

Rediscovering 'disciplemaking' and the role of faith-sharing

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According to the Gospel of Matthew, disciplemaking seems to be the signature mark of faithful disciples of Jesus the Christ (cf. Mt 28:18–20). Van Aarde refers to this, with reference to Von Harnack and Lohmeyer as the manifesto of the church, being on the same level of meaning as Deuteronomy 6 in the Old Testament. It may be fair to say that this 'natural' way of being and doing was in more than one way exchanged for evangelism practices that did nothing to show forth that following the Christ is a better or best way of living life, here already, to its fullest. These practices even reflected negatively on disciplemaking as such. A personal conviction is that 'discipling' may even be one of the missing links in the so-called missional conversation. This article will reflect on current theory on discipling and the natural necessity thereof. It will also draw upon findings in empirical research conducted by the National Church Life Surveys during 2014 in South Africa that may give an indication whether discipling is a common praxis among selected South African denominations and congregations. The focus will be on 'Faith-Sharing' as a core quality among adult attenders and includes several measures of the involvement of attenders in the outreach of the congregation (e.g. evangelistic activities, readiness to share their faith with others and whether outreach is a highly valued part of the ministry of the congregation).

Introduction

Discipleship has almost disappeared from everyday discussions in faith communities. It may be because, as a good pastor once said to me, 'the concept is so negatively loaded that we need to find another way of referring to what it means'. This article is a serious attempt to focus on the four research questions stated below. The purpose is not to solve the problem as such but to stimulate research concerning this critical ministry issue and, above all, theological problem.

In order to do so, the authors took the 'four tasks' (Osmer 2008:4, 11) within Practical Theology into account. The research questions this article will focus on are as follows:

- Why is this the case?
- What is discipleship and discipling about?
- How do we rediscover this concept and ministry?
- What is the current state of affairs in a limited number of congregations concerning 'faith-sharing' as a primary 'ingredient' in the discipling process?

Why is discipleship and discipling negatively viewed?

Reflecting on this same issue in an article with a somewhat different focus, Nel (2015b) wrote:

My conviction after the many years in youth ministry and in youth ministry research and training is that we have missed this Kingdom-like perspective on salvation and life as such. For some or other reason (some quite understandably so) our understanding of salvation as decision-making rather than disciple-making has not done the job. It is misfiring and backfiring into our faces. Faith communities are paying the price. Shallow, even superficial, connections to the Christ and his body are falling apart in front of our eyes. So much so that, in spite of the many exceptions the 'church' is in trouble around the world. (p. 1)

Before turning to some of the reasons as to why the concept and ministry is often neglected, one has to admit that there is indeed an obvious 'ecclesial turn', as Stoppels (2013:13–17) has pointed out. 'In many circles, whether mainline or among the so-called evangelicals, there is a new discovery of this neglected jewel in the crown of faithful missional churches' (Nel 2015b:2). Stoppels (2013:13) chooses to go for discipleship and discipling in his book and does so under the motto: 'Jesus called learners, not church people'.

Note: HTS 75th Anniversary Maake Masango Dedication.

In the same article, Nel (2015b) referred to, what Ogden (2003:39–56) called, ‘The discipleship malaise’. Ogden (2003:40–56) discerned eight factors that have contributed to ‘the low estate of discipleship, to the church’s failure to grow self-initiating, reproducing, fully devoted followers of Jesus’:

