

GROWING

Participation

A FLOW OF DISCIPLESHIP

The Growing Good research¹ recognised that “participation in social action (including any of the activities a church might offer for their neighbours) can also offer a practical route into faith for people who weren’t previously part of the church community and might not have considered exploring faith before.”

What can churches do to encourage this journey?

The Centre for Theology and Community (CTC) have described a model of ‘intentional discipleship’ that supports the progression of deeper church participation, which not only increases participation in church but also a stronger sense of connection and engagement with the community around them. This draws on the power of faith-filled community that enables “roots down” even more deeply in one’s own faith while taking “walls down” to grow in solidarity, trust, and knowledge of people across lines of difference. It is rooted in the centrality of prayer, the value of patience and a focus on the development of people.

This new tool from CUF and CTC helps churches grow in confidence in enabling journeys of deepening participation and discipleship, and grow meaningful connections through intentional conversations.

This tool can be used by:

- Church leaders and leadership teams, to think intentionally about engaging the wider parish community and how they can take steps to increase participation and develop disciples.
- Individuals, both within the congregation and on the fringes, as they reflect on their own journeys.

This tool comes in two sections:

1. Participation and discipleship:

Reflections and questions to help you think about participation and your journey of discipleship.

2. Intentional conversation questions:

A set of questions that encourage deeper listening and conversations to build a relational and participatory culture.

How to use

Each section includes an introduction, some questions, and a short case study film. You could work through these in a small group – perhaps over two sessions, in pairs or as an individual. You might want to start and/or finish with a short time of prayer or silence. You could then revisit the exercises and questions at a later point to reflect on what might have changed for you and those around you as a result of using this tool.

¹ <https://growing-good.org.uk/uploads/img/CUF-GRACE-Report-2020.pdf>



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Discipleship

Discipleship is about following Jesus, learning from him, and helping others do the same. It's a lifelong journey, not a programme to complete. The sacraments of baptism and confirmation can be important way-markers on the journey, as can getting involved in acts of service or challenging injustice, a deepening experience of prayer and sharing fellowship with other Christians on Sundays and at other times. All these help anchor and sustain discipleship.

Wherever we are in our journey of faith, participating in church life and community action allows us to use our gifts for others. Research from Growing Good shows that participation can deepen discipleship—even for long-time church members.

As we participate in community engagement, service and local action for justice, we have the opportunity to grow in humility, perseverance, prayer, and commitment.

Questions for reflection or discussion

- What does being a follower of Jesus mean to you?
- How would you describe your faith journey?
- What experiences, people or practices have helped or hindered your growth?
- How does serving others and acting for justice connect with and shape your faith and discipleship?
- How has your faith led to action in the church or community?

Growing Participation:

A flow of discipleship diagram

Discipleship and participation grow together. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul reminds us that in the church we are a body where everyone has a role, a gift and a part to play. Discipleship means discovering and using those gifts to serve and build up the church.

Community organising supports individuals in developing their gifts and leadership alongside others.

