.

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FOREWORD

I was surprised (and I'll admit more than a little terrified) to become a Christian in my early 40s. I then set out to understand what it meant to be a Christian. In the early stages of my quest for understanding I came across LICC and Mark Greene's essay *Imagine How We Can Reach the UK*, which led me to attend LICC's Let My People Grow conference in 2004. In that perplexing time in my faith journey, this gave me some clarity on how to be a Christian. Thank you, LICC.

Many years later, it has been a privilege and a pleasure to work alongside LICC on this research. We know that becoming a Christian can happen in an instant – but becoming Christlike and sustaining that Christlikeness in all aspects of life is challenging and requires discipline.

This research provides a robust and insightful analysis of a sample of churches which LICC knew had sustained discipling. To gain a richer understanding, LICC took care not just to interview church leaders but to involve a range of other people, including congregation members. The depth and quality of thought from all respondents was excellent.

The findings have been carefully analysed to produce a report that gives valuable insights into how churches have sustained an emphasis on whole-life discipling – supporting and equipping people to become increasingly Christlike in their everyday lives. Whether it's leaders who prioritise learning what people do outside the church building, a habit of sharing stories of God at work in everyday life, or a focus on personal responsibility for faith – this report gives a window into what helps to create a resilient whole-life church culture.

My hope is that this research points the way forward for other churches to grow a whole-life culture of their own, inspiring and equipping Christians to join God at work in their daily contexts – sent out into his world, ready to make a difference for Christ in their jobs, streets, homes, and beyond.



Benita Hewitt
9 Dot Research

INTRODUCTION

How do churches sustain and develop a whole-life approach to discipling over three or more years?

Over the years – through conversations, observations, and hearsay – we noticed that some churches grasp the whole-life vision for discipling in their churches, and they make real progress. And then... well, a whole load of things happen. The vision fades, other demands shout louder, key leaders and influencers move on, ideas run dry, discouragement sets in.

Then there are others who, despite facing many challenges, keep whole-life discipling (WLD) going and growing.

LICC had already done a lot of research around how churches can begin a process of culture change, along with exploring what tools and approaches keep them moving for the first few years. But what about after that? How do churches sustain and develop a whole-life discipling culture over three or more years?

That was our research question, and in order to answer it we turned to church communities who have managed to do just that. All of them have done it for longer than three years – and some have been going since just after the turn of the millennium.

Our aim was to capture what they've learned along the way, so that we might gain wisdom as an organisation and in turn share that wisdom with other churches around the country. Churches who are just setting off on a WLD journey, and churches who, for whatever reason, have plateaued or become stuck.

In the summer of 2020, we recruited 11 churches to be part of our research sample, along with two other pilot churches.

These churches are spread around England and Scotland and are affiliated with the following denominations and networks: Baptists, the Church of England, Elim, FIEC, and the Scottish Episcopal Church. Due to issues linked to the coronavirus pandemic, three of the 11 churches withdrew from the process, leaving two pilot churches and eight churches for the main sample.

The selection criteria was that the churches needed to have sustained and to some extent developed a whole-life approach to making disciples for a minimum of three years (and ideally more). This needed to have moved from just being something one or a few leaders were doing, to something that was increasingly part of community life.



Joe Warton, Lyn Weston, and Steve Rouse (all members of the LICC Church Team) then conducted structured interviews with three representatives from each church. For each church, we spoke to:

- A/the senior leader of the church (two one-hour interviews by phone or Zoom)
- A secondary or lay leader within the church (one-hour conversation by phone or Zoom)
- A member of the congregation (one-hour conversation by phone or Zoom)

There were separate interview questions for each role: we asked seniors leaders slightly different questions to secondary leaders, and we asked congregation members significantly different questions to leaders. Space was given within each interview to explore other interesting and relevant areas raised by the participants.

All conversations were recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions were then analysed by Joe Warton (LICC) and separately by Benita Hewitt (9 Dot Research). We were keen to invite Benita to conduct her own analysis for two reasons. First, as an 'outsider', it was a way of guarding against internal bias, leading us to consciously or unconsciously see what we wanted to see. And second, because she is an excellent and experienced Christian researcher. We are grateful for Benita's contribution to this project.

All research participants were then invited to attend a Zoom session in which we shared our findings. We also sent them a draft version of this report, with the opportunity to comment as they saw fit. This was to help us ensure we had listened properly and were not misrepresenting their experiences and perspectives.

This report is split into two sections. In Part 1, we explore eight key ingredients that we discovered across these eight church communities. These are ingredients pervasive throughout the church – while they

are affected by and important to church leaders, they are not solely matters for their concern. However, as we conducted these interviews and analysed what was being said, five themes specific to leaders emerged. We outline these in Part 2.

Wherever God has placed you within his church, as you listen to the voice of these churches, we hope this report stimulates your thinking, and helps you and those you are connected with find a fruitful a faithful way forward in your desire to make disciples.



PART 1:

EIGHT INGREDIENTS

to Sustain and Develop a
Whole-Life Disciplemaking Culture



**KEEP THE BIBLE
CENTRAL AND
CONNECT IT TO
EVERYDAY LIFE**

All of the participants in this research stated or implied a high view of the Bible. What is particularly interesting (and encouraging!) is that their focus on learning about people's lives and seeking to disciple them for their contexts had not weakened their commitment to the Bible. In fact, their commitment to whole-life discipleship seems to have strengthened their love for, and enriched their handling of, God's word.

There was no sense that 'we now solely focus on people's lives' to keep the whole-life flame burning. Rather, a high view of life beyond the church building combined with a high view of Scripture seems to be central to sustaining and developing WLD.

The leaders and members of these churches insisted on the power, centrality, and relevance of Scripture in the ongoing life of their discipling ministries.

The first three comments below are from church leaders and the fourth is from a church member.

'Scripture is the starting point for all aspects of discipleship, really. The whole way I read Scripture is through this whole-life discipleship lens. Jesus came to make disciples, and he sent us out to make disciples, and we have God's word to help us be disciples and to make disciples. I guess all my reading of Scripture is through that lens... When I'm preparing stuff, it always starts with Scripture.... Scripture always has something to say to us, it's always saying something to me as a disciple of Jesus.'

'You can trust the Scriptures to address things people face in their lives and to speak to every aspect of their lives, if you handle the Scriptures well. I have found that some of the best stuff has grown out of bringing the Scriptures to people.'

'Everything is about learning to be like Jesus as a disciple, and that comes out whether we are teaching from the Gospels, an Old Testament prophecy, Psalms, epistles – it's all about helping us to learn the belief of Jesus, the behaviour of Jesus, and the attitude of Jesus. And so much of Scripture is just about that. So, if you're consistently going through a Bible book, in whichever form, discipleship has to come out of it. How is this making us more like Jesus?... So, we have done courses, we have done workbooks, but there's nothing like letting the Bible loose on people.'

'The single biggest thing is the continual preaching of the word and the grounding of the word on a Sunday and prayer for one another to go back out onto the frontline.'

As the four quotes above make clear, it's vital that the teaching of the Bible is connected clearly to the reality of people's day-to-day lives. It must also be grounded, as these quotes from two church leaders and one church member show:

'Any good sermon has to answer the "so what?" question. Your faith has to be lived out in practice.'

'In our teaching, we are focusing on the person's whole life – not just the theology, but the theology and practice. We seek to answer the YBH question, the "yes, but how?" We look at themes and topics to address the kinds of things people are thinking about out in the world; we don't just talk about what we want to say.'

'I think some of the more specific stuff at church with teaching around who is your neighbour, what does it mean to love your neighbour, what does it look like, is thought-provoking and challenging. So, I find it helpful to think through what does it look like with my slightly annoying patient at 11 o'clock?'

It's important to note that it was not just church leaders and regular preachers who were talking about the importance of Scripture, and of connecting it to people's lives. This was very much the view of the congregation members as well. It is also important to recognise that while preaching was talked about a lot in these conversations, it was not held up as the only place where the Bible is opened, and its implications connected to life. It is happening in other realms of church life too, especially small groups and pastoral practice, and to some extent in strategic planning and individual Christians' own devotional times.

As one church leader and one church member commented:

'I also try to model the importance of Scripture. I will try to share Scriptures with people in conversation, or if something comes to mind for somebody, I will text them it. I try to minister to people from the Bible and for that not to be weird. I want them to see the power that God's word has to speak into any and every situation.'

'Being part of a small group at church really helps; I've been in the same group for about 15 years or so. So, people know me, I know them, and I generally feel like I can share stuff with them, even about work. And getting to grips with Scripture and trying to apply it to our lives wherever we are is a help and encouragement... Often I walk home from Bible study at 9.30 and think, "Yes, that makes sense; I can apply that and it can help keep me going".'

These churches really value Scripture, and consistently apply it to people's lives. Leaders and members are seeing the benefit of doing so. They also reported that it helps to keep things moving forward, to keep things fresh. In a church community where people are constantly learning about each other's lives, and where the depth and breadth of the Scriptures is being explored, there never becomes a point where people feel like 'we've covered everything, we know all there is to know'. There is always more, and this helps to keep WLD going and growing.





IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCHES

If you already love digging into Scripture, and helping people to engage with it, a focus on whole-life discipling is not a call away from that. It is a call to go deeper into Scripture, to really help the congregation wrestle with the implications of the Bible for the situations they find themselves in. There is great power in knowing the Bible, in knowing about people's lives, and in connecting the two.

If a leader, team, or church think that a move toward whole-life discipling means a move away from serious engagement with Scripture, they need to hear the voice of these churches. St. Paul was not lying when he said 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.' (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

A photograph of two women standing outdoors in a grassy field with hills in the background. The woman on the left has long dark hair and is wearing a patterned scarf. The woman on the right has short blonde hair, wears glasses, a yellow cardigan, and a floral dress. A large, semi-transparent blue circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, partially covering the woman in the yellow cardigan. The text "THE POWER OF STORIES" is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the middle of the image.

THE POWER OF STORIES

Throughout the interviews with leaders and congregation members from these churches, it was clear that the sharing of stories, testimonies, lived examples – whatever we call them – plays a significant role in sustaining and developing a WLD culture. According to these research participants, stories appear to be having a significant impact on most people in these churches.

One of the most striking features was the way stories and testimonies help the congregation get to know one another better as whole people and enrich their relationships with one another. This is what three different congregation members said:

'The danger is, if we only ever see people at church, it's like we just see them as a Christian who lives in church and you forget that come Monday morning, they are in a business meeting, or driving a truck, and they're interacting with people – it's a huge part of who they are and you don't see it, and it just doesn't occur to you that it's there. I knew so-and-so was a teacher, but you don't know what that looks like. Or someone says they are a project manager, or they sell chemicals in Australia; people don't necessarily know what it means. So, it is encouraging to see how someone is living out their faith in a normal, ordinary working life, or someone who is doing it with a housebound husband and they are the main carer, and their Monday morning is going to look very different to mine... It fills out the picture; it makes the whole thing much more 3D. We appreciate each other much more and we get a bit more of an idea about what God is doing in people's lives. I think as well, that helps the church to be a bit more relevant in its teaching and everything else it does.'