1. ‘[P]astors have been diverted from their primary calling to “equip the saints for the work of ministry”’. (p. 40)
2. ‘[W]e have tried to make disciples through programs: The Scriptural context for growing disciples is through relationships ... Unless disciples receive personal attention so that their particular growth needs are addressed in a way that calls them to die to self and live fully to Christ, a disciple will not be made ... Since individual, personal investment is costly and time-intensive, we have put programs in place’. (pp. 42–43)
3. ‘[W]e have reduced the Christian life to the eternal benefits we get from Jesus, rather than living as students of Jesus’. (pp. 46–47)
4. ‘[W]e have made discipleship for super-Christians, not for ordinary believers’. (pp. 48–49; cf. also Nel 2004:97–102, 2015a:186)
5. ‘[L]eaders have been unwilling to call people to discipleship’. (pp. 49–51)
6. ‘[W]e have an inadequate view of the church as a discipleship community. Biblical discipleship is never seen as a me-and-Jesus solo relationship, for the church is a discipleship community’ (p. 51). He refers to Robert Putman’s *Bowling Alone* (2000) making ‘the convincing case that the social capital of religious life is being undermined by privatized faith’. (p. 51)
7. ‘[M]ost churches have no clear, public pathway to maturity’. (pp. 52–54)
8. ‘[M]ost Christians have never been personally discipled’. (pp. 54–56)

In our research on the problems and questions concerning discipleship, we have learned that there may be one more critical reason for the unpopularity of the concept and its implications. Most confessional churches would agree that the concept is biblical and doctrinally important. When such churches have, for some or other reason, allowed themselves to become ‘*volkskirchlich*’, in the sense of membership being determined by monoculturalism, such churches shy away either consciously or subconsciously from the implications of discipleship. Following the Christ, learning from him how life is to be lived, then becomes uncomfortable and inconvenient. It is at this point that Van Aarde’s (2006:107) remark is so relevant when he openly declared that the conversion of the church is a prerequisite for our legitimate missional involvement in this world (cf. Guder 2000). This conversion is indeed getting honest with ourselves as to our many ‘reductionisms’ (Guder 2000:97–143) and getting back to the basics of being a church in the Spirit of the New Testament Jesus.

It is rather obvious that such monocultural ecclesologies often overlap with exclusive thinking and issues of injustice to who-ever. Botman (2000:201–212) reflected on Discipleship

and Practical Theology within the light of the South African situation and with special reference to the Confession of Belhar. In his article one cannot but be struck by the challenge to be willing to pay the price for discipleship. Botman (2000) wrote how the Confession of Belhar confronted him in understanding the:

... theo-logic in the idea of *following Christ*. It states that in a situation of enmity and injustice, God is revealed in a special way as the God of justice standing with those against whom the injustice is being done and God calls the church to stand where God is Standing. This first confession of faith drafted and adopted by a church within the Dutch Reformed tradition since the seventeenth Century seeks to make discipleship central to its content. The Confession of Belhar is a witness to the fact that this church understood its political and ecclesiastical task as a matter of faithfulness in following Jesus of Nazareth. As such, praxeology received confessional status within the church. (p. 210, [*italics in original*])

Warren (2008:61–73) wrote a great chapter on ‘youth ministry in an inconvenient church’ within the broader theme of awakening youth discipleship as Christian resistance in a consumer culture. He does not shy away from pointing out how we shy away from the inconvenience of being faithful to our calling. Being Christian against the grain of culture is not easy at all and certainly not always convenient and popular.

Let us add one more reason why, according to our observation and research, the concept is undervalued. A strange phenomenon plays itself off in churches that are serious about discipleship. When the rhythm and balance between the given (the indicative) and the imperative in life are broken, it easily becomes moralism, if not legalism. The *implications* of discipleship then easily got preached and taught as *requirements* for discipleship. Many churches reacted against this, not by setting this broken and false imbalance right again but by devaluating the implications of discipleship. *Discipleship is costly but discipleship is never earned by taking the implications seriously.*

Within the context of the research problem and questions of this article, a reference to the relationship between evangelism and discipleship or discipling is necessary. As we learned to neglect the calling to make disciples, we discovered new ways of calling people to decisions for Christ. Many of these approaches had discipleship as part of the so-called follow-up ministry in evangelism (cf. a reference to Campus Crusade for Christ in Nel 1982:56–76). Most, if not all, of these decision-making approaches were confrontational at heart (cf. Evangelism Explosion, Kennedy & Moore 1983). When someone would confuse confrontational evangelism (with its decision-making, propositional approach) with the ‘making of disciples’ as relational, rather than informational, in nature (cf. also Armstrong 1987:52; Van Aarde 2006:103–122), one can understand the negative response: if this is ‘discipling’, we should oppose it with good right. At the same time, there is such a worldwide reaction against a sometimes very un-Christlike confrontational approach to evangelism that many theologians rather shy away even from the concept of

evangelism itself (cf. Nel 1997–1998:31–42; 2002:65–87; 2007:98–117; Stoppels 2013:67).

