



**CUMBRIA  
CHRISTIAN  
LEARNING**

Growing disciples for mission

# CUMBRIA CHRISTIAN LEARNING: PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES

## STRATEGIC PURPOSE: CHRISTIAN LEARNING FOR CUMBRIA

Cumbria Christian Learning (CCL) has been created to support the mission of the Christian Church in Cumbria by **growing disciples for mission**. It does so in support of *God For All*, the strategy adopted by the Anglican Diocese of Carlisle, the Cumbria Methodist District and the United Reformed Church in Cumbria. *God For All* is founded upon two key themes, *growing disciples* and *growing together*, and draws together three joint areas of strategy relating to Ministry, Reach, and Buildings.

Within the broad remit of *God For All*, Cumbria Christian Learning will work towards the particular goals for *Reach*:

*By 2020 every person in Cumbria of all ages and backgrounds will have had an opportunity to discover more of God and God's purpose for their lives, so that they will discover more of Jesus and the Good News and become followers of Jesus within a Christian community;*

and *Ministry*:

*We want to do Church better and enable all Christians to discover their vocation and ministry as a disciple of Jesus Christ. We want churches that are missional, sustainable and enable the ministry of many.*

In partnership with other agencies, CCL will seek to be a catalyst of change and growth in pursuit of these strategic goals. In particular, CCL will support the establishment of mission communities across Cumbria which will engage in mission, make and nurture disciples, develop appropriate patterns of ministry, and utilise their buildings in ways which best serve their strategic goals. *Growing disciples* is at the heart of a mission community – it is both what the community is about and what will sustain it and allow it to grow and flourish. Cumbria Christian Learning will therefore seek to support and resource mission communities as they are created, and to sustain them in discerning and responding to God's calling on them as partners in his mission.

## CHRISTIAN LEARNING

Cumbria Christian Learning will serve the partner churches and mission communities by supporting them in their task of **growing disciples for mission**. CCL will promote opportunities for all Christians in Cumbria to engage in learning, operating on the following core principles:

## LEARNING FOR ALL

Just as Jesus' mandate to the Church in Matthew 28 is to make disciples "of all nations", so it follows that the Good News is for all people. The opportunity to learn more of God therefore belongs to people of all ages, backgrounds, cultures, classes, abilities and life experience.

CCL seeks to offer learning which is:

- **accessible** to all, utilising a range of modes of delivery, and offering a variety of levels of engagement
- **flexible**, promoting learning that works with the shape and pattern of people's lives so that learning becomes part of the fabric of life for all Christians in Cumbria
- **ecumenical**, drawing together Christians across denominational and traditional boundaries.

## LEARNING FOR DISCIPLESHIP

All Christian ministry and mission flow from an obedient response to the call of Jesus to follow him. The Greek word which we translate as 'disciple' or 'follower' can equally translate as 'learner', and the word 'vocation' simply means 'calling'. The call to deeper knowledge and love of God through learning and personal growth is therefore for every Christian, not for an elite or super-spiritual few. Scripture and Christian tradition identify the goal of Christian discipleship as to know God through the person of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, and in knowing him more deeply to become like him, sharing his mind and heart for the world and participating in his mission in it.

CCL aims to offer opportunities for learning which are:

- **theological**, deepening the knowledge and love of God through engagement with Christian Scripture, tradition and spirituality
- **transformational**, bringing about change which leads to the formation of Christ-like character in learners.

## LEARNING FOR SERVICE

Learning which produces authentic discipleship finds its expression in active participation in the mission of God. For some, this represents a calling to serve God in roles which are authorised or licensed by the Church, supporting other disciples in their learning and service or directly engaging those outside the Church with the Gospel; for the majority, it involves the call to serve God through faithful witness and Christian living beyond the Church in their communities, families and places of work. 'Ministry' is what happens outside the church in everyday life, as well as within the building and fellowship. Learning for service and ministry is lifelong, enables disciples to discern their God-given gifts, and equips them obediently to exercise those gifts wherever they are called.

CCL aims to offer learning which:

- **inspires** Christians to active participation in God's mission
- **equips** them with knowledge, skills and understanding which help them to be more effective in that mission
- **enables** them to deploy that learning with confidence and continually develop.

## LEARNING FOR MISSION

Both *learning for discipleship* and *learning for service* together are fundamentally *learning for mission*. Mission and outreach are the responsibility of all Christians and our church communities, singly and together. Mission is the active participation of Christians in pursuit of God's purposes in the world. Learning for mission is outward- and forward-facing, seeking to engage the needs of the world with Christian faith, presenting the challenge and the offer of God's love, and promoting the growth and flourishing of God's Kingdom.

By drawing upon the vast and deep resources of Christian tradition and Scripture, and upon the best of contemporary research and scholarship, CCL aims to offer learning which:

- **challenges** assumptions – especially where those incline to despair and hopelessness, or the belief that situations cannot change or become better
- **broadens horizons**, enabling Christian disciples to see their situations from fresh perspectives and become agents of transformation in their churches and communities.

CCL also aims to offer opportunities for learning which are:

- **reflective, responsive** and **relevant** in discerning and providing for the needs of Cumbrian Christians, and the needs of the communities among whom they live and serve.

## LEARNING IN COMMUNITY

Just as the partner churches have come to realise that only by working together will the purposes of God be fulfilled, so too CCL recognises that its distinctive contribution is only one of many within that wider partnership. CCL must therefore work within and across the local, regional and national structures of the Churches to promote learning which is:

- **collaborative** - recognizing that no single part of the Body of Christ can do the whole Body's work
- **interdependent** - recognizing that every part of the Body needs the other parts to do its work
- **integrative** – recognizing that Christians learn best when they learn together and from one another: this promotes respect, understanding and recognition of the value of different contributions to the Church's life;
- **ecumenical** – recognizing that diversity within a more profound unity in Christ is the foundation of effective discipleship, ministry and mission

## LEARNING FOR GROWTH IN A TIME OF CHANGE

The vision of the Church in Cumbria set out by the partner churches and summarized within the *God For All* strategy is a vision of a future which none of us have yet experienced. This poses profound challenges for our understandings of what discipleship, ministry and church look like in practice, as well as an opportunity to experience new forms of those things and so enhance our knowledge of God and his purposes in the world. As well as promoting a culture of learning within the Church, CCL also needs to be a **learning community** in its own right, engaging in constant processes of:

- **reflection** – seeking to understand our emerging experience of God in our context and interpreting that in the light of our knowledge of Him;
- **review** – seeking to ensure that the learning we offer holds true to our core principles, and serves the strategic needs of the churches;
- **response** – shaping ourselves and our activities appropriately to our task and our context;
- **risk management** – recognizing that seeking to bring about transformative change in a context which is itself constantly changing will require the commitment of resources and effort in pursuit of outcomes whose achievement is hopeful but not certain.

By seeking actively to learn from our experience, CCL aims to offer the Cumbrian churches theologically- and contextually- informed insights which will help the churches to further develop their strategic thinking and adapt their practice so as better to serve God in his mission.

Roger Latham

3<sup>rd</sup> October 2016