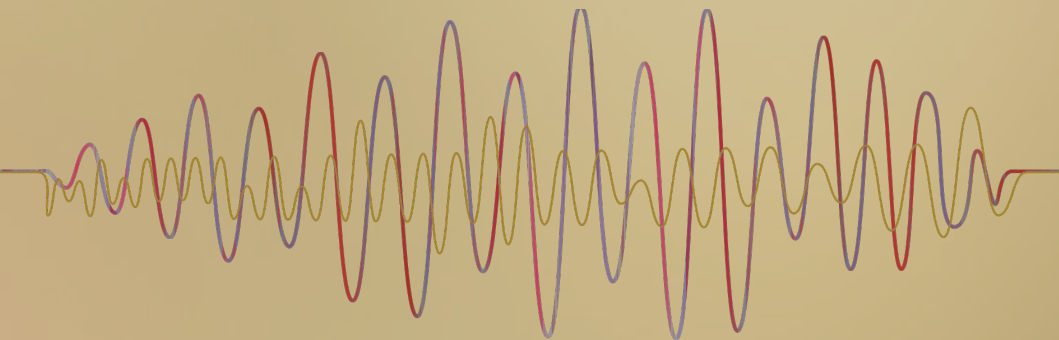


Life Together

Deepening our relationship with God across the Diocese of Rochester





I am excited by the possibilities raised through Life Together. It is a refreshing counter to the idea that we must make our own way in life, which often seeps into the way we view our faith. By inviting us to be reliant on and accountable to others, it breaks the mould. This might just be for you.

*Rt Rev Simon Burton-Jones,
Bishop of Tonbridge*

Introducing Life Together

Conversations around, **Called Together**, the vision for the Diocese of Rochester, identified a desire among many of us to be better equipped as 'devoted disciples' of Jesus.

Inspired by this desire, 'Life Together', aims to support those wishing **to deepen their relationship** with God.

It offers a way for people to abide and obey **with others** in Christ that is:

- Flexible
- Accessible by all sorts of groups and communities
- Clear enough for us all to feel we belong.

This is not about setting rigid structures, but about encouraging a rhythm of listening, commitment and regular prayer.

There are underlying guiding principles; they are the pulse points that help sustain the rhythm of our relationship with God and each-other.

Through our Life Together we will become fruitful in many ways.

Read on to discover more.



'They **devoted**
themselves to the
apostles' teaching and
to fellowship, to the
breaking of bread and
to prayer.'

ACTS 2:42

Why be part of Life Together?

It's a good question.

The disciples were those who Jesus called; they spent time with him and each other. They learnt together through many shared experiences and Jesus' teaching.

Early Christian communities also grew by spending time together.

From these examples we learn two fundamental steps towards growing as disciples:

- Devotion to Christ, and
- Making an intentional decision to respond to Christ's call to follow his lifestyle.

So, the more time we spend in relationship with Jesus, the more Christ-like we become.

We in turn become fruitful in many ways and God's kingdom grows in us, and in others.



Whoever is within it, or however it expresses itself, a Life Together group, is about Christians **joining together** to support each other, and being **committed** to the activities of the community or group.

Who is this for? Becoming devoted disciples together

The simple answer is, anyone.

You might be a church group, the PCC, a home group.

Maybe a group based in a school or office.

A 'Life Together' group could be a dispersed community who meet on-line, for example, a group of students or a group of commuters.

Maybe it is a group of people who find it hard to get out but support each other through phone conversations.

You might never have thought of being part of something like this before. Maybe you thought you didn't have the time, or just didn't know where to start 'getting connected' with God.

The ways in which this could work are endless, exciting and could be very imaginative.

PAUSE POINT Who might you be able to form a life together group with?

St Benedict wrote a short rule of life for the communities of monks he established. Still widely used today, his rule became the foundation for many religious communities and cathedrals, including Rochester Cathedral and the Sisters at Malling Abbey.

So how does it work? Guiding principles.

There is no one way to do this; there are no rules, no rigid structure.

Rather, there are guiding principles – our pulse points which are rooted in the Benedictine tradition.

These are:

- **stability** - which means abiding or being with Christ.
- **obedience** - which means listening and responding to Christ.
- **change** - which means living differently so others see us grow more in loving God, neighbour and ourselves. In the way Jesus loves.

How these elements are expressed by a group will be for the group to decide. They will discover what works for them. It is right that each group discovers its own way of being together.

What is important is to start, and to discover how you grow.

But first, let's explain why these principles matter...



'Abide in me as I abide in you. As the Father has loved me so have I loved you.

Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments you will **abide** in my love just as I have kept my Father's commandments and **abide** in His love.'

JOHN 15 4A, 9-10

STABILITY: Abiding in Christ

Abiding is more than just remaining or staying.

Abiding in Christ means we are sustained in and by Christ. It means being where Christ is.

In John 15, Jesus uses the vine to illustrate how we are called to abide as a community in Him, not just as individuals.

Abiding is a vital principle of Life Together.

Every time we respond to Christ's call to follow Him, we go deeper into our relationship with Him and each other as the body of Christ.

PAUSE POINT How could your group discern together where Christ is? Where is He calling you to be as you abide in Him?

In Hebrew, Shema means
listen or hear, and in
Greek, hypakoé means
'submission to what is
heard.'

OBEDIENCE: Listening to Christ and responding to Him.

Christian obedience is more than just doing as we are told.

The words used for obeying in the Bible mean listening.

St Benedict instructs his communities to listen to the voice of the leader and to the youngest voice. In other words, to value everyone's contribution including new ideas.

We can listen to God in four ways:

- we listen by spending time with God and reading scripture.
- we listen through and with those who share our desire for God, our intentional communities.
- we listen by tuning into God in the world.
- we learn to be attentive and expectant of God's presence.

Obedience is not a competition. It is the foundation of a relationship we and God work at together.

**PAUSE
POINT** What might you do in
your group to enable this
listening to take place?



'Be subject to one another
out of reverence to Christ.'

EPHESIANS 5:21

OBEDIENCE: Responding to Christ together

Just listening is not enough. Not to respond would be disobedience.

St Benedict was very clear that those who try to do this on their own can end up deluding themselves, and quite possibly not honouring God.

The danger is that we, not God, become the centre of our listening.

So, obedience requires discipline. Developing a regular habit of meeting together will help that discipline.

Obedience within community helps us stay focused on God together. If we do it intentionally and with commitment, we will become holy and fruitful.

Each Life Together group will want to work out how to be obedient and what works for them.

PAUSE POINT

What can your group do to ensure you hear Christ speaking through one another and are accountable to each other?



'By this everyone will know
that you are my disciples
if you have love for one
another.'

JOHN 13:35

CHANGE: Loving like Christ together

The whole point of Benedict's rule was that it would bring about a daily change of life.

The community routine gave the monks time to listen and respond to God through worship, study, work and rest.

By doing that together they held each other to account and discovered the life of the community.

Change, in 'Life Together' groups, will be evident by the ways they tangibly show love of God, neighbours and oneself. Loving like Jesus.

We are very comfortable with the golden rule: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your mind and with all your soul, and love you neighbour as yourself.'

One way of realising the impact of that command afresh is to change the word 'love' for a more active word like 'serve' or 'honour'.

PAUSE POINT

How will your Life Together group serve God, neighbour and yourselves as Jesus served?



This is just what we
needed, God has
placed