

VISION AND STRATEGY



Introducing 'Learn Christ'

In this special edition we are introducing the second strategy of our Diocesan Vision and Strategy: Being God's Church for God's world by fulfilling the two great commandments: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves.



The second strategy is: Learning more about Jesus Christ in order to become more like Christ. Or, for short, **'Learn Christ'**. But what exactly does it mean to 'Learn Christ'? It is such a small phrase yet loaded with meaning. To explain this strategy as clearly as we can, we are dedicating this issue of the newsletter to unpacking what it meant to 'Learn Christ' and hopefully providing some inspiration for how you, as individuals, churches and organisations, can move forward in your own journey of 'Learning Christ.' Our goal is for this strategy to run in each organisation and parish between Advent 2022 and Pentecost 2023 although you may begin as soon as you wish.

The Four Strategies

Deepening and Growing our prayerfulness as individuals, groups and churches

Learning more about Jesus Christ in order to become more like Christ

Growing in love for, and encouragement of, one another (within our churches and diocese)

Being salt and light in the places and among the people God has placed us (in our communities)

What does it mean to 'Learn Christ'?

The phrase 'Learn Christ' appears in Ephesians 4:20 in various translations of the Bible: eg

But that is not the way you learned Christ! (NRSV)

Some other translations refer to learning 'about Christ' (NLT) or 'knowing' Christ (NIV). However, the most literal translation is 'learn Christ'. This phrase – to learn a person - is used uniquely by Paul in this letter and so to understand what Paul meant by 'to learn Christ' we need to look at the context of the verse and rest of the letter to the Ephesians. The immediate context is Ephesians Chapter 4 v 17-24 (NRSV)

*“ Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. **That is not the way you learned Christ!** For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”.*



Here, Paul is talking about 'putting off' the 'old person' (the corrupt, deceitful former life, sensuality and covetousness) and the 'putting on' of the 'new person' with a renewed mind and clothed in God's holiness and righteousness. It's a whole new way of life for those who have 'learned Christ'.

How did the Ephesians 'Learn Christ'?

Ephesians 4 v 21 tells us that the Ephesians “heard about Christ and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus”. The Ephesians first heard about Christ through the apostle Paul. Paul spent two years in Ephesus, speaking ‘boldly and arguing persuasively’ about the Kingdom of God. Those who came to faith were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus and received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 19)

The first step for all of us is to learn about Christ through listening to the teaching of wise Christian leaders, reading the Bible and discussing what we are learning and hearing with others. **The next step is to be 'taught in him'**. When we commit our lives to Christ we allow Christ himself to be our teacher, to direct our steps, to renew our thinking and living, so that gradually, day by day, we grow in Christ-likeness.

One of the first things the Ephesians learned from Christ, according to Paul, is **peace and reconciliation with God the Father**.

“He [Christ] came and preached peace to you . . . for through him we have access to the Father by one Spirit . . . you are no longer foreigners but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household . . . (Ephesians 2 v 17-19)

Paul was also eager for the Ephesians **to learn about God's love for them and experience it through Christ**. He prays that *“Christ might dwell in your hearts by faith and that [they] being rooted and established in love may have power to grasp . . . how wide and high and long and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God”* (Ephesians 3 v 17-19).

Then the Ephesians were to **become imitators of Christ**: *as dearly loved Children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us. . . .”* (Ephesians 5 v 1-2)

In summary, what does it mean to 'Learn Christ'?

1. To **learn about Christ** through reading the Bible, listening to the teaching of wise Christian leaders, and discussing what we are learning with others.
2. To **be taught in Christ**, as Christ dwells in us through the Holy Spirit.
3. To **be at peace and confident in our relationship with God** and the Holy Spirit, through Christ.
4. To **experience** the height, depth and breadth of **God's love** for us.
5. To **put off the old way** of thinking and behaving and **put on Christ's** righteousness and a renewed mind.
6. To **become more Christlike**, living a life of love



How do we 'Learn Christ'?

