

## Church Growth - From Church Attender to Disciple

*Bishop Malcolm Harding*

The word disciple appears no less than 264 times in the Gospels and the book of Acts. Our real priority in the faith communities from which we have come is to 'grow and mature as disciples'.

Church attenders have a tendency to be connected to God by external ritual and the overall institution, whereas disciples have discovered a vibrant relationship with a living Lord.

Those who tend simply to attend church will generally look to their parish priest for the ongoing ministry, whereas disciples have discovered their gifts, and are using them within the body of believers in ministry.

- A reading of Luke 9: 23 – 27 from The Message by Eugene Peterson.
- Reference on the booklist to an excellent parish resource for group study on discipleship – Discipleship Essentials by Greg Ogden. The course is divided into 4 sections: Growing in Christ, Understanding the message of Christ, Becoming like Christ, and Serving Christ.
- Some marks of a contemporary disciple:
  1. Someone who is willing to serve, and use their God given gifts in parish ministry.
  2. Someone who spends disciplined time each day in prayer and Bible study.
  3. Someone who is learning to listen to others with a warm, caring, and sensitive heart, and manifests the compassion we see in Jesus towards others in need.
  4. Someone who has taken to heart the great Commission, and has come to see that one's ministry of friendship evangelism can only be done in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- A few thoughts on friendship evangelism.

Jesus never said that the life and ministry of a disciple would be easy. He referred to rejection by some, persecution by others, and indeed Satanic attack in other places. What He did promise to his first disciples, and what He promises to us, is the power of the Holy Spirit to enable his followers to do the very work He had come to do, and, as He put it, "even greater works".