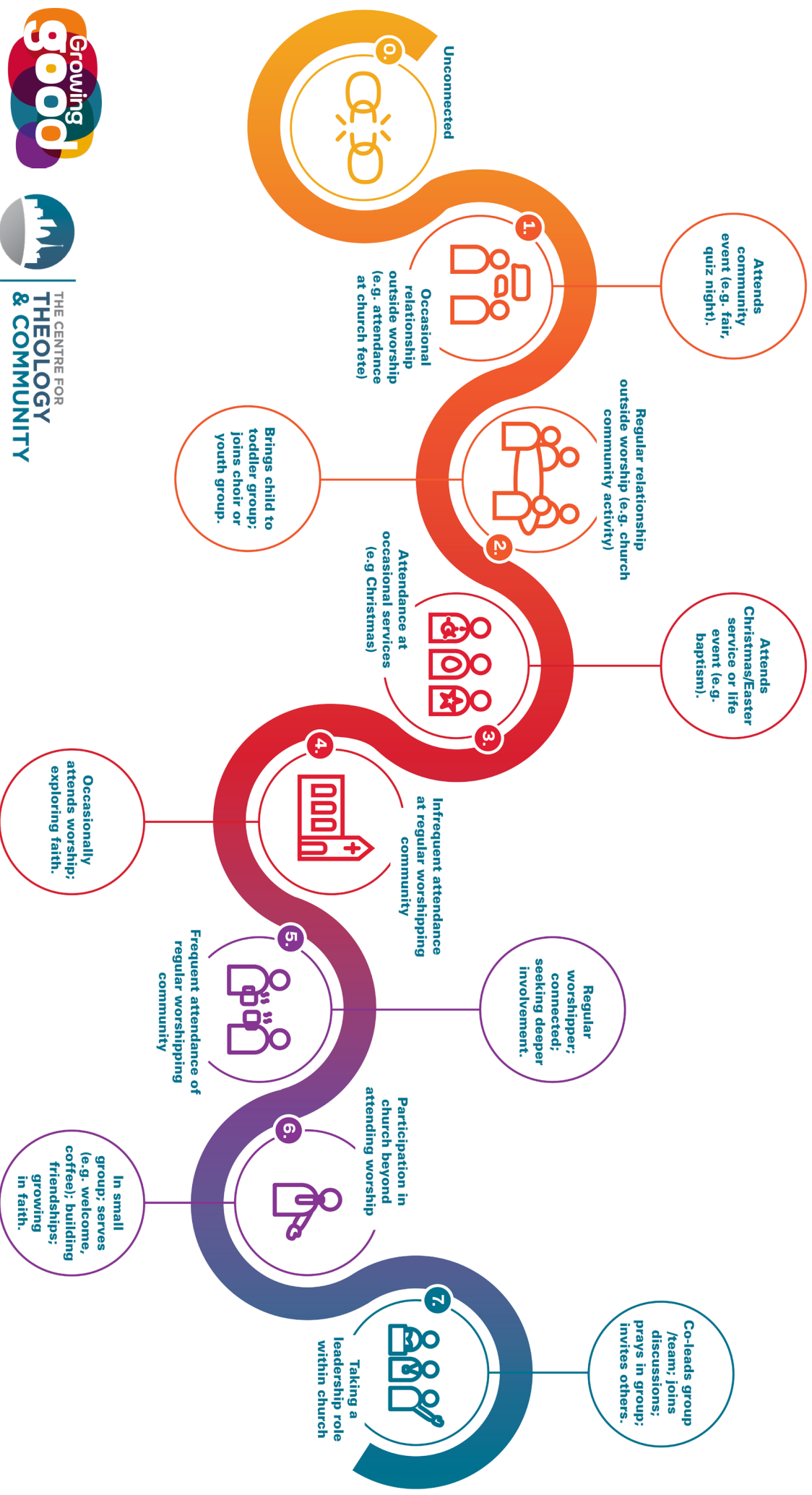
The following diagram and questions (pages 3 and 4) encourages churches to stretch beyond their comfort zones and become more “porous,” offering a safe, welcoming space for exploring faith.

When you're exploring the diagram, it's important to remember that discipleship isn't a linear journey from A to B, there are different seasons on our discipleship journey, sometimes we are called to rest or take time out from activity. Furthermore, deepening discipleship doesn't always end in leadership in church. But it does mean growing in action, commitment and participation and a growing understanding of what faith in action looks like. This might look like deeper engagement in intercessory prayer which is often unseen but no less valuable prayer, or engagement through school, work or voluntary activities outside of the life of the church. Finally, rather than being an end in itself, the fruit of deepening church participation will also be seen through a greater awareness and engagement with the wider community.

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This diagram was developed by the Centre for Theology and Community as part of their Organising for Growth programme.