'It's really humbling. Even though people just share a small glimpse, often you have no idea about the kinds of challenges and situations people face, because you're so caught up with your own immediate circumstances. I think it also goes back to that thing about being an encourager. Often, they will say something I can really identify with or empathise with, so it helps you get to know them as brothers and sisters, not just people you're sitting in the pews with. And it's people you're not necessarily crossing paths with, because they're not in the toddler group or they are not in whatever ministries you are involved in. It just gives you an insight and helps you get to know them; it gives you something to talk to them about so the conversations after church are a bit more meaningful... It's really good to know how God is using people who are different to you, who are in different circumstances across the area. I really like [This Time Tomorrow/stories]. And it makes you realise nobody is really a clone, even though you might think they are. Giving everybody that space and that honesty to express that is really encouraging.'

'There's a guy in our church who was the CFO of [multinational company]. He got to a very high position very quickly, and he's upfront, and he's telling you how he's going to work, he's trying to represent God, and he just feels he can't cope with it. And he's in tears at the front of church when he's telling you how God took him through it. Half the church was teary-eyed. It's like for all of our programmes and everything else, there's nothing like a story.'

Learning about one another's lives through interviews, testimonies, and the like not only enriches relationships and appreciation for one another, it also plays a significant role in the congregation challenging, inspiring, and to some extent teaching one another. There seems to be something very powerful about hearing about real-life situations that are close to home, that come from 'regular people' in the congregation. They are not coming from a pastor, or theologian, or cross-cultural missionary, but from someone 'on their level', someone 'like me'.

Here's what a church leader and a congregation member had to say:

'I think people see this is actually what makes faith come alive, because God is using you in the ordinary. I think that comes from testimonies, and when people hear other people, normal people – in the congregation, not the leaders – that I think excites people. I think it empowers them.... When you tell the stories of what God's been doing, and you see him using normal people, it raises that expectation.'

'I see it as an encouragement when someone is sharing their personal testimony and sometimes people might share something really, really encouraging: like they've had a great conversation about the gospel with someone. But it could be a little bit more low-level: when they see how God is working through them. It's great to hear that testimony. You don't always see how God is working in them in ordinary ways, so it helps me to then see what God might be doing through me in my communities as well. Even though sometimes I can be feeling so 'AAHHHHH' about everything, it reminds me that God is at work. It's a big reminder to thank God that he is working.'

Across the church, stories play a role in helping people to 'get it', and to keep growing in their understanding of what being a whole-life disciple is. Representatives from a couple of churches talked about the changing content of the stories and testimonies people share. In the past, these tended to focus on how they became a Christian, or something that was happening in their inner spiritual experience, or something spectacular or miraculous that had occurred. But more and more, people are sharing examples from their lives that are more 'low-key', and from areas of life that did not used to get much of a mention – for example, the workplace or the wider community.

One lay leader talked about the significant role talking about everyday life had played in shaping the leadership team he chairs. At each leadership team meeting, the first item on the agenda is an opportunity for them to talk about what is happening on their frontlines. It is very powerful in helping them to see the importance of WLD and helps them in influencing the rest of the church.

Some church leaders did express a level of frustration about how difficult they sometimes find it to get stories from small group leaders and the congregation. Others talked about how there were certain people who would share a lot, and others who wouldn't share at all. This is an issue we have addressed elsewhere (see article '[Unearthing & Sharing Stories](#)' at licc.org.uk, and our [The One About](#) resource).

Of the 16 church leaders (lay and ordained) we interviewed, only one said stories were not particularly his thing. But even he still recognises the significance of stories in the journey, and has found ways to incorporate them into the life of the church:

'I am terrible at telling stories and thinking stories are an important thing. It doesn't come naturally to me... More often, I invite other people to share their stories...'

Otherwise, I would deliver very well-structured and propositional truth. I know that I'm not brilliant at telling stories or finding them. Recently I was teaching on Romans 8:31-38. I invited someone in the church who is facing cancer to share her experience of these verses over the last year, and how she's experienced the power and the truth of these verses. She could say things in a way that I couldn't, because I haven't had that experience.'

What was also really interesting is that most of these churches reported an increase in storytelling during lockdown restrictions, where services had gone online. Here is what two church leaders had to say in this regard:

'Over the past two years, me and [the senior leader] have been talking about how we want to get more stories. We were getting some, but we knew we were not doing great at it. Then lockdown happened and it's flourished – it's just amazing. Every service during lockdown we had an interview with random people – we've done interviews with key workers and people on their frontlines: a doctor, a social worker, teacher... We got into this pattern of people sharing their stories every week, and we realised we were doing the thing we wanted to do. Everybody loves it, and people are saying they love the interviews.'

'Lockdown has enabled us to do more video testimonies. I would love to get out more and take videos of people where they are, and I've not done that here as much as I would have liked. But what we are doing much more now is getting people to send in their own video testimonies, or we video them. We've talked so much about getting more video testimonies for years, and it's only when we started doing online services during lockdown that we do them every week now, and there's a much wider variety of people sharing.'

Anecdotally, across the country, many churches have been talking about how the move to online gatherings has increased the number of people actively taking part in services, with a big part of this being the sharing of testimonies. The church as a whole is hearing more from the laity in that sense. One reason for this seems to be people are more willing to share, because they don't have to go to 'the front'. There is also anecdotal evidence that church leaders are asking for stories/testimonies more than they used to, because they want to make the services more participatory, and to help the community remain connected during this time where they can't physically be together. So, while lockdowns and restrictions have placed all kinds of pressures on churches, one blessing to come out of it has been this increase in storytelling.

To conclude this section, here is a final quote from a church leader convinced of the power of storytelling to fuel a church's focus on WLD:

'I know a couple of times, I've said to Mark [Greene of LICC]: "Keep the stories coming, because they really carry it". I think they carry the frontline thing. They carry the culture; they inspire hearts because people can hear a story and they can do the work for themselves and say, "What does this mean in my workplace?" And you don't have to spell it out and I love the "let's be sparing with our principles and lavish in our storytelling". And I think that's what will carry the whole-life discipleship forward.'



IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCHES

Whether or not you believe in the power of storytelling, and whether you are a good storyteller or not, take the power of people sharing their testimonies/stories/life experiences seriously. They will help to move the church forward in the whole-life journey, and they will help in the forging of fuller and deeper relationships within the church. And they will help to envision and inspire people to live out their faith more fully in their everyday lives.

A photograph of two women in a professional setting. On the left, a woman with long brown hair, wearing a black sleeveless top, looks towards the right. On the right, a woman with short blonde hair, wearing a white top, is seen in profile, looking towards the left. They appear to be in a meeting. The background is a blurred green wall. A large, semi-transparent blue circular graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image. The text "GETTING SPECIFIC, GETTING PERSONAL" is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the middle of the image.

**GETTING SPECIFIC,
GETTING PERSONAL**

Having worked and researched in this area for some years now, we have a reasonable grasp of the elements that help sustain and develop a whole-life journey. Along the way, we pick up things we have not seen or thought of before. But one of the interesting things about doing research like this is not just the completely new things you learn, but the significance of the things you already know.

We knew from previous research, from conversations with church leaders, and from our own pastoral practice, that getting specific and personal was significant in the discipling process. What stood out from speaking to these eight churches is just how significant that dynamic is.

By getting specific, we mean when those involved in helping to disciple others help them grapple with the nitty-gritty of who they are and the specific contexts they are in, and what it means to follow Christ and live out his mission in that context. It is the opposite of a one-size-fits-all approach. It's about tending to specific trees, not just the forest.

By getting personal, we mean engaging with people on a one-to-one (or perhaps one-to-two) basis.

These terms overlap, and so we address them together, though they are not identical. In good WLD ministry, it's possible to get specific and not get personal (e.g. running a group for health workers is context-specific, but is not necessarily personal – there could be 20 people in the group). So, some of what is described below fits neatly under the heading of 'getting specific', whereas other aspects are both specific and personal.

As we stepped back and listened carefully to the research sample as a whole, the theme of getting specific and personal began to emerge. These churches are not all doing the same things, but when they were speaking about what they do, and especially about the things they think are the most significant in sustaining and developing WLD (though they weren't always consciously articulating it), they were describing practices that involved

getting specific and/or personal. Interactions between leaders and the congregation and between congregation members themselves both exhibited those hallmarks (more of which will be discussed in the 'one another ministry' section below).

The belief behind these practices (whether implicit or explicit) is that people are different from one another, that they are at different stages of life to one another, and that they have different lives. All of them have challenges and opportunities as disciples of Jesus, but those challenges and opportunities differ based on their season and area of life. And those individuals change over time. They change and their contexts change.

Here's what one church leader had to say:

'I'm not into a discipleship funnel or pathway because I don't see it like that. Everybody's life is a bit like being on an A-Z map. Everybody is somewhere on that map, and so everyone's journey as a disciple is going to look different. People need different things at different times. Some people have hit dead ends, and others are on the motorway. We're all at different stages, and so how we encourage people to live as whole-life disciples is going to look different for everybody. I guess my job is to make sure that there is a smorgasbord of things to meet people where they are on the map, and grow them as whole-life disciples of Jesus.'

In this section we explore the main ways churches are getting specific and personal in their discipling efforts.

MINISTRIES, COURSES, GROUPS, OR NETWORKS FOR PARTICULAR LIFE STAGES OR WORK SECTORS

There are various ways some of these churches are seeking to disciple people according to their particular situation, stage, or sector. Some have found it really helpful to get different groups connected at special Sunday services, where people choose which group they most identify with (e.g. retired, parenting, working in finance, and so on). These groups then work through some questions, and/or have opportunities for mutual wisdom-sharing, encouragement, and prayer. Some of these have spawned WhatsApp groups, which allow those connections to be sustained throughout the year.

One church talked about a particularly strong group consisting of senior managers, which met regularly and functioned like a church small group. This group lasted for many years, and members found it particularly helpful in terms of accountability, learning, and encouragement.

Other churches spoke of the significance of running courses for people in particular seasons of life. LICC's *Transforming Work* had been catalytic for a number of workers, as had being a part of Executive Toolbox.

One church leader shared this with us:

'We try to make sure that [our groups for different ages and stages] aren't just social clubs, but have a discipling element. We want them to be about learning to follow Jesus in this stage of life or in this experience, as well as wanting to generally build community. We are increasingly aware of the importance of people being able to work out the implications of God's word in these specific groups. You can't apply it to everyone in a sermon.'