Our assumption is that embarking on the challenging journey of rediscovering discipleship might help us in finding ourselves back and be in the heart of the *Missio Dei*. While one may differ with Volf (2015), his remark reminds us again of the serious nature of the situation when it comes to the calling of the church:

As it travels in time and space, the Christian faith needs regular realignments with its own deeper truth; such realignments are termed reformations. Christians, too, and not just their convictions, will need to keep realigning themselves to the authentic versions of their faith; these realignments are termed renewals. I exhort us as Christians to reform and renew our faith so as to lead lives worthy of the calling to which we have been called (Ephesians 4:1). If we don't, the Christian faith may well turn out to be a curse to the world rather than a source of blessing – an embodiment of the fall into the temptation to live by bread alone rather than a means of resisting it, a faith insufferably self-righteous and arrogantly imposing itself on others to control and subdue them, a source of strife over worldly goods rather than a wellspring of confident humility, creative generosity, and just peace. (p. 26)

What is discipleship and discipling about?

Discipleship

Nel (2009) explained in some detail what is meant by discipleship. He followed it up in 2015(b) with a focus of who will be best prepared to make disciples. It is not the place to repeat those arguments here again. Suffice to say with Rengstorf (1967) that two things constitute biblical discipleship:

... acceptance into a personal relationship with Him who calls you to belong to Him; and
a vocation, which means that you have to be a follower and pupil of the Christ who has called you. (p. 446)

In other words, according to Rengstorf (1967):

Jesus's concern is not to impart information, nor to deepen an existing attitude, but to awaken unconditional commitment to Himself. That *mathytys*, as *akolouthein*, is also *manthanein*, is self-evident (Mt 11:29). In contrast to both Rabbi Akiba and the philosopher Socrates 'Jesus binds exclusively to Himself'. (pp. 406, 447)

In addition, according to Louw and Nida (1988), the verb 'to make disciples' (*matheteusate*) refers to disciple:

... in the sense of adhering to the teachings or instructions of a leader and promoting the cause of such a leader ... In many languages the equivalent of 'to follow' (in the sense of 'to be a disciple' is literally 'to accompany' or 'to go along with' or 'to be in the group of'. (p. 470)

The verb means to:

... cause people to become followers ... In order to avoid a wrong implication of a causative it may be important to use such

expression to 'convince them to become disciples' or 'urge them to be my disciples'. (Louw & Nida 1988:471; cf. Nel 2009:2 of 11; for a reflection on discipling and 'influencing' people, cf. Farley 2013:361–382)

We cannot but also refer to the very important description of Firet (1986:50–68) as to being called, being initiated into the way of *Jahweh* with his people, being guided on this way by *Torah* and being helped to discern on the way by *Chokmah* (cf. also Nel 2009:3 of 11).

In the 2015(b) article, Nel worked more with the understanding of discipleship as a journey where we learn to live and enjoy life as we follow the Christ:

My port of entry in this article will be that we have missed and are missing the quality of the life we received. Our call to discipleship and the making of disciples is to get back the fullness of our lives. The journey of discipleship is one lifelong journey of rediscovering and recovering the fullness we may have missed. (p. 1)

Niemandt, without referring to Nel's article, stresses the same. He calls discipleship 'a journey in search of flourishing life' and also connects this with life in the Kingdom (Niemandt 2016:1). In a book with more empirical detail as to the state of discipleship in the US, Barna (2001) says:

