

Discipleship in the Church of Ireland: A Theological and Practical Examination of Discipleship and its Importance to Christian Development

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Abstract

Discipleship is a term in prolific use in contemporary Church culture. However, it is not without its critics who declare that such terms as 'disciple' and 'discipleship' belong in the day of Jesus' earthly ministry. Thankfully these individuals, some of whom are ordained clergy, are very much in the minority. The importance discipleship plays in a modern day disciple's life is the same as it was when Jesus called his twelve disciples to follow him – it is imperative.

Using the tools of Biblical theology this dissertation explores the actual meaning of the term 'disciple' and views it through the lens of Jesus' teaching and ministry. Theological and pastoral resources are used to explore the landscapes of discipleship in contemporary culture and the landscape of discipleship in the Church of Ireland context.

The wider Church is examined to establish current discipleship models. How these models are formed, influenced and evaluated as to their effectiveness is explored and contrasted in light of Jesus' model of discipleship.

Discipleship within Church of Ireland is discussed from both a theoretical manner in terms of that Church's stance on discipleship, and practically through examination of synod reports and field research obtained during my internship year. Although the synod report is a stark warning that numbers and participation are in decline, there is evidence of green shoots in terms of life and growth on parish level.

The Church of Ireland in the 21st Century has much to be grateful for in terms of the rich heritage, doctrine and faithfulness passed down to it from previous generations. However, to remain faithful and fruitful it must continue to find ways to remain relevant in the culture it finds itself so that it may continue to teach Jesus' command to 'make disciples'.