Another church leader, from the same church as the person quoted directly above, shared some of the ways they seek to equip people for stage-specific discipleship:

'When someone has a first child, we meet with them. We get people to think through what they really want for their children. We also meet with parents in transition stages, when they are starting primary school and secondary school, and we talk about the opportunities and mission this new phase in life presents, and also what it looks like to disciple your children at this point. We mapped out a child's path and thought about where the good moments to speak to parents were, so that they can deal with things proactively, rather than reactively.'

'We have a group [for retirees that helps them think about what fruitfulness might look like for them]. We also run a session for people as they approach retirement; that it's not just a time to play golf – though it's fine to do that – but it's not just a time for self-indulgence; it's still service, it's still for Jesus. We have some people modelling that and articulating that brilliantly. We made some videos with some of them about how they use their retirement, and we had a sermon series last year on dying well and ageing well, and using your retirement well. We should be asking the question "how do I use my gifts and my talents in the situation God has put me in best?"'

These quotes make a number of key points. First, getting context-specific helps people think through what following in the ways of Jesus will look like for them 'in this place and at this time'. Second, it shows that this is a ministry that both leaders and church members can feed into. Church leaders and Bible teachers within the church can speak meaningfully into these stages of life as they develop more of an understanding of them, and the people in these stages of life can reflect meaningfully on their own challenges and opportunities, and share their insights and wisdom with others who are in similar circumstances.

Third, there is an important point about getting people to think about the stage they are moving into (i.e. during transition), as they can then be better prepared for that season of life as they head into it. While it is important to speak into the circumstances a person is already in, if you can get them to start thinking about it beforehand, they can deal with things proactively, rather than reactively.

Fourth, every season of life is valid. In every season, disciples can grow. In every season, disciples can meaningfully engage in the mission of God.

MAKING SPECIFIC APPLICATIONS IN PREACHING AND TEACHING

This point is covered in detail in Section 1 ('Keep the Bible central'). However, it is worth noting here, as it's another example of how people can be equipped for their specific contexts.

MENTORING

At the time of interview, only two of these eight churches had a formal mentoring programme in place. However, both leaders and laity in these churches spoke of how important this specific and personal ministry can be in sustaining and developing disciples.

This is what a congregation member, church leaders and lay leader said about mentoring:

'The mentors are a bit of a coach, a bit of a spiritual director, and a bit of a "let's have a cup of tea and a chat" kind of person.... We encourage people if it feels like there's something missing – if prayer life is a bit non-existent, with decisions, or if they are about to retire and they want to do that well, or they are a student and their flatmates are really annoying them, or they've just finished Alpha and they want someone to talk about the specifics of discipleship – we offer it to everyone for anything.'

When it works well, it makes a huge difference to people. It is about whole-life discipleship. If people need a counsellor, it's not the right thing for them. If they want to know how to live life well with Jesus, and want to know him better and live that out more fully, then that's the remit for mentoring.'

'A few years ago, we established a mentoring programme, because we noticed Christians weren't maturing in their faith. There were people who had been Christians for decades but weren't developing. Even the ones who had been Christians for a long time didn't feel able to mentor others, and even those who have the ability didn't think that they did. We did some mentoring training and appointed a mentoring coordinator – this has been a big leap in helping people grow in their faith, to work through issues, and to work out what it looks like to share their faith outside of the church. One of the big things that's come out of the mentoring has been about living out their faith in the workplace. People are beginning to see they can have a public faith, as long as they live it out with gentleness and respect.'

'I mentioned the mentoring, and that's quite an important part of our life as a body. That helps discipleship enormously, as it's a one-to-one relationship. It's having someone there to encourage you in your own walk, and where you're at. So, mentoring plays a big role, and that mentoring has been encouraged.'

Due to the breadth of these conversations, we were not able to go into as much detail as we would have liked in this area, but it does invite further exploration. There definitely seems to be something poignant in the specific and personal interaction that takes place within a mentoring-type relationship. One church, discussed below, talked about the significance of spiritual friendship. And the church member quoted above talked about how much she values seeing a spiritual director eight times a year.

SPECIFIC CONVERSATIONS

This point very much ties in with the section below on the importance of leaders taking an interest in people's lives. It also operates on the same principle as mentoring, in that the conversations being talked about here are highly personal and specific. But conversations are more sporadic and less formal than mentoring. And while the quotes below come from those involved in church leadership, these conversations need not be the preserve of 'professionals'.

Below is an extended quote from a church leader who particularly sees the value in personal and specific conversations. He describes the general principle, before sharing a story of how that had worked out on the very day we interviewed him:

'[Regarding equipping], what I discovered is the strength of the one-to-one, smaller group interaction rather than the teaching from the front. To get vision and concepts, we have to do some teaching, even in sermons and stuff. But I think so much of the significant movement that happens is in one-to-one conversation, or one-to-three or -four conversation, in those visits on the frontline or whatever. But in those one-to-ones... I think that's a big challenge for me at the moment – I'm reflecting on how can I create space to do more one-to-one stuff and have those one-to-one personal interactions, and helping the middle leaders to do the same. We've come from a place where you do the sermon from the front, the minister talks to fifty or a hundred people, and that's the input they get, and you can only take that so far. I think if you're going to really help those people on you've got to do stuff in smaller groups, and even smaller than small groups. I think in ones and twos, and particularly in ones, that hour you might spend with someone grappling with what God is doing on their frontline and what God is doing with them is gold dust.

'There's a lady I saw this morning, [he describes her job] and she reflected on a moment where she hadn't done something properly. And so, we met up together and in the course of that conversation I was able to talk to her about what it means to serve God on your frontline. I think up till then she had thought the only way she could serve God was through sharing her faith with her clients, but was struggling to know how to do that because technically she is not allowed to do that. So, she can't do the one thing that she thought was the only important thing in God's calling. And when I sat down with her, and said just by doing your job in terms of helping people [with the kind of issues she helps people within her job], I said that is such kingdom stuff, that is so much God's heart – you are helping to release the oppressed, you are helping to heal the broken. And I could just see in her face she was like "wow, I've never thought of it like that before". And that's where the 6M framework was so helpful and I was able to talk to about that. Because she had thought the only one that was important was the sixth one about sharing her faith. But suddenly she has a new vision for her role.

'And that would never have come up if I hadn't sat down with her for an hour and had a one-to-one conversation. I could have preached my heart out. In fact, I had preached my heart out on the 6Ms, but she hadn't taken it in. It was only when we sat down together and I was able to reflect with her that she really saw that extra dimension and suddenly found a new way of seeing her whole job. I think people take in much less from sermons than we think they do. I think no matter how well you preach, I think if you asked half the congregation what was the sermon about two hours later, most of them would have forgotten most the stuff. It's that coaching role that I've talked about. They need to be coached and mentored, just as Jesus did and dwelt with a few. He didn't just preach to the crowds, he dwelt with a few and said "come on, let's sit together."

'It's that stuff that I think really ingrains this into people. You know, I need it, to have people to sit and reflect with just to have that extra pair of eyes to help you see your situation – that can be so helpful for us all, can't it? ... I think a lot of it is about listening. I just listened to her and her story and she's doing some amazing things with one or two individuals. I think that listening is so, so important for us to do. It's when we listen we can then reflect. And that's what we can't do in a sermon, we can't do that from the front. You can't hear people's stories... That's the beauty of going to someone's frontline, you see where they are, you see some of the people they are with, and actually that can open your eyes too to help them see the way. If you just meet people in the church you don't see that. That thing of listening is really helpful.'

Another church leader talked about a conversation she had with someone from her church not long before we spoke to her. She explained how a long-standing member of the church community was still articulating a belief that true discipleship was about (and limited to) having a set prayer and Bible reading time every day. Because that's not happening, this person felt they were therefore not a disciple. It was only through conversation that this belief came to light, and this church leader was able to tackle it head-on.

Two other church leaders also articulated the significance of one-to-one conversations:

'I think sometimes the conversations I have with people at the end of the service and where I pray for them possibly has more impact than the sermon. The fact that a pastor has taken an interest in their frontline and prayed about it probably has as much impact, if not more, than the sermon.'

'[When] I'm in a conversation with someone, I more and more take people there, to their workplace, and what is God doing there. So, you know, the whole "6Ms" way of thinking, of not just, "When was the last time you led someone to Christ by the water fountain?" but more, "What's going on in your organisation that is about the kingdom of God coming or clashing with the kingdom of God?"... And I try to encourage a sense of calling. It's really lovely when people recognise it, you know what I mean? When the lights come on and they see that this is ministry.'

So, one-to-one conversations can take a long time – though sometimes it might just involve a 10-minute chat at the end of the service. But they really are significant in helping individuals to grow as whole-life disciples. It appears devoting more time and attention to getting specific and personal in this way does help churches to sustain and develop WLD.



IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCHES

The power of getting specific and personal cannot be overstated. From listening to the voice of these churches, as well as reflecting on other conversations, the personal-specific approach appears to have a significant impact on the growth of individuals as whole-life disciples, and therefore, on the church community as a whole.

There are many ways churches can grow in this regard, and there are many benefits. Therefore, church communities and the individuals within them should think about how they can do this more and more. Some areas to give serious consideration to would be:

- The development and implementation of a mentoring programme, or some other way that provides a one-to-one opportunity for individuals to reflect on and explore discipleship for their context.
- Church leaders and ministry leaders to commit more time to one-to-one conversations, with a deliberate focus on contextual discipleship.
- Sermons, services and work within big groups most certainly have their place, but often breakthroughs and lightbulb moments take place through conversation.
- Ways to connect those in similar seasons or sectors with one another, for the purpose of learning, encouragement, support, wisdom-sharing, and prayer.

A photograph of two men in a workshop or laboratory setting. The man on the left is wearing a blue button-down shirt and khaki pants, while the man on the right is wearing a dark patterned shirt and blue jeans. They are both smiling and looking at each other. In the background, there is a large, circular, textured object (possibly a fossil or a piece of wood) mounted on a wall, a black desk lamp, and various pieces of equipment. A large blue geometric shape is overlaid on the right side of the image.

HEALTHY BALANCE: A MORE INTEGRATED APPROACH

Unsurprisingly, one of the biggest challenges these churches and church leaders articulated was busyness. Keeping discipling central requires time, effort, and headspace. The church leader below eloquently summed up how many involved in church life feel:

'We are a very busy church and a very community-focused church. The church is a bit of a machine; it runs Sunday to Sunday and kind of just trundles on. I would like this to change. It feels like being in a hamster wheel, trying to churn out services and church ministries – all good things – it just makes it difficult to try other things.'

In light of how busy church life can become, as well as how busy many people's lives tend to be these days, some of these church communities have deliberately cut back on the amount of activity happening in and around the building. They want to ensure people have enough time and space to live well on their frontlines and in other areas of life. Two church leaders comment:

'We try not to be too busy as a church. We recognise people have busy lives, so we resist calls to do more. Evangelical churches are very good at "doing" but not always very good at "being". We are saying if you spend 95% of your time elsewhere, we want to equip you for that, rather than concentrate on dragging you into church meetings or church activities.'