We might define discipleship as *becoming a complete and competent follower of Jesus Christ*. It is about the intentional training of people who voluntarily submit to the Lordship of Christ and who want to become imitators of Him in every thought, word, and deed. On the basis of teaching, training, experiences, relationships, and accountability, a disciple becomes transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. (pp. 17–18)

Discipling

Discipling is what we do any way as we live life and while we learn how to live life to its fullest, as Jesus gives it (cf. Jn 10:10b). Van Aarde pointed out that Matthew 28:19 should not be understood as a rather cold command, and certainly not a military one. To quote him:

This imperfect 'church' hears the commission. The verb 'to go' (*porouthentes* – Mt 28:19) they heard is not a strong verb – not in the grammatical form of a command, but an infinitive. It is like 'I am going to eat'. Not to be understood as command: GO and eat! What is imperative in what they hear is 'make disciples' (*matheteusate*), make the church one large school of Jesus followers. (Van Aarde 2006:114; also quoted in Nel 2015b:5)

Doing this as we go anyway is good news to both those inside and those outside. As we go, our lives touched both insiders and outsiders (cf. Kok 2015 for a discussion on the radical nature of *oikodome* and the edification of insiders and outsiders). Disciples are good news people. They have found life in Christ and through the Spirit. They find joy on the journey of learning how to live this life well. A critical difference between this way of evangelising or discipling is that we confess and experience that the joy is in the journey and not (just) in the destination. Disciplemaking is to be

serious about life before death. This is the essence of evangelism within a disciplemaking paradigm.

We are convinced that disciplemaking includes evangelism and vice versa. Nel (2015b) has admitted that there is a slight distinction between evangelism and disciplemaking by saying:

We must understand the subtle distinction between evangelism and disciple-making. There is a difference. But: when disciplemaking does not include evangelism and vice versa we get the situation we are in at present. (p. 3)

We are now willing and more so ready to argue that this is what disciplemaking is. This is how we share and are the good news in this world. McPhee (1978:17) even called us 'good news people'.

Evangelism is, in our minds and understanding, indeed about sharing the good news of the gospel of the Kingdom of God – and this we do as we go and make disciples, showing forth what value God in Christ has added to our lives. Time and space do not allow us to explore this in depth but a few remarks are necessary. Bosch (1991) refers to *evangelism* (italics in original) as one of the 'essential dimensions' of mission:

Evangelism is the proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in him, calling them to repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sin, and inviting them to become living members of Christ's earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit. (pp. 10–11)

When further on in his book (Bosch 1991:73–83) he discusses discipleship, he makes no direct link to evangelism.

Malphurs (2007:80–83) also does not connect, at least not in a direct way, evangelism with discipling. He names five functions that according to him are 'timeless, unchanging, non-negotiable, based on the Bible' (p. 79). The five functions are teaching, fellowship, worship, evangelism and service. Malphurs (2007:84) refers (without naming the source) to Rick Warren who has five purposes for the church, one of them being discipleship. The five purposes are evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship and ministry.

To our minds, this missing link may be one of the reasons for the often underdevelopment of discipleship ministries in congregations. Even when churches do evangelise, they do not see it as deeply related to the principle and the way in which we 'make disciples'. Discipling is evangelising in its very core. Ott and Wilson (2011) do connect the two:

Church planting is that ministry which through evangelism and discipleship establishes reproducing kingdom communities of believers in Jesus Christ who are committed to fulfilling biblical purposes under local spiritual leaders. (p. 8)

Armstrong (1979) did connect service evangelism and discipleship in a direct way:

[W]e show with integrity our belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God if we ask ourselves what it means to be Christ's man or

Christ's woman in the world today. The answer to that question defines the quality of our discipleship; and when church members take it seriously, the church will truly become a servant church. (p. 38; cf. also Sjogren 1993:20ff. and what he calls 'servant evangelism = deeds of love+words of love+adequate time')

In his article, Niemandt (2016) makes a strong argument for evangelism as core in missional thinking and then writes:

One of the core practices of evangelism is disciple-making – evangelism is the invitation to personal conversion and discipleship. The formation of authentic followers of Jesus the Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit, and the church participates in this mission of God through evangelism. Chilcote and Warner (2008:xxvi) state that '... evangelism is concerned with discipling people in Christ'. The invitation to follow Jesus Christ is an invitation to discipleship. It is a call to people to commit their lives to Christ and to be incorporated into Christ. God's call to mission is a call to discipleship, that is, to follow God's presence, purpose and promise with the lifestyle and disciplines necessary for this life of obedience and praise (Brueggemann 2008:219–220). Tolmie (2014:243) says that to be church is to follow Jesus and to be disciples. He emphasises that the gospel of Matthew 'describes the church in terms of discipleship'. (p. 3)

It is indeed a fresh wind and to be welcomed and endorsed. Paas (2015:29–34) also argues for 'evangelism being at the heart of mission'.¹ But we are even arguing for something more closely connected. Nel's lifelong journey in the field of evangelism and developing missional congregations (cf. Nel 2015a) convinced him that the relationship is closer. Discipling is what evangelism is about. Evangelising, faith-sharing, within a relationship of trust, is discipling: there is life, we have found it in him.

Discipling and faith-sharing

Armstrong, the father of service evangelism theory (1979) and the author of the course for training disciples to share faith (1987:41; 1997:40), defined faith-sharing as: 'a three-way communication in which two or more people relate to each other their personal experiences of God'. This approach builds on trust and serious listening. The style is indeed:

... consistent with an evangelistic approach that is more relational than informational, more incarnational than propositional. We reach out to others in the name of a Savior and Lord who came not to be served but to serve. (Armstrong 1987:82; cf. my discussion of this style in Nel 1996:38–47, 1997–1998:31–42)

Discipleship is learning from the one who called us to join him on this journey; and called us to learn, on this journey, how to live life in the Kingdom and seek 'his righteousness' (Mt 6:33) as the priority in life (cf. Nel 2017a; 2017b). In a book edited by Dorothy Bass (2010, 2nd edn.), the subtitle captures this notion so well: 'A way of life for a searching people'.

Ogden (2003:54), who is not formally part of the so-called missional conversation, then states what he calls the heart of his book (and for those who know his work it may be fair to say of his research and publications as such). He calls it:

1. Free translation of the Dutch: 'Evangelisatie als Hart van de zending'.

[O]ur paradigm shift question: How can we grow Christians into self-initiating, reproducing, fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ? My conviction is that the primary way people grow into self-initiating, reproducing, fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ is by being involved in highly accountable, relational, multiplying discipleship units of three or four ... By discipling I mean 'a process that takes place within accountable relationships over a period of time for the purpose of bringing believers to spiritual maturity in Christ'. (p. 54; His quote is from The Eastbourne Consultation, *Joint Statement on Discipleship*, September 24, 1999)

How do we rediscover this concept and ministry?

Osmer (1990) once wrote that in order to recover something, we often first have to rediscover what we have lost:

Rediscovery is the activity of discerning once again the meaning and power of tradition that has been repressed or forgotten. Recovery goes further. It involves the positive evaluation and appropriation of that tradition, using what has been rediscovered to structure present patterns of thought and action. (p. 141)

Taking this into account, we suggest that the following might be helpful in a process to rediscover and recover this critical ministry. Within the broader missional and ecclesial conversation, this is well accepted and even called a 'second transformational key' to get 'discipling' back into the everyday vocabulary of congregations:

Congregations that focus on becoming a discipling community as they deeply engage their context are more likely to develop a healthy life that moves beyond institutional survival or just serving the needs of its members. (Rouse & Van Gelder 2008:56)

Rouse and Van Gelder (2008) agree that it will be difficult to 'cultivate a more missional vision' with older members but, nonetheless: 'It is imperative that transformational leaders lift up a larger, missional vision for a congregation to serve as a *discipling community*'. They refer to a remark by Nesson (1999) saying:

The number one priority for Christian education in our time is disciple-making ... This priority contributes to the fundamental purpose of the congregation, building Christian identity for the sake of Christ's mission in the world. (p. 55)

What is suggested or even proposed below as a way forward asks for new research. It is not within the scope of this article to work this out in any detail. We try to state concepts that will perhaps be developed further in the follow-up research. We do, however, refer to sources where some details were discussed and introduced.