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Questions for reflection or discussion

Pick a few of the questions that seem most helpful to you. We've also provided a blank version of the diagram so you can use it as a worksheet for making notes (see appendix).

For individuals:

- Where are you on this diagram?
- Do you have relationships with others in your church?
- What or who has helped you grow in your involvement with the church so far - what's your story?
- Would you like to get more involved in church life? If so, what would that look like to you (e.g. serving in a particular ministry team, leading intercessions, taking action in the neighbourhood)?
- Have you been part of making change happen in the church or community? If so, what was that like?
- What impact had participating in the life of your church has on your faith?
- What do you need to do, or what support or training do you need in order to become more involved?

For church leaders and leadership teams:

- In what areas of the diagram do you see activity and growth in the life of the church and its members?
- How can you help people make the step from connection to joining the worshipping community, (try to be specific - e.g. 'we'd like to build deeper relationships with parents coming to our midweek toddler group by having one to one conversations to find out what they care about.')?
- And, how can you help people make the step from being part of the worshipping community to taking a role in its leadership (or to support them stepping into leadership in the wider community)?
- Are there barriers that you need to remove, or support you need to provide, to help people grow in engagement with the life of the church? You could focus on a specific group (eg. young people) or think about this more generally.
- Who holds power (both in terms of leadership positions and relationships across the congregation) in your church? Do you need to consider redistributing this power so it is shared more widely? How might you begin?

Case Study

St Barnabas Walthamstow has been involved in community organising for a number of years, which has helped it build a wide range of relationships in the community. The Organising for Growth project from CTC was the first time this work had an intentional focus on mission and on the vocational development and discipleship of new leaders within the congregation. The 'Discipleship flow diagram' provided a "light bulb moment" for the members of the congregation. It was only when they took ownership and agency over their own growth and development in their leadership and faith that the church could have the capacity to grow. This same diagram also helped the church leadership realise that they could not continue to do more and more of the activity on the left-hand side of the diagram without thinking more carefully about how to help people make the step from connection to joining the worshipping community, and from being part of the worshipping community to taking a role in its leadership.

The growth in the faith and leadership of the congregation and their ability and willingness to reach out into the community are yielding tangible fruit in terms of numbers attending church and coming to faith - most strikingly amongst families and children, the vast majority of whom live in the parish neighbourhood. Watch Mark talk about his experience of using the discipleship flow tool by scanning the QR code.



Conversation Question Cards

A set of question cards to help you and your church community build a relational and participatory culture both within the church and across your community.

The questions have been intentionally formulated to go deeper than the typical conversations we might have. They are about sharing something honestly of ourselves and what matters to us, and curiously getting to know what matters to others. We are looking for energy, gifts, and common ground from which to work together. They are also a great way of building our confidence around sharing our journey of faith with others, and being curious about the faith journeys of others.

The cards are colour coded around four themes: faith (green), calling or vocation (yellow), building relationships (blue) and taking action (red).

Some examples of the faith questions include:

- Why did you decide to start coming to church?
- What does your faith mean to you?
- Is there a character or story in the Bible whose story you resonate with?

Some examples of the 'calling' questions include:

- What gives you life and energy?
- What are your hopes and dreams for yourself and your family/ community?
- Have you ever had a 'nudge' or 'prompt' from God, what was that like?

How to use

There are lots of ways you could use these cards. We think they work best used in pairs (one-to-one), and can be used as part of a Sunday service (e.g. asking people to discuss 1-2 questions in pairs instead of a sermon or during tea and coffee), or as part of a midweek activity (e.g. a coffee morning, food pantry or toddler group). They can also be used to build one to one relationships in PCC meetings, or as part of a midweek home group or bible study. They are a great resource to help your congregation become more intentional about listening.

The cards are available to view, download and **[print here.](#)**

Case Study

Listening, story telling and testimony is significant in developing confidence in talking about faith with one another and building relationships and growing discipleship. Watch Nora talk about her experience of reflecting on her experience of 121 conversations by scanning the QR code below.