'We've changed the rhythm of the working week, to make it less busy; less demanding in terms of church meetings and church services – just recognising the change in cultural life and the demands on people's time. We've tried to simplify the church's worshipping life so people have a better balance.'

Thoughts and feelings regarding the impact of lockdown restrictions on church life and discipling varied amongst participants. But of church leaders spoke of the benefits, both in terms of the space it has created to focus on discipling, and discipling:

'It is still that battle balancing everything else the church does to keep this central. It's interesting that in this season, where we are not able to meet properly, and where our programmes have been really cut so we can't do so much of the stuff we have done [lists a number of groups they normally run]. But actually, that released us to have time to actually equip people and release people more... It's a time where we can create margin in our lives, so we have more time to be with people and to be open to God's prompting. I think one thing the lockdown has been good for is that we have had to stop a lot of our activities. Over the years, we've just become busier and busier – with good stuff, but it was all just stuff: tons of meetings, courses, youth groups, Messy Church – they're all really good things. But by the time lockdown started the church was running around like a headless chicken. And lockdown has stripped that all away, and the mission of the church has continued. And it's probably accelerating during this time, rather than reducing.'

Many of the research participants recognise the danger of the whole-life focus being crowded out. Listening to what they said, it sometimes sounded like various aspects of church life are in competition with one another, competing for air time and prominence, like low-level vegetation in a rainforest vying for sunlight.

But even some of those who spoke in these terms talked about the significance of the rotas and internal ministries of the church, and of the ways the church body reach and serve the community together.

A few participants (leaders and non-leaders) shared how they thought the emphasis the church already had on serving and reaching out to the community had contributed to the church grasping and living out a whole-life vision. Because the church had already developed an outward-looking posture, it was not a big jump for people to start thinking about serving and reaching out to people on their frontlines.

A couple of churches even talked about how they recognised the pendulum had swung too much towards the frontline, and that gathered attractional ministry/outreach needed to be expanded and/or strengthened. These quotes from two church leaders are insightful:

'One of the problems we face today is keeping church ministries going. I mentioned before that there are some things that a church can do that individuals can't do, like [gathered] youth work – it would be very hard just for an individual to do that. So actually, making sure that our church ministries are actually kept going while we maintain our frontline ministry... So now we have two commissioning services a year: one for our frontline commissioning in the spring, and one for our church-based ministries in the autumn.'

'In the early days I was very fixed on whole-life discipleship and what it meant, and we didn't do anything attractional as a church. I got to thinking that attractional was wrong, and the challenge I was finding was that we weren't actually seeing people come through to faith in Christ and to be disciple themselves; it wasn't happening in a great way. So, I went through a journey myself, thinking about how I needed to balance my approach and balance between attractional and whole-life. So, we added in some stuff like Alpha courses and doing some more occasional events, but then try not to put all the emphasis into those things but still trying to hold onto whole-life discipleship.'

From their perspective, in order for WLD to survive and thrive, it was important that talking about and equipping for frontlines received enough attention, but not to the detriment of the gathered/attractional elements of church life.

Ultimately, as these church leaders and members reflected on the interplay between gathered and scattered life, they have recognised (or are increasingly recognising) the importance of a more holistic and integrated approach. More and more, WLD is becoming part of their DNA; increasingly, it's the way they think about everything. It is not one of many topics fighting for a seat at the table, but a value that pervades all aspects of life and ministry. They are learning to value and equip people for their lives beyond church activities, while at the same time affirming those good gathered/attractional things they have always done.

The following excerpts from interviews with four church leaders demonstrate this move towards integration in their thinking and doing.

'It's more like an assumption that runs through all of our thinking and our living. We run a ministry development programme, where we take a group of people who are leading in an area of ministry, and we see in them real leadership potential. The whole process is designed around going deeper in discipleship. But we don't just concentrate on "ministry stuff", we also integrate it into what they do in their volunteering, their family life, their workplace.'

'In all that happens in [church name], whether it's in the teaching programme or the involvement in different ministries, it really is about trying to produce whole-life disciples, who are as much disciples if they happen to be at work or with an awkward neighbour, or sitting in the sanctuary of a church. The church really is intentional about whole-life discipleship, and that's been really valuable; really helpful.'

'Rather than having a special service about what we do for the rest of the year or the rest of the day, make it as normal and natural as possible. Bring it into the life of the small groups, into the preaching – not just doing a series on it like Fruitfulness on the Frontline (which is great), but where do you go after that? That's where [the model we have developed here really helps] because it runs through everything. It's seeing the church as part of our walk. It's just talking about the outside world in church in a normal way. If we can talk about normal life in church in a normal way, we can talk about church in our normal life in a more normal way... It's softening the edges between those two things. But I've recently just been having a feeling, and this might prove to be wrong, but what I'm wondering at the moment is that what the Frontline Team are into, and what the Local Mission Resource Team are into, aren't different things.

'This came to me when listening to some of the stories that were being told in our online service; that our frontline stories are sometimes from a kind of local mission context in [name of

town], and sometimes they were from a bank, or a catering company. And actually, what's different? If I'm working at my calling by getting involved in some local expression of mission that we're into, or if I'm working it out in my leisure pursuit, or if I'm working it out in my workplace, is there actually a difference there? Is one whole-life discipleship, and the other something else? And I think my answer to that seems to be, 'No, they're not. They're not actually different.' Would it make sense for these two teams to actually come together?

'So, we are here for harvest. We are here to see people come to know Christ and become his followers, but we pursue that as whole-life disciples – not veering back to kind of narrow evangelistic programs and so on.'

'I might be advertising an event we've got on at church, but I would just drop in again: 'We believe the primary way we reach people is by being everyday missionaries – but this event might be helpful in that.' So just trying to constantly drop those kinds of phrases in.'



IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCHES

The call here is for churches to consider how much they are trying to do, and how busy they have become. In order to allow the church to give enough energy to discipling, and to living it out, they may need to reduce (or at least, not increase) the number of volunteer hours to keep everything going. However, those wishing to increase the focus on the frontline must ensure they affirm the gathered ministries of the church.

Ultimately, by definition, whole-life discipleship is about valuing every aspect of life, because Christ, the Lord of it all, cares about it all. Therefore, an approach to church life that learns to move away from competition, and begins to see things in a more integrative and complementary way, will lead to more fruitful and more faithful practice.

A photograph of two women smiling and looking at each other outdoors. The woman on the left has dark hair and wears glasses, a white t-shirt, and a plaid jacket. The woman on the right has short brown hair with sunglasses on top, wearing a blue patterned top. A large, semi-transparent blue number '4' is overlaid on the right side of the image. The background is a blurred green landscape.

ONE ANOTHER MINISTRY

In seeking to start, sustain, and develop a whole-life culture within a church, leaders may, whether consciously or subconsciously, feel that it is all down to them to make it happen. While leaders clearly have an important role to play, it cannot be stressed enough that whole-life discipling is a task for the whole church to be fully engaged in. Everyone has a frontline, a whole life within which they live for Christ. And everyone can (or should) be playing their part in supporting everyone else for the ministry God has for them, wherever it may be.

In all of these churches, to varying degrees, it was clear that one another ministry is significant.

Church members shared ways they have seen other members of the church be encouraged and challenged as disciples in some quite challenging frontline situations. They saw this being worked out in the nitty-gritty of people's everyday lives. The situations below, described by two different congregation members, were both in conversations regarding small groups:

'[She explained about a couple who live in a retirement village, where the wife does a lot of work to make the grounds look nice, including putting up and looking after hanging baskets. Staff were making her life quite difficult with a lot of rules, and even more so during lockdown – beyond what was necessary]. Her first reaction was, "I'll let [the flowers] die then. Too bad, if they don't want me to do the watering, that's their hard luck!" When she shared this in our life group on Zoom, we gently said, "Would you reconsider thinking that, because of your Christian witness?" We very gently dropped in the idea that this was not the most Christlike reaction. So next time she shared she said, "Actually, I have been watering the baskets – I decided I would just go on doing it." That's just a tiny example of how we share with one another about the challenges of everyday life, and how we encourage each

other to bring the Lord into the situation, and to think about the right response in a challenging situation.'

'One of the greatest things was, we were going through our work, and this guy was a plumber, and he was having real problems at work, and he wanted to punch someone, because they were nicking his tools, basically. But we were ending up saying, 'Yeah, well you can't punch them; you're going to have to just say, 'Don't do it again.' And show some grace in that way.'

As well as seeing how others had been helped by members of the congregation, two other interviewees shared their own experiences of being disciplined by those in their churches.

'I like to have people who will ask me questions about how I'm doing, and challenge me... I have one or two friends here who will do that. So that accountability side is crucial; I don't know where I would be without that accountability side.'

'I have a prayer partner as well... Often we talk about what's going on at work and pray for each other, and that really helps. Having someone who understands – while she doesn't completely understand all the chaos and stress I go through – but she does because she's walked with me through it through the past few years... She might pray that I would be able to deal with the stress and the chaos; that I won't crumble through it. It may be about my witness in the office, especially if I'm stressed. Or, if I'm spending time with someone to pray for opportunities to speak to them about faith. She's prayed a lot about one colleague in my office.'

This one another discipling is taking place in a range of settings – some formal, some semi-formal, and some informal. Across these churches, the following settings were talked about in terms of mutual discipling:

- Conversations and/or prayer before, during, and after services
- Prayer partnerships/spiritual friendships
- WhatsApp groups
- Small groups
- Mentoring
- Groups connected by sector or season

Needless to say, this one another ministry cannot be forced. Church leaders cannot make members disciple one another. What they can do is encourage it, teach about it, train people for it, and create structures and environments that create space for it to happen. Before sharing some of the specific ways this is happening, a lay leader from one of the churches shared this insight into the significance of a shift in mindset taking place in church leaders and leadership teams:

'I think there's been an increased confidence in the leadership: that it's okay to step back; that it's okay not to control everything. We've become humble enough to allow others to have the spotlight, and I think that's grown more and more and more, and it's growing because our confidence in God and our confidence in each other. It's about trust and mutual respect; trust and honesty. It's about being honest where things haven't worked well, and being honest together and working through that together... It doesn't matter if you have a position or not... We are in it together. Titles or roles aren't particularly important; we all have a role to play.'

Here are some church leaders and members talking about steps they have taken to facilitate and make space for mutual discipling, along with what they've seen happen as a result.

IN CONVERSATION DURING AND AFTER CHURCH SERVICES

One church leader talked about how they have started having the coffee break halfway through the service, to create time and space for people to talk about what is happening in their lives – to communicate the significance of this, and that it is not just an after thought. Another talked about how they get people to turn to each other during the service to ask about what is happening in their lives, and how they can pray for them. A church leader and church member talked about what they are doing after services:

'We used to have a time of ministry at the front where people were invited for prayer, but the numbers who came forward for this were pretty small. So, now we encourage people to ask when they are chatting to someone at the end, 'How can I pray for you?', and to pray for them there and then.'