Rediscovering that discipleship is about relational 'learning' of how to live life in a Christlike way is indeed basic to the churches recovery. In his long chapter (article) in the book edited by Zscheile (2012), Osmer (2012) wrote, to our mind correctly so:

In contrast, the missional church leaders viewed the purpose of formation as cultivating a life of active discipleship in ways that

represent both a break with the immediate past of the congregation and was more open to cultures of people *not* currently in the church. (p. 34)

It is clear that it is in more than one way the ministry of the *didache* that is at stake here – coordinated and integrated with the other ministries.

Congregations will have to get this church-DNA back by means of integrating the basic development and facilitation of healthy discipleship back:

- in the pulpit where formation is also part of preaching
- training of parents in faith-sharing with their children, baptised or blessed
- training of youth from as young as possible.

Barna (2001) wrote:

Successful pastors care about the discipleship commitment of their people, they monitor it closely, and they respond when the numbers suggest a waffling of dedication to spiritual advancement. Not one of the highly effective churches waits until a person is eighteen or twenty-one to begin an intensive, intentional discipling process. (p. 115)

He (2001:6) wrote that after having found that: 'Not one of the adults we interviewed said that their goal in life was to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ or to make disciples'.

In 1979 already Armstrong wrote as a reflection on an almost miraculous turnaround in the local congregation he served:

Experience has taught me that deepening the congregation's spiritual commitment is the best way to encourage interest in evangelism. What was needed was a training program that would begin by helping people to discover and understand their personal faith in God, before teaching them how to share their faith with others. (p. 18; cf. also Armstrong 1971)

One would think that this is part and parcel of the everyday ministry of any faithful local church. It sounds so 'natural'. Stoppels (2013) does not link up with Armstrong in anyway. In his own way, he phrased the issue of a deep and deepening relationship with the Christ as follows:

A learner of Jesus Christ is someone who, in the power of the Holy Spirit and in communion with (the) other learners, desires to learn with his or her total life to live life in following Him. A learner (disciple) is someone who sincerely directs/focuses his or her life on the Kingdom of God as Jesus Christ has embodied and proclaimed it. (p. 73)²

What Bosch (2008) once wrote in an article, published again in 2008, emphasises this too: 'Evangelism is possible only when the community that evangelizes – the church – is a radiant manifestation of the Christian faith and has a winsome lifestyle' (Bosch in Chilcote & Warner 2008: 12; cf. also Putman 2014:1–50).

2. My free translation of Dutch: 'Een leerling van Jezus Christus is een mens die in de kracht van de heilige Geest en in verbondenheid met (de) kring(en) van andere leerlingen over de volle breedte van zijn of haar leven het verlangen heeft te leren leven in zijn spoor en zijn leven daadwerkelijk en duurzaam richt op het Rijk Gods zoals Jezus Christus dat belichaamde en verkondigde'.

In cross-cultural discipling, this principle of faithful living is a challenge. In his book on cross-cultural discipling, Zahniser (1997) wrote:

The point is this: Christian disciplers need to adjust their discipling to the culture of the believers they are discipling. Helping people who communicate differently grow in faith and integrate ultimate and intimate issues presents disciplers with a formidable task. It is my purpose to help you devise culturally relevant and effective means to cope with this problem. While these means will not make discipling easy. They will help make it possible. A third problem faced by any church wanting to draw people to Christ looms even larger in the back of the discipler's mind, namely how to help new believers bring all areas of their lives into conformity with the values of the Kingdom. (p. 19)

It may help when church leaders and congregations as such consistently consider evangelism (in a spirit of relational faith-sharing) as part and parcel of the development of a missional congregation. And not as something extra, an addition to becoming and being missional. Chilcote and Warner (2008) argue that all the articles in the volume they edited consider evangelism to be:

... a vital part of something larger than itself, namely, the *missio Dei*. While evangelism is but one part of God's larger mission in the world, it is the essence – the heart – of all Christian mission ... Third, evangelism is concerned with discipling people in Christ. The primary purpose of evangelism is not growing churches or recruiting members (although both may be its consequence). God forms people into authentic disciples of Jesus, and we participate in that process through evangelism... Evangelism, in other words, engages the Christian community in a complex inter-relational dynamic in both intra- and cross-cultural experiences of evangel-sharing. (pp. xxvi-xxvii; cf. also Brueggemann, this volume, 2008:219–234)

As acknowledged already, it is stated again that space does not allow us to explore the above in more detail. Two articles by Kierkegaard on discipleship and discipling are to be mentioned here. Jolley (2011:84–98) argues a case for how 'Kierkegaard's understanding of discipleship turns crucially on the Cross'. And this means that he thinks in terms of the incarnation:

For Kierkegaard, emphasizing the Incarnation is emphasizing the Crucifixion. For Kierkegaard, if I may put the point this way, the Incarnation is not so much an event in Christ's life as it is His life, seen from a particular point of view, a point of view in which its 'inner logic' is laid bare: an 'inner logic' whose starting-point and controlling initiative is the Cross. The events of Christ's life are all internally related to the Cross, and their meaning is only fully available at the Crucifixion. So, for Kierkegaard, who has this understanding of the Crucifixion, there is no emphasizing of the Incarnation that does not emphasize the Crucifixion. To think the Incarnation is to think the Cross. (pp. 84–85)

With this in mind, evangel-sharing and faith-sharing are deeply rooted in the Gospel of the Cross, the Incarnated Christ (cf. also Law 2011 for a discussion on 'discipleship and Church in the thought of Søren Kierkegaard and Dietrich Bonhoeffer').

A last suggestion within the scope of this article as to the long road of rediscovering and recovering discipleship as

faith-sharing to be a permanent ingredient of vital churches may be to embark on a consistent training programme to help members and disciples understand their faith as a gift of God and how to share the way they reckon with God on a daily basis. In the training course *Faithful Witnesses*, this will focus on both the *what* and the *why* of our faith – taking serious that:

- the *what* has to do with our beliefs about God. The objective of answering the *what* question, when asked, is to be understood
- the *why* has to do with our personal experiences of God. The objective of saying *why* we believe, when asked, is to be believable
- 'the *what* gives clarity to the *why*; the *why* gives integrity to the *what*' (Armstrong 1987:36).

Faith-sharing: A perspective from the National Church Life Survey

As indicated above, faith-sharing is an important aspect, if not the most important part, of discipleship and discipling. This section intends to answer the question from an empirical perspective – what is going on or what are congregations and its members doing in terms of discipleship and sharing the good news of the gospel? The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) will be utilised as an empirical source to answer this question.

The NCLS is a survey conducted among denominations and congregations that started in 1991 in Australia with the aim to give a voice to congregational members (Kaldor, Castle & Dixon 2002:96). The attender survey gives an opportunity to congregational members attending a worship service to give their opinion on a spectrum of aspects regarding congregational life (Hermans & Schoeman 2015:53–54).

Faith-sharing, as part of the outward focus area of a congregation, is one of the core qualities identified and measured in the NCLS attender survey (see Powell et al. 2012 for a more comprehensive description of the other core qualities). The 'faith-sharing' core quality measures willing and effective faith-sharing of attenders by referring to the following aspects:

- a willingness to invite others to a church service
- involvement in the evangelistic or outreach activities of the church
- a readiness to share their faith with others
- outreach, which is a highly valued part of the activities of the congregation.

The methodology of the survey consists of a structured questionnaire that was completed by the attenders (15 years and older) of a worship service on a specific Sunday. The Australian data used here are from the survey conducted in 2011 (216 063 questionnaires from 2874 congregations, 23 denominations), and the South African data are from the survey conducted in 2014 (18 838 questionnaires from 141 congregations, 5 denominations). The South African survey

was part of a pilot study and attenders from the Dutch Reformed Church comprises 77.8% of the completed questionnaires of this survey.

