

4.0 DISCIPLE-MAKING AND CHRISTIAN FAMILY LIFE

One of the most obvious opportunities that we are being given in this uncertain time is to commit to the training and support of Christian Family Life. The church has long been known for its commitment to forming disciples of Jesus in the home, but the parents in our congregations may not have been led to form a Christ-centered marriage and are, therefore, unlikely to know what it means to form a Christ-centered family. Anglicans have long held a high view of Christian community and the fellowship that is required in order for people to become formed as Jesus followers. However, there are more steps that we can and must take, and if we hope to see the next generation of leaders emerge equipped to lead the church, we have to begin with young men and women who are considering marriage. What I mean is that college and university ministry is about more than gathering students for a worship service. Men and women seeking marriage from our pastors need to be drawn effectively into a long season of discipleship through processes that address the real questions of how to live as a Christian in a secular world. Marriages, young and old, need strong mentoring and support before the couple ends up in the pastor's office looking for a blessing on their contemplated divorce.

Family Life: Discipling the Young:

This effort will lead us to consider how we understand formation for children who grow up in our congregations. Elementary age children need to spend time in intensive experiences of formation to add to their weekly family discipleship group where their parents are leading them into the presence of God through worship, study and action. Empty nesters can invest in others because they have learned how to love beyond the hurts of life and can facilitate deeper commitment and hope in the younger or the struggling. By itself, Sunday school is woefully inadequate to form Christian disciples if we are relying on a one-hour Sunday morning program to shape our children as Jesus followers. It can add greatly to a robust family life development approach to Christian living but the best disciples allow others into their lives where they are making daily decisions for Christ and this is best done in the home and around the neighborhood.

Christian Marriage:

In simple terms: Christian marriages, effectively supported so that the husband and wife are stimulated in their growth as disciples, may then apply what they learn in the context of their family when the Lord graces them with children. Forming young Christians in the home needs to become normative and how we prioritize this work will go a long way toward defining congregation development. It will impact not only what we consider important and invest ourselves in, but also how we approach the task of doing and being the church. We will need everyone's participation in a process as comprehensive as this one, but it is the most effective means of making disciples because it involves all of the people who are the most important to one another. When we participate in marriage services and the pastor asks, "Will you do all in your power to support these two persons in their marriage?" we all say, "We will." And, when we ask the congregation to support the

newly baptized in his or her life in Christ, we say, “We will.” And yet, we may not have developed the daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual methods that will allow us to be accountable for what we so easily promise.

Christian marriage is just one key building block of the Temple that Jesus is erecting with himself as the chief cornerstone (1Peter 2:6-7) and the local church is the best, and perhaps only, environment that has a meaningful chance of offering to people the Way, the Truth and the Life. We are developing relationships and commitment to Kingdom Life in this season of ministry together that will lead us, by God’s grace, to a more focused approach to Christian discipleship. Pastors are being invited to refresh their vision for Christian discipleship because pastors provide the leadership that gives everyone else the courage to mature in Christ. Paul speaks clearly and cogently to our time in his words to the Ephesian church:

“It was he (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”
(Ephesians 4:11-12)

Prayer:

We are people of prayer because we are a people at prayer. Please take advantage of the Litany for Marriage and use it regularly in your worship services. Leading people through seasons of change is difficult and it requires much patience on everyone’s part. This litany or collects and prayers for marriage, used regularly in worship services and at home, may help you to draw your people into the Presence of the Lord so the He may prepare them for the changes that are now being brought to bear on all of us. Call your people to pray for you and your leadership team that you might lead in the power of the Holy Spirit, giving you the words to speak when you introduce the irreligious to life in community with Him. To God be the glory!