'One of the very special things here is that our coffee time after the service lasts about an hour. People bring packed lunches for their kids and high chairs; there's not a rushing away. As well as the usual superficial chats, there's far more space for conversation, and so you see huddles of prayer. You see people turning to someone they know and praying.'

THROUGH MENTORING

See further detail in Section 3 – 'Getting specific, getting personal'.

THROUGH SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIPS

'One of the ways of encouraging people in their spiritual life is to encourage them to relate to one or two other people more closely than they can in their small groups or in a congregational setting. And to have breakfast, to go out for a drink, and to really explore their spiritual life. That way we walk with Christ together in a way that maybe is a little less guarded, more open, more daring. And that, I think we're finding, is a really important context for people doing some frontline thinking'

THROUGH SMALL GROUPS

'Small groups particularly are places where a good leader will train people in these holy habits together, and it's a place to practice these together so that when we are on our own, we can do them on our own. Before, I had seen small groups mostly as places where you care for each other and for teaching. But this idea that it's in our small groups that we practice and learn these holy habits, these disciplines, that actually we

can then lift them out in our own lives in the community. So, those things like blessing, if we learn to bless each other and to be generous with each other and to pray for each other, what we do then is we are learning a practice that we can take out into the community and live with non-Christians. So those small groups are becoming places to practice and learn together to enable us to go out.'



IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCHES

Discipling is the task of the whole church. Being a disciple is not just growing and living out your faith where you are, it's also about being part of a mutually supporting and edifying community. Undoubtedly, church leaders have a significant role to play in discipling those in their churches, but the whole task does not fall solely on their shoulders.

Churches and the leaders of churches will sustain and develop WLD by encouraging and making space for one another discipling.

AN EMPHASIS ON PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY



This point links to one another ministry, but is not exactly the same, and therefore is worthy of being highlighted in its own right.

Amongst these churches, there is an increasing move away from what a number of them described as 'spoon-feeding', towards an approach that was often described as 'equipping'. They talked a lot about teaching people 'how to', and less about 'what to...'. It was not just the paid/ordained leaders saying this, but lay leaders and members of the congregations as well. When conducting the interviews with the congregation members, it was striking how much responsibility they were taking for their own growth and for their own effectiveness as disciples. Not in an 'I don't need anyone else' kind of way – they recognised and appreciated the input of others. But ultimately, they took responsibility for engaging with and applying inputs from others and from resources.

The following quotes from ordained and lay leaders exemplify something of this focus on equipping, and on expecting and encouraging people to take responsibility.

'Our fundamental approach is to help people think for themselves. I want to help people think for themselves. We can't tell people to read the Bible; we need to help them to know how to do it and how to pray and how to encounter God in their daily life. You can't just tell them to do it, because I'm not sure people know how to do that anymore... It's not spoon-feeding them, but teaching them how to be learners of Scripture themselves, rather than teaching them what they should believe. It's the difference between telling them what to do, and helping them know how to do that. I think that's what Jesus did.'

'I think there's been a general shift over time with a greater emphasis on personal responsibility – I think that's been key, threaded through all this... It's through teaching, and it's through the personal equipping and through focusing on people and listening to each other, just personal responsibility for faith and growth and discipleship – shifting away from attending and being fed, to participating and being an active member.'

One church leader, reflecting on people he sees really growing as whole-life disciples said:

'I think that there are people who are getting the truth that they are called by Christ to follow him wherever they are; to live out their faith in the detail of their lives... And what I see in those people is kind of the desire to really invest in their own spiritual wellbeing, their own spiritual lives, and to work out what this whole discipleship business is about in the situations they are in.'

Two church leaders highlighted the benefit that this approach to equipping has had upon disciples and the church community during lockdown/restrictions:

'I feel like some of the success of our children's work during covid has been due to the success of years of legwork of helping parents see themselves as the primary disciplers. We have got a very strong core of parents who see themselves as the primary disciplemakers of their children, and that has sustained us thus far.'

'Before covid, we had a strong feeling that we should be helping people learn to stand on their own two "faith-feet". We wanted to help people have the confidence to work things out for themselves; to open the Bible. Spiritual disciplines had faded and people weren't reading their Bibles or praying – and this was the big secret in the church. So, we felt we needed to return to that, to equipping.'

And so, another key ingredient that appears to sustain WLD within a church community is a commitment from everyone to take responsibility for their own growth as disciples. The leaders, structures, and ministries of the church are not primarily there to impart information or to do everything, but to catalyse, enable, and support growth.



IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCHES

If this is not already happening, think about what a move towards equipping would look like. Ensure that people aren't just being told what to do, but that together as a whole church, there are opportunities to learn how to do discipleship. Language and practices that might encourage and reinforce passivity should be avoided. Communicate and act in a way that encourages and enables everyone to take responsibility for their own growth.

**PERSISTENT
PERSUASION,
NOT CONTINUOUS
CONFLICT**



One of the questions we brought to this research process was around the type and intensity of resistance (if any) churches faced from within as they sought to embed a WLD culture. Of those from the eight churches we spoke to, none of them described out and out conflict or intense resistance. Some spoke of more of a 'passive resistance', or a kind of 'I'll let "the church" or the leaders do their thing, and I'll carry on doing mine.'

None of these churches were saying they have reached the point where everyone is appreciative of and engaging in a whole-life way of thinking and living, but most of them have reached a critical mass of people on board. Given the nature of the sample (churches who have managed to develop and sustain a whole-life approach over a period of three or more years), it is not surprising that they have made progress in growing this critical mass.

One church leader described what it was like early on in the journey:

'I think the initial bringing it to the congregation is the toughest part, because they have the same reaction that the leadership team had: "Well, we should be doing that anyway, we are doing that anyway." But, [we weren't] doing it, you know... If you had asked a month, or let's say six months after we started it, "Who wants to continue with this LICC whole life?" I think people would have said, "no"... I think it takes a long time to get in. I know one of our churches... I bet they were a good year before they even engaged with it properly.'

The leaders and congregation members we spoke to described a range of mindsets and objections to WLD within their churches. For some, there was a theological element to it; they had different views on what God's kingdom is about, what God is interested in, and what the role of the church should be. For others, people in the church have just got very used to thinking about things and doing things in a particular way, and they see a

shift from the status quo as unwanted and unnecessary. Others thought this all sounded like a whole new load of programs that would have to be implemented, when they were already busy enough.

Having listened to the ways advocates of WLD in these churches have responded to resistance and scepticism, it was striking how non-combative and un-confrontational their response has been. Undoubtedly, this is at least in part a reflection of the culture of these churches (and of 'church' more generally). That is not to say though that these advocates have been passive, it is more to say they adopt an approach we are describing here as 'persistent persuasion' rather than 'continual conflict'.

Many of the participants used the phrase 'drip-drip' to denote the way they (and/or leaders) have sought to get and keep WLD in the church's bloodstream.

These next two quotes, the first from an ordained leader and the second from a lay leader, reflect a sentiment we picked up from many others as well:

'It's still there because we constantly drip-feed it. I think that's the key, that you just have to constantly drip-feed this stuff with middle leaders like life-group leaders and the preachers to say let's always think how we are equipping people for out there in their lives. That's what I see as my role, to make sure this is always on the agenda.'

'The basic challenge is to get people to recognise the significance of whole-life discipleship. Just by presenting it in a multitude of ways again and again, to change people's thinking from "this is a great body and I love being here with my friends to worship; it's great, but it all kind of finishes when we walk out of the door, apart from a few fired up evangelists". I think there's just been a consistent drip-feeding which has changed the culture.'

Leaders (lay and ordained) have consistently talked about and modelled WLD over a significant period of time. They have continued to share stories, connect the Bible to people's daily lives, to encourage one another ministry, and so on because they are convinced WLD is the right way to go and that a significant number of people will embrace it over time.

They did report certain moments where they have had to answer specific questions, or tackle thorny questions – they don't seem to be shying away from them. They seem to be doing a really good job of explaining to people why this matters, and why they are doing the things they are doing. There is a sense that they are sticking to their guns, without being militaristic. They are convinced this is the right way to go, and they accept that not everybody in the church is necessarily going to agree.

'When I set up the [monthly family discipleship sessions], I had a lot of parents who just wanted to leave their kids at the door and get back into the main service for their time with God. It was quite a struggle. I was quite belligerent about this. Even now, we still have some people who just want the childcare and don't want to engage. Sometimes in church, you're not going to change that. You have to have tenacity and know that you're not going to win everyone over – but just keep going if you are convinced you have the right approach.'

Within this general strategy of persistent persuasion, leaders are finding a couple of tactics useful.

One is that rather than concentrating lots of time trying to convince those who are opposed, they invest more time in those who are on board with the WLD vision. We have observed this in other research and conversations, and it seems to be a fruitful way forward. That is not to say they don't go on trying to persuade, but is to say that persuasion takes place in the drip-drip

form described above. They know that by encouraging and developing those who embrace WLD, those people become models and advocates for the approach within the church. There is also a patience and humility undergirding this: it's okay for people to disagree and to take time to come around.

The other tactic shared by a number of leaders is to be very deliberate in communicating the whole-life message to newcomers. Leaders saw this as really important, as it makes it clear from the off what is valued in the church. Some do this 'onboarding' through welcome courses or meals they run periodically. Many talked about the importance of regularly repeating yourself from the front, consistently communicating a whole-life message through leading and teaching, ensuring that language such as 'frontline' is explained.

One of the churches in our sample (a relatively small church at the time) described a time that a significant number of people joined at the same time from another local church. The leaders had worked hard to embed a whole-life approach, with a particular emphasis on people sharing stories of God at work in their everyday life. They were aware that having so many people from another church that wasn't particularly focused on WLD could potentially water down the culture they had developed. So, they worked really hard not only to communicate the message to this new group, but to help them see how they were already living it out and getting them to share their stories. For example, one of these couples were quite influential within this group of new people, and they ran a small business. The leaders of the church took a real interest in them as people, and the business they ran, and got them to share their stories with the whole church of how God was with them and blessing them (and others) in their work.

As those seeking to sustain and develop a whole-life discipling culture within their church communities continue with 'persistent persuasion', by consistently communicating the message, investing in those who get it, and in newcomers, the approach goes broader and deeper. One church leader shared the encouragement he had received not long before we spoke to him.

'During this time [lockdown and restrictions], people are writing out prayers and sending them in, and then I read them out. Several people have talked about their new frontlines. That's really encouraging,

because it's been some of the older ones, some of the retired people who have sent these in. And that's been really encouraging, because they have been some of the slower ones to get this vision, and now they see it. And that's a real blessing. It shows it's part of church life. One of the ladies lives in semi-sheltered accommodation, and she now sees the people around her in the bubble as her frontline. They were before, but she didn't see it before. But now she is spending time only with them, she sees it. Another lady, in her late 70s, sees far more of her family – that's her bubble; her non-Christian family. Again, they were [her frontline] before, but she didn't see it.'



IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCHES

Every context is different, and the relational dynamics within each church community are unique. Handled well, conflict can lead to healing, growth, and fruitfulness. However, the approach these churches have adopted of 'persistent persuasion' rather than 'continuous conflict' seems to be serving them well.

Find ways to continually 'drip-drip' the message: say it in different ways, at different times, and utilise a range of voices. Invest time in those who get it, as they themselves become models and agents of change. And take the initiative to share this vision with people new to your community. Sometimes they will pick it up by osmosis, but clear, intentional communication is really important.



OUTSIDE
• INSPIRATION

With any topic, agenda, or approach, there is always the possibility for leaders and/or the community to become tired, distracted, demotivated, or frustrated. Sometimes, an injection of ideas and inspiration from outside of the community can be just what is needed. This was/is certainly the case in these churches.

Here are some of the different inputs these leaders and churches have found helpful. (Note: many of the examples shared involved inputs from LICC or people connected to LICC. As they shared these examples, some of these leaders said things along the lines of 'I'm not just saying this because I'm speaking to someone from LICC, but...')

EVENTS

Some leaders talked about the impact that attending LICC events had had on them, such as the International Forum and Bible Days. They described how these kinds of events provide encouragement, create connection, and catalyse their own thinking.

ONLINE/IN-PERSON DISCUSSION GROUPS AND FORUMS

As well as providing inspiration and ideas, these help those seeking to sustain WLD recognise they are not alone, that there are others walking the journey with them in other places. These can be great spaces to share and receive wisdom.

GUEST SPEAKERS

As one church leader put it, 'Usually, these people have a different style to me, and I guess as a guest speaker you can say what you like and leave without dealing with the mess. You can say things the regular pastors wouldn't always get away with.'

CONSULTANCY

As well as providing encouragement and ideas, having an outside consultant come in provides a fresh pair of eyes who can encourage the leaders/church in what they are doing well, as well as some ideas of how they could move things on.

With consultancy, there is more of an opportunity to deal with specific challenges or questions facing the community.

JOURNEYING WITH OTHERS

This may take place in forums and discussion groups, but it might involve networking with a small number (perhaps even just one) of other churches on the journey.

RESOURCES

Lots of different resources were mentioned, some from LICC, some not. They included books, podcasts, small group resources, websites, and more. While some of these lack the personal and interactive elements of the other inputs described, they can still be really helpful for providing ideas and deepening understanding.



IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCHES

Sustaining and developing a WLD culture is not easy. External inputs can be a great way of injecting energy, freshness, and life. What input might be helpful for leaders, and what inputs might be useful for the community as a whole (or for particular teams within the church)?



PART 2: **ON LEADERS**

Leadership ingredients for
whole-life discipling

A man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a white clerical shirt, is speaking into a black microphone. He is standing behind a wooden pulpit. The background is a dark wooden wall with intricate carvings. The text "THE SENIOR LEADER MUST BE ON BOARD" is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**THE SENIOR
LEADER MUST
BE ON BOARD**

In some of these churches, the genesis of whole-life discipling (WLD) within the community can be traced directly to one or a few members. In some, it was a lay or secondary minister who was catalytic. For others, it started with the senior leader. Yet whoever first brought the WLD vision into the life of the church, all the churches we spoke to demonstrated the significance of the senior leader 'getting', promoting, and sustaining whole-life discipling.

As one senior leader said:

'It really does help if the senior leader is convinced and drives this forward; that definitely makes a massive difference. If the senior leader isn't, or just acquiesces to it, it's a bit like pushing water uphill.'

It wasn't just senior leaders saying this about themselves either; this was very much the view coming from secondary leaders and congregation members too.

'I do think it's that foundation and reinforcement and application from the word from the front on a Sunday. That's the strongest single piece, and that comes down to [church leader] in one sense. His heart for this, and his ability – he recognises there are a number of things we have to focus on as a church – but that consistent drip-drip-drip from the front of the church over 18 years is absolutely key. Others have helped, and come and gone, but I think [church leader's] consistency and heart for it has been absolutely key... I can't get away from the whole thing about if your leader has a heart for something that that has a massive impact on stickability.'

Senior leaders, secondary leaders, and congregation members expressed a similar sentiment that while the senior leader absolutely must support whole-life discipling, it can't just be that single leader who shapes the culture.

Other leaders, leadership teams, lay leaders, and congregation members all have a significant part to play, both in terms of getting things going, and keeping things going:

'My vision 19 or 20 years ago was to send people out either as pastor-teachers, or as missionaries for pioneer evangelism.... Then one guy came up to me after a while of me saying this – a guy I really respect – and he said something like this: "What about most of us most of the time? We are not going to be pastor-teachers or overseas missionaries, and most of us are already witnesses in the workplace." I was going to excommunicate him because he was challenging my vision [laughs]. But on reflection, it's absolutely true, and I hadn't grasped it. It took me a little while to come to terms with it, but it's absolutely true: we don't send out many pioneer missionaries. In fact, I don't know if we've sent out any. And over the years we've sent out a number of pastor-teachers, but that probably happens once every few years so we've got all these people in their workplaces or their communities every single day, and I realise they will meet more unbelievers in a single day than most pastor-teachers will meet in a whole month. So that began to change my thinking quite a bit... It's strange really, because I got it through members of the congregation, so I already had some allies in the congregation.'

'So, the frontline team was set up, including myself and a few others. And that's been a really important catalyst for us as a church, and [congregation member] has been a really good facilitator of that, keeping on provoking me when it's needed, or the church.'

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERS

If you want to see change happen, make sure the main leaders are actively involved in the process. They should not be the only ones involved in the process, but they must be involved in the process.

A close-up photograph of a young woman and an elderly woman. The young woman, on the left, is seen in profile, wearing a brown textured sweater and a large ring. She is holding the hand of the elderly woman. The elderly woman, on the right, is looking towards the young woman with a gentle expression. She has short, wavy grey hair and is wearing a multi-strand pearl necklace, a pearl earring, and a light-colored cable-knit cardigan. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting with trees.

CHARACTER MATTERS

When seeking to implement and sustain any kind of change, the temptation can be to jump straight to methods: 'How do we do this?' Yet something we have observed in other settings that came through very strongly in this research, is that the character of the leaders is paramount.

It goes without saying that many non-WLD-focused leaders will demonstrate some or all of these traits, but all of the leaders participating in this study demonstrated character we could describe using the following terms:

- **They lead alongside** – these leaders do not see themselves as being over and above the congregation. Yes, they have a leadership role within the community of faith, but they are very much in that community of faith.
- **They are humble** – for some of these leaders, beginning a whole-life journey meant a complete rethink of what ministry is about. Some of them changed as a result of church members highlighting the deficiency of their previous models. That listening and changing requires humility! There was no hint of self-aggrandisement in the way these leaders talked about what was happening in, through, and around them. Secure in their callings, they can focus on serving others.
- **They are releasing** – one of their greatest joys and focuses is the releasing of others into the ministry God has for them, wherever that may be. They recognise they are there to serve the body, not the other way round.
- **They are human** – while all of the leaders we spoke to were clearly good leaders, they are not superhuman. They are normal people, who relate naturally to those in their congregations.
- **They are authentic** – all of these leaders want to live this kind of life themselves, as well as equip others for it. They are comfortable and willing to talk about their victories as well as their defeats, their strengths as well as their struggles.
- **They are Christ-centred** – unprompted, many of them spoke of their love and passion for Jesus: their desire to glorify him, their willingness to serve him, the inspiration they draw from his character and ways, and the way they share Jesus' desire to bring people into his kingdom.

At some points in the interviews, leaders explicitly stated some of these things about themselves:

'It's so important that I'm spiritually resourced. If I'm not growing as a disciple of Jesus, I'm a fraud because I'm not ministering from a place of authenticity. And if I run dry and I'm not growing it's hard to encourage other people to dig into their relationship with Jesus. So, it's about making sure I've got good spiritual disciplines in place. As clergy, it would be possible for me to work every minute of every hour every day, but I want to model good balance in life. I have quite a large capacity for work, but I want to be with my family and have fun and see my friends, so it's important for my own well being and it's important for me to model good discipleship.'

'I see my job in light of Ephesians 4; that I'm here to equip people for their works of ministry, wherever they are.'

'We don't take ourselves very seriously. We laugh a lot. But we take God very seriously. I think it's about where you position yourself as a church leader. In [my denomination], you have the [church leader] who is held in awe, apart from everyone else. They are the one who can 'do the ministry' and everyone else sits there while they do it. I position myself at completely the other end of the spectrum, where I say 'We're all just in this together'. I think that's also about the way I share my vulnerabilities too.'

'I get more satisfaction from seeing congregation members released into their ministry and flourishing, rather than me standing up and seeing my ministry flourishing... I think it's that leading alongside, that's the posture this should be done in, I think.'

'I love the church, seeing it flourish and thrive. That's what gets me up in the morning; helping people recognise their gifts and seeing how these can be used inside and outside of the church. I love seeing people develop.'

At many points, these attitudes and virtues were implicit in what they were saying, as well as in what they were not saying. They were quick to emphasise the important role played by others, they weren't over-reliant on their own judgements, they alluded to the help God gives.

'I would probably give us a six out of 10, or five and a half out of 10. There's definitely more to do... We are a work in progress. I don't want to overstate what we are doing; we are far from the finished article.'

Importantly, these characteristics weren't just displayed explicitly or implicitly by the leaders, or solely picked up by the intuition of the researchers – others in their churches recognised and appreciated these qualities too:

'[Church leader] has done an amazing job of releasing people, of releasing me. We don't put the leaders on pedestals; they are real people... Because he is real, and because [other leaders] are real, they connect in a deeper way than others I've had. It makes them feel more approachable, even though they are obviously busy. That then feeds down; it encourages people to be real and talk about what they do.'



IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERS

Within this, there is an encouragement to some leaders, and a challenge to others. For leaders who already exemplify this kind of Christ-like character, they already have a lot of what they need to give themselves and their church community the best chance of developing a healthy WLD culture. Leaders like this are more likely to have the trust and respect of their people required to lead to this kind of change.

Yet for leaders who are not growing in and exhibiting these virtues, there is the challenge that you can't cut corners when it comes to character. Change within a community is not purely mechanistic; it is not merely following the right procedures. People follow people. Culture is personal.