In the NCLS research, faith-sharing is seen as part of the outreach activities of the congregation and its members and it was found that they are on different levels involved in various activities. It may be in the form of active engagement, taking part in outreaches of the congregation, and discussions at home or other places. The attenders may also be willing to discuss their faith and how it influences their lives with others. Table 1 provides a summary of the findings regarding this specific core quality.

The following may be noted as general remarks on faith-sharing regarding the attenders from the South African survey:

- Thirty-eight per cent of the attenders invited someone to church here in the last year.
- Nine per cent are regularly involved in an outreach or evangelistic activities.
- Eighty per cent feel at ease and mostly at ease talking about their faith.
- Ten per cent choose reaching those who do not attend church as an aspect of the church that they most value (as one of three options to be selected).
- Twenty-two per cent believe more attention should be given to encouraging people here to share their faith or invite others in the next 12 months (as one of the three priorities for the congregation).

NCLS research found that inviting people who are currently not part of a congregation or attending worship services is an important way through which new members become part of a congregation. 'Among newcomers to Australian churches,

some 38% were prompted to attend through invitation of their spouse, a family member or a friend' (Powell et al. 2012:55). The research indicates that outreach activity, particularly attenders inviting others to church, is an activity closely associated with growth in attendance and the flow of newcomers into church. Churches that invite people also tend to be growing (Powell et al. 2012:56). The indication is that this is also the situation among South African attenders.

An important aspect of evangelisation is to talk about and share your faith experiences with others. In Australia, 17% of attenders feel at ease talking about their faith and look for opportunities to do so. About half (52%) mostly feel at ease and talk about faith if it comes up. Another 19% find it hard to talk about their faith, and 13% believe that their life and actions are sufficient. In the South African case, 14% feel at ease talking about their faith and 66% feel mostly at ease to do it. This is an important point to utilise to equip members to become involved in activities and be prepared to share their faith with others.

What are the congregational involvement and characteristics of the members talking about their faith? The research found that those that feel at ease talking about their faith are also highly involved in church life, experiencing personal growth in their faith and helping people in practical ways. They are also younger – older attenders prefer not to talk about their faith, believing their life example is sufficient (cf. Powell et al. 2012:57):

When church attenders feel they are growing in their faith, they are spurred on to share that with others in their lives, and many who share their faith find it a spiritually enriching experience. (p. 97)

Congregations should take note of this in developing strategies and programmes. Members feel that congregations should give greater encouragement to its membership in this regard. It should be part of a holistic or comprehensive approach within congregations.

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Authors' contributions

M.N. was responsible for paragraphs 1–4 of the article and W.J.S. was responsible for paragraph 5 of the article.

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TABLE 1: Willing and effective faith-sharing aspects.

Aspects	South Africa 2014 (%)	Australia 2011 (%)
1. Inviting others to church here/Willingness to invite to a church service here any friends and relatives who do not currently attend a church:		
Willing and invited someone in the last 12 months	38	35
Willing, but didn't invite someone in the last 12 months	46	37
Probably wouldn't invite someone	5	12
Definitely wouldn't invite someone	1	1
Don't know	11	15
2. Involvement in evangelistic or outreach activities		
Attenders involved regularly in outreach or evangelistic activity	9	18
3. Readiness to share faith with others		
Feel at ease talking about their faith and look for opportunities	14	17
Mostly feel at ease talking about their faith and do so if it comes up	66	52
Find it hard to talk about their faith in ordinary language	12	18
Do not like to talk about their faith; life and actions are sufficient	8	12
Do not have faith	0	1
4. Aspects of church's most valued outreach		
Attenders who most value this congregation reaching those who do not attend church	10	13
Attenders who want this congregation to give greater encouragement over the next 12 months for people to share their faith or invite others	21	17

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