'Learning Christ' is a process, although not necessarily a linear one. Most of us begin by learning about Christ from others (1) before we have our own personal relationship with him (2), but some have an encounter with Jesus first – for example the Apostle Paul himself. (Acts 9). In fact, most of us are learning each of steps 1-6 listed above continually. We are all at different starting points as we set out on this journey to 'Learn Christ' in the Diocese. Some of us are at the very beginning of the journey and asking 'Who is this Jesus'? Others may be new to faith in Jesus and some have been learning Christ for many years. One thing is certain: none of us have learned everything there is to learn. We are all life-long learners of Christ.

So where to start?

You might like to read steps 1-6 again and consider how you would like to learn and grow some more. Are you hungry for more 'head' knowledge and information about Christ? Or for a deeper relationship with Jesus? Are you seeking more transformation in yourself – more 'putting off' and 'putting on'? A more renewed mind? A more Christ-like daily life? All of the above?! You may need to let these questions sit in your thoughts for a while and see what comes to the surface, or the answer might leap out at you. You may wish to discuss this with your small group, or the leaders of your church or organisation to find a way forward together as well as for yourself. Ask Christ himself to show you.

What resources are available?

The gospels are the best place to start Learning Christ, perhaps with some study notes. Some recommended resources are outlined in a separate brochure, called "Learn Christ". Links to some of these are available on the Diocesan website. The resources in the brochure are described in a way that makes it as easy as possible to match the resource to the need. However, all the edges are 'blurred' and it is quite possible that a factual book about Jesus may lead to a deeper spiritual encounter with Christ and so on. Some resources suit particular learning styles – for example if you don't like reading you may prefer to listen to a talk than read a book. If one resource doesn't suit you, put it down and try another one. Jesus himself is our teacher and can lead us where he wants us to go in our learning. Feel free to explore other resources that you find helpful and recommend them to us by emailing Bishop Ian via bishop@bunbury.org.au.

As always, we would love to hear from you. Please let us know how you are going on this journey and how you are increasingly "Learning Christ" .

A Word from Bishop Ian



Why Learn Christ?

In Michael Frost's book *Surprise the World*, he uses the acronym 'BELLS' – 'Bless', 'Eat', 'Listen', 'Learn' and 'Send'. In the 'Learn' section Michael Frost says to be a Christian is to be like Christ. He therefore suggests that if we wish to be like Christ then we need to learn as much as possible about Christ. This seems a rather valid and important point to make and begs questions about how much we do know about Jesus Christ, the "pioneer and perfecter of our faith", as the writer to the Hebrews put it (Hebrews 12.2). J.I.Packer wrote in the conclusion of his book *Knowing God*, that learning to know about God in Christ was the "true priority". The Christian claim is that Jesus Christ revealed to us what God is like so learning about Christ is also learning about God.

Michael Frost suggests starting by reading a gospel to begin with, like the Gospel of Mark or Luke, because they were written expressly to tell future readers about Jesus Christ. We often know many stories about Jesus Christ, but we may not always read a gospel from beginning to the end to see how the writers were at such pains to communicate about this Jesus Christ.

Jesus frequently confounded his followers and his detractors with the things he did and said and the way he lived his life of compassion and obedience. We may think that is not possible for us to be like Christ. Jesus, nevertheless, assured his followers that they would do even greater things that he had done (John 14.12). St. Paul also points to the importance of Christians having what he called "the mind of Christ" (Philippians 2.5). For all these reasons I commend to you this second strategy of our Vision, and the wealth of resources listed here and in the Resources Brochure.

Please join us for the 'Explore Prayer' Day
on 17th September

THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF BUNBURY

EXPLORE PRAYER

MEDITATION / CONTEMPLATION / HEALING
PRAYER / EXTEMPORARY PRAYER / LEADING
SUNDAY INTERCESSIONS / MUSIC AND PRAYER
/ PRAYING THE LORD'S PRAYER / PRAYING
WITH ICONS / KINAESTHETIC PRAYER

Saturday 17th September 2022 | St. Boniface Cathedral
9:30am - 2:00pm | Community Hall

Visit www.bunburycathedral.org.au for details