A person with long brown hair, wearing a grey jacket, a red skirt, black leggings, and tan boots, is seen from behind. They are carrying a large brown backpack and are standing on a stone path, looking out through a large, arched stone opening. The archway is made of rough-hewn stone and brick. The view through the archway shows a dense, lush green forest with many trees and bushes. The lighting is soft, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

A THEOLOGICAL POINT OF NO RETURN

It was fascinating to listen to the many ways these leaders became convinced that making whole-life disciples is imperative. Some were convinced by listening to the likes of LICC's Mark Greene or Neil Hudson. Others picked it up when they were younger, from older Christians within their church community or family. Some were influenced by books. Others by people in their church. Some had epiphanies as they were going about their work, or as they reflected on it. Others were shaped by college tutors. Scripture played an important part in all of their journeys.

Yet whatever factors were in play, all of them arrived at a point of no return. As one said, it 'is difficult to think of discipleship in any other way.' Another leader, when asked why they had a whole-life take on discipleship, said, 'My question would be, what's the alternative then? Part-time discipleship?'

Leading a church on a whole-life journey, keeping that journey going, and developing things along the way is not easy. Church leaders face a number of challenges; the whole-life focus does not make their lives easier! Yet this deep theological and logical conviction yields sustaining power. And not just a gritty determination, but joy and love and excitement. WLD is in their bones. The following quotes reveal something of the journey, the depth, and the passion these leaders have for making disciples.

'I think whole-life discipleship is just following Jesus, and anything else is not following Jesus. He gave his life for us! Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all. So, it's not a new concept. The apostles did not teach a synagogue faith, but a whole-life thing. Augustine knew it was a whole-life thing. [It] makes me a bit sad that people might think that following Jesus is just a Sunday thing... But realising Jesus is the best thing in the world, and to realise living for him is the most fulfilling and satisfying thing – there will be all sorts of costs – but to live for Jesus is more

rewarding than any other way of life. So why on earth would I not want anyone else to live that kind of life? Why would I not want their homes to be Christ-centred? Because it's the most satisfying, fulfilling, delightful way to live.'

'It's giving people that vision: this is how to make the Christian life exciting; this is how we find joy in the Christian life... I think this is about leading people into an adventure, is how I want to describe it... It's not another chore, it's not that I've got to go out and share my faith in the workplace and if I don't I'm not a good Christian. It's about going on an adventure with God and the Holy Spirit and seeing how God uses you.'

'You just have to look at what Jesus did and how he did it. Most of the time what he did was outside of the church with ordinary people. Jesus cared about ordinary people, people who had been told they were second-class citizens, and I find that inspiring. I want our church to be like that, and that's our motto, to be like Jesus.'

Several of these leaders shared how WLD offered a more biblical, life-affirming, and missionally-effective way of thinking about the ministry and mission of the church. They experience that sense of 'we can't stay here', and that helped them move from A to B.

'Their life outside of church matters. Whereas before, I thought I just had to prepare people for glory. Now I realise I have to prepare them for life. It's not just avoiding a glory-less eternity and getting to heaven – it's actually surviving and thriving on your frontline, wherever you are at this time. I just see it there in the Bible; it's everywhere. And certainly throughout the Old Testament as well. It's unavoidable. So that's what's kept me going. Also just looking at the evidence; often people come to faith through somebody at work or somebody

in their neighbourhood... The old model of just thinking about Sunday and maybe once more in the week, but not thinking about the workplace doesn't work anymore.'

[Describing a realisation at a prayer meeting in the build-up to Christmas] 'At a Christmas service, we might get 20 people [who are not Christians] come to the service... And while we still have our Christmas services, and I think the church should put on these things because they can do things that an individual Christian can't. But why do we pray so much about these meetings and forget about it 51 weeks of the year, when actually, it can be Christmas for 365 days a year?!'

'For me, it's just a belief that it's the right way to do it. It's what I see in Scripture, and also it's just common sense. It makes sense. Having spent a significant proportion of my life in churches where I struggled to see the connection between my everyday life and my Christian life – they had become quite split between the two – I remember those first times of hearing Neil and he talked about the sacred-secular divide, and it made me think, 'Oh yes, that makes sense. I can see that'.



IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERS

If you want to go far, then you have to go deep. Whatever stage of the journey you are at (exploring, early implementation, a few years down the road), get your roots deep down into Scripture. Listen to/read LICC materials, read books, listen to or read anything that will help you develop a strong whole-life theology. Consider why a WLD approach is biblical, makes better disciples, and advances the mission of God.

A man with short brown hair and a light beard is sitting and looking towards the right, engaged in conversation. He is wearing a dark green button-down shirt. His hands are clasped in his lap. In the foreground, the back of a person's head and shoulder are visible, out of focus. The background is a warm, light-colored wall.

CONSISTENTLY LEARNING
ABOUT PEOPLE'S LIVES

A hallmark of all of the leaders we interviewed is they consciously and consistently take time to learn about what is happening in people's everyday lives. They are genuinely interested in who people are, what they get up to, the challenges they face, the ways they are being fruitful. There is no sense in which they are just looking for sermon illustrations; they really do care about people and want to learn about their lives.

We will explore the benefits of this practice below, but first the 'how'. How do they learn about people's lives?

These leaders listen in lots of different ways. Some of them are more naturally 'relational' than others. But they all find ways to listen. In their own words, here are some ways of listening these leaders have found helpful:

'Something I've started doing is emailing out a page of my directory and asking "what can I pray for you?" And I'm learning by their responses, and what they ask me to pray for, I'm learning a lot about their lives... I think just taking a few people each week, that way you learn an awful lot about people.'

'There's a Friday Bible study I could just not be a part of because it doesn't require me to be there. But it's a great place for me to hear about what is happening in people's lives. I go to some seminars on doing ministry in churches with multi-ethnic congregations, and they are helpful to an extent. But I genuinely learn more just from talking to people and having ongoing relationships with people. I am naturally a task-orientated person, and I have to fight that. In ministry you need to make time for the person who wants to chat, because that is ministry, that is learning about people. I think asking good questions is really important. Listen well and show people physically that you are listening well, and you just learn stuff. You have to be in it for the long haul and gain people's trust.'

'On a Sunday I would stand by the door and you get to know people through the little snippets of conversation. Who is a great dog-walker on their frontline? People see walking their dog as their frontline, as they meet people in the park and so on. So, I probably have a conversation about the dog, and get to know about the veterinary fees. I get to know people deeper beyond just their church attendance. You get to know about what people do. We've got quite a few people who travel a lot for work, to America, the Far East, Europe and so on. So, I'd get to know what they did on the aeroplane.'

In what they say, it's clear that these leaders find ways to listen because they value people, and they recognise the value of listening to them. Other ways these church leaders have learned about people's lives include frontline visits, congregational questionnaires, and This Time Tomorrow (TTT) slots or similar.

The effect of church leaders showing such interest in people's lives clearly made a significant difference to the congregation members themselves, and on their relationships with their leaders. One working mum spoke very movingly about how much she appreciated the way her church leaders value her as a whole person, and not just a church person. In a previous church, she had been made to feel that her work was more of a distraction, an inconvenience, rather than a valuable part of her life. It meant so much to her that in the church she is now in, the leaders take time to find out about how her working life is going, and invite her to share knowledge and experiences from her working life with the church and the leaders. This has been massively affirming.

In that same church, a lady who works in a university department spoke of the way it made her feel so valued to have one of the pastors visit her in her workplace.

Here is what three other congregation members from three other churches said about the significance of church leaders taking a genuine interest in their whole lives:

'If you have a church leader who is utterly preoccupied with what happens within the four walls of the building – the church's programmes – then their interest in you wanes when it's not to do with stuff that's happening in the church. But when they are interested in your whole-life discipleship, your interaction with them is much more whole-life, more full. When we get together and talk, we are as likely to talk about my situation at work as we are about church-based ministry. In that sense, it's a better relationship because it's fuller and you're talking about more of your life and you're sharing more about your life and you don't feel like you've got to put on the shiny happiness, because when they ask how are things, you can say work is a bit of a struggle, or I've got a trip coming up which I'm a bit nervous about.'

'The thing that made a big impact on me is my friend runs an amazing educational charity... The last minister, I don't think he ever set foot in there once, even though it's only two miles from the church. [The current church leader] leads prayers there every Monday morning... We've had people who came to work there who weren't Christians who became Christians, and got involved in youth work... [The current church leader] has embraced it, and I think for [friend who runs the charity] it's been transformational. It may be a coincidence, but the charity has gone from not being very successful to being unbelievably successful... [My friend] has become a lot more confident and just feels more empowered.'

'I think it's good that [church leader] knows what people do. It makes you feel that he wants to know you as a person and that he is interested. I think there's nothing worse than feeling as if your vicar and your wider clergy don't know you.'

Having looked at how church leaders learn about the lives of their congregation, and the affirming effect that listening has on people in churches, we now turn to the difference this learning makes to the leaders themselves and the way it sustains their discipling.

Having listened to these leaders talk about the role listening and learning plays, it became apparent that it serves a double function. Learning about people's everyday lives helps them with the 'what' of making whole-life disciples, as well as the 'why'.

First, the 'what'. On the whole, church leaders tend to know the Bible pretty well, they know how church communities function, and they know what their own lives are like. They often know a lot about who is good at what within the life of the gathered church, and the pain and scars people carry. What they tend to know less about is what Alice the freelance consultant actually does at 3 o'clock on a Thursday afternoon. What are the challenges, pressures, and temptations of people in their workplaces, friendship groups, and other arenas of life? What opportunities do they have to show and share Christ? What are the cultures like in places where people spend their days, and how are people in their churches shaping these cultures (and being shaped by them)?

In one of the interviews, a church leader was reflecting on the significance of 1 Corinthians 7:17: 'Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.' He explained that if he is to meaningfully help people live as believers in their situations, 'I need to know about their everyday situations because

everybody else's everyday situation is not the same as mine. Because I deal with Christians 90% of my time.' He went on, 'So, I need to explore their everyday situation and then find ways to connect what it means for them to live as a believer in that situation, and then find ways of helping them to understand a sense of calling, rather than just a job or a life situation.'

Stating it as a negative, one church leader could not have been blunter in the way she talked about the importance knowing people's lives in the pursuit of meaningful discipling: 'As soon as you don't know what is going on in people's lives, you are pastorally irrelevant.' If a whole-life disciple is someone learning to follow the ways of Jesus in this place at this time, it's very hard to meaningfully disciple someone if you know little of their place and time.

So, when a church leader does know something of the fabric of people's lives, they can begin to address the broad range of challenges and opportunities people face. They can go beyond the areas church leaders are traditionally good at speaking into (namely personal ills and gathered skills) and can minister wisely into more areas of their congregants' lived realities.

Then second, the 'why'. Discovering what is happening in people's lives has become one of the main motivating factors for virtually all of the leaders interviewed. When leaders know what is going on in the everyday lives of their people, they find it hard to not care, to not affirm and encourage and teach and challenge with those things in mind. As they find out more about people's lives, they see ways that the life of Jesus is being lived, and how it could be lived even more. And when leaders hear about the great things people are doing, they can't help but be inspired. Learning about people's lives keeps the whole of life on their radar. And learning about people's lives becomes fuel for the journey.

These quotes are just a small selection of many that could be used to show just how motivating and inspiring learning about people's lives can be for leaders:

'Sometimes I look out at the congregation and I'm just so aware of all the things people are facing, and that really moves me.'

'Seeing people walk closely with Jesus in whatever aspect of life it might be. That gives me real encouragement. [This leader went on to explain the circumstances of an older lady in the church whose husband has dementia] She emailed me yesterday. She recognises that she is serving Jesus when she is putting his socks on, and answering the same question 20 times a day. It's not glamorous work, but it's kingdom work.'

'I sometimes feel really excited that [place name] is this big city, and [the congregation] go back to their community, and they are battered there by the world's agenda. But they are salt and light there: in that home, in that suburb, on that estate. That's just thrilling. So, coming back to church life, the rhythm is coming back to our meetings on Wednesday nights, coming back to the meetings on a Sunday, to share the results of their victories, to be healed from their wounds, and to be held accountable in the temptations. So that's what keeps me going, that rhythm of church life. We try to feed people, prepare people, ask questions of people about how their frontline is going. Every Sunday is a commissioning service, in that we are sending them back out the frontline. So, it's that rhythm of church life that keeps me going.'

'When they share stories not just about what's going on in church and their personal/private life, but where they see God at work in their workplace. That's what I think is the really encouraging thing. And you feel, "Yeah, we're getting into the heart of what this is all about."'

There is a very real sense in which learning about people's everyday lives enriches and makes sense of the gathered ministry of the church. The time church leaders spend with people takes on much greater significance in the light of what God is doing in and through people in their scattered lives.

In and of itself, this was an encouraging finding. It took on even greater meaning in light of a challenge to sustaining a WLD approach raised by at least three of the research participants. Here is the problem, articulated by one church member:

'I think the mystery of what goes on in people's private lives and their frontlines is one of the great mysteries. You're kind of working a little bit in faith and trust. In one sense it is less visible than the geographical location around [the church building] and the impact you can have there. It is less visible than the work that goes on in the church rota. I think that is one of the challenges of [equipping for] the frontline. I think that's perhaps why some churches get a little bit disillusioned with it, because it's actually

really hard to see the fruit or even to see how people are actually living it out in reality.'

Sight and motivation are inextricably linked. If a person can see the fruit of their labour, they are more inclined to keep doing that thing. But if they work hard and the results are invisible, and therefore unknown, remaining motivated and focused on the task becomes more difficult.

So, there is great purpose in church leaders taking time to find out what is happening in people's lives; to hear how they are living as disciples. It's important for them to know how the ministry of the gathered church connects with people's scattered lives. When this is unknown, leaders are less likely to keep making the effort to equip and encourage people for life 'out there'. But when the challenges, opportunities, and victories are brought to light; when leaders can see the impact of their congregations 'out there', the motivation to maintain an emphasis on WLD is inevitably strengthened.



IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERS

Make learning about people's everyday lives a top priority. Assume the posture of a learner. If you want to disciple people for the contexts they are in, you need to learn about your people in context. And if you want to stay motivated for the long-haul, make a consistent effort to discover what is happening in their lives. It will motivate you to want to keep partnering with them in their own growth and mission, and you will be amazed by what God is doing in people's lives. Find ways to listen that work in your church community. And as well as adopting/reinforcing this posture of listening, perhaps set some goals: once a week I/we will..., Every month I/we will...

A man with short, light-colored hair is standing at a black podium, speaking into a headset microphone. He is wearing a light blue button-down shirt under a dark grey blazer, with a brown leather belt. His hands are resting on the podium. The background is a stage with warm, reddish-brown lighting and several vertical light fixtures.

TRAIN MIDDLE LEADERS

As stated in point 1 in this section on leaders, for WLD to really become embedded in the life of the church, it must not simply remain the preserve of a single leader, or even a few leaders 'at the top'. A consistent approach must be adopted in all areas of ministry: in small groups, the pastoral team, youth and children's workers, regular preachers, service leaders, worship leaders, and so forth. What they say and do will either develop and reinforce WLD, or it will undermine it. These middle leaders play a key role in shaping culture.

The leaders we interviewed in this research recognise this, and therefore they are deliberate in the way they communicate with and train middle leaders, as the below quotes from two separate leaders show:

'This is where you have to be quite deliberate with lay leaders. You have to make sure people have the DNA so they can pass it on. Twice a year, we bring all of our leaders together on a Saturday morning to think about the vision, and about half come. We do leadership visionary training, so they are reminded of the vision in that focused way.'

'We didn't want to have special interest groups. If we do something we want to do it together and be a church together in doing this. And that's quite difficult with the size of the church. We wanted to put something into mainstream church life. So, we got together with all our small group leaders, and showed them the videos over six or eight weeks, and we went through the discussion guide. Then we made sure, as much as we could, that they actually got this vision; that they got the importance of this. Because they were the ones who would run it with their small groups. So, if they weren't convinced by it, the people they would show this to wouldn't be convinced by it.'

In one conversation, a church leader confided that there can be a temptation to try to do everything yourself. He recognised this temptation, and was doing a really good job of training middle leaders. Another leader talked about how training other leaders takes a long time, but that in the long run, it's essential in sustaining and developing WLD.

'Rather than me meeting up personally with four people in the church to do some whole-life discipleship stuff, I have to think about how can I equip the small group leaders and other influential people within the church to have that mindset in the way they lead their groups and influence people. And even how do I invest in the other staff who will invest in those leaders. That takes a lot longer, and has a much longer lead-time, but that way you are shaping the lives of hundreds of people, rather than a few people. But it takes a longer period of time. As well as being strategic, I try to listen to the prompts of the Spirit, even if those prompts don't seem very strategic. Sometimes, I just sense the Spirit prompting me to invest in someone, even though it might not seem very strategic.'

There is a helpful model in here, about the importance of doing the behind-the-scenes, more strategic stuff, but still doing those other things that God prompts you to do, like meeting up with particular individuals. It holds together training middle leaders with getting personal and specific.



IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERS

It's really important to invest time in training middle leaders. This is a time-consuming process, but it will help spread, embed, and develop WLD within the church community. It means there will be a consistent message in every area of gathered church life. It means discipling will be happening in more of the encounters people have within gathered church. In addition to that, more ideas will be generated, more perspectives will be shared, and there are more people to help keep it going.

Spiritual practices

A fruitful area for churches and LICC to explore further

A number of the church members we spoke to talked about the significance of spiritual practices/disciplines in how they view life, and how they live it. One lady talked about how she notices a huge difference in her attitude towards other people, and the way she views her role in the world when her devotional life is strong. Some are finding the Lectio 365 app helpful. Another member talked about the benefits of reflective practices such as the prayer of Examen. For her, practices such as this go deeper than just cognitive processes, as the quote from her shows:

'The other thing that's been good is the Examen prayer, which is about asking where has God been today and where have I missed him and what does God wants for me tomorrow. For me it's a prayer of integration, it's a theology of God in all things. It's personal relationship with God, and how God is in all of life.'

There was a clear desire amongst the church leaders that this would be true for everyone in their churches, that they will be engaging in spiritual disciplines, making connections between them and how they live their whole lives. And whilst acknowledging a few bright spots, they recognise that many in their congregations are not doing this, as this comment from one church leader regarding biblical literacy shows:

'Churches like ours are constantly challenged by biblical literacy – people who become Christians or even people who have grown up in a certain wing of the church and you discover them at student age and they know nothing really. They love Jesus, they get it. They know the basic gospel, but the depth is so shallow. [We need to ensure] that we are giving them opportunities to get to know Jesus through the Bible, to grow in depth, and to handle it well in our culture.'

There was no consistent pattern across these eight churches in terms of what they are doing to help people develop spiritual practices to grow them as whole-life disciples. Some described the way they are developing this area, and the fruit they are seeing as a result (e.g. through small groups, resources, prayer weeks, mentoring, spiritual friendships, teaching). Others said that it is an area they really need to think about more. These churches encourage and sometimes equip people in areas such as prayer and Bible study, but they haven't made explicit links between such practices and how people pray for and live on their frontlines.

Through the interviews, it feels like we have done a shallow dig, and the top of a large wooden chest has become visible. It's clear that spiritual practices can make a substantial difference in the life of individuals and church communities in terms of growing them as whole-life disciples (there is plenty of material beyond this research to more than suggest that!). Our hunch is that church communities and individual frontline Christians could and would be massively strengthened through development in this area.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERS

It is likely there will be lots of people within the church who are not regularly engaging in spiritual practices. Many people need help and motivation to know how to get started. Those who do have a regular pattern will undoubtedly be benefiting from this. But even then, they probably need some help in making a stronger, more explicit connection between their praying/reading/singing/whatever and the life they are living. Consider what teaching, training, encouraging, and resourcing might be required to strengthen this area.

Afterword: what next?

CONTINUE LEARNING WITH FURTHER LICC RESEARCH

If you've found this research inspiring, check out *Making Disciples*, a research report full of practical advice produced by LICC in partnership with Elim. It was commissioned to identify which good practices really help disciples to be formed most effectively. Read the executive summary and download the full report at licc.org.uk/elimresearch.

Plus, keep your eyes peeled for future research from LICC on the hallmarks of a frontline-friendly church – and how to cultivate a culture that releases people into the roles God has for them in daily life.

EXPLORE MORE DEEPLY WITH PEERS IN A LEARNING HUB

If you want to continue exploring how to make whole-life disciples in your church, LICC's Learning Hubs are a great way to do it.

Alongside leaders from other churches in your area or network, you'll go deeper into the theology behind whole-life discipling, and how it fits in with God's great plan for the world. Together you'll explore how you, your leadership team, and your whole church community can shape your services, small groups, and church culture to equip people for mission – wherever they are, whatever they do.

You'll be led on the journey by our dedicated church consultants – people who live and breathe whole-life discipling. People who don't just know the theory, but have experience of working it out in their own churches, day by day. Find out more at bit.ly/licclearninghubs

GET IN TOUCH

If you'd like to chat about Learning Hubs, or anything else to do with making whole-life disciples in your church, we'd love to hear from you. Get in touch with Ken Benjamin, our Director of Church Relationships, at ken.benjamin@licc.org.uk, or Lyn Weston, our Director of Church of England Relations, at lyn.weston@licc.org.uk.

Plus, if you have any questions regarding this research, you can contact the author Joe Warton at joe.warton@licc.org.uk.

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Joe is an experienced writer, speaker, and researcher, focusing on how to help churches grow and sustain a whole-life discipling culture. He loves uncovering stories of fruitfulness in the lives of individuals and churches, and helping LICC tell those stories to inspire others. He also works with the wider LICC team to develop resources that help Christians discover the thrill of whole-life discipleship, and explore the impact of our training and resources. He's worked as a discipleship pastor in two local churches, and is currently on the leadership team at Godmanchester Baptist Church.



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