

how to grow mature disciples



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Be a good **companion**, whether as a friend, mentor or leader. New believers may have little Christian background and their faith journey may be very different to yours. So be understanding. Walk at their pace. Remember how patient the Holy Spirit is with you, and be patient with them. Don't be an expert, but a fellow disciple.

Let the **community** do the talking. Teachers know that pupils learn from the 'hidden curriculum' - relationships and values - as much as from the official curriculum. Your community's 'hidden curriculum' is its common life and values. What are they teaching new believers?

One community invited everyone to contribute to its shared meal, including those on benefits. They wanted to show that each person had something to offer.

Encourage **conversations** about Jesus. People learn by asking questions, putting what they've learnt into their own words, trying out ideas and listening to other people's comments.

Jesus did not merely preach at people. He taught through conversations and left room for dialogue (Mark 8.27-30; 10.17-31; John 6.25-59). So allow plenty of time for Christian discussion.

example

B1, in Birmingham, invited adults to read a Bible passage in advance and discuss it with their children. When the community met, age-based groups shared what they had learnt.

freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/b1

Couple worship to life. The Spirit works through worship that engages the everyday. So as you introduce new Christians to worship, ask them whether it connects with their lives. Ask, too, how their daily experiences can lead to worship?

The worship of one fresh expression followed this sequence:

- gathering - songs and prayers as people gather round Jesus;
- introducing the theme - e.g. Bible passage and short talk;

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- exploring the theme (e.g. groups choose between ‘writing a tweet or blog’, ‘reflecting the theme on your Facebook page’ or ‘writing an email to your grandmother’);
- offering - feedback from groups is offered to God, sometimes with communion.

Keep your worship:

- simple - e.g. as part of a shared meal;
- helpful - relevant to life;
- authentic - e.g. using language from the heart;
- rich - vary the diet;
- enabling - are worshippers pooling their gifts?

Communal practices are done together to support individuals’ walks with Jesus. People can do them for a limited period, either as a whole gathering or in self-selecting groups.

Examples could include:

- for six weeks, each person does one act of generosity a week and shares with the group how they got on;
- as a form of prayer, one group writes protest letters on behalf of Amnesty International (as JustChurch did in Bradford, freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/justchurch), another two groups write on behalf of other organisations;
- three or four people contract to eat more healthily or to read an evening Bible story to their children;
- each evening in Lent, individuals say the same texted prayer of confession in their homes;
- individuals text each other prayers through the week.

Connect with the wider church. Christians are baptised into the whole body, and discipleship involves learning from and contributing to it.

Connecting up can include:

- shared learning, missional, social and worship events with your parent church;
- attending a Christian festival or conference;
- downloading online Christian resources;
- ‘blending church’ by worshipping in your fresh expression and, periodically, in the church you came from;
- getting involved with a Christian project overseas.

Picture your community as a **circle**, not rows. Shared leadership involves being part of the circle, inviting others to pool their gifts and mature into leadership.

One person resolved that as she read Scripture with enquirers, she would avoid answering their questions where possible. If someone asked, ‘who was John the Baptist?’ she would invite the group to search the internet for the answer. The group would learn to depend not on her, but on one another led by the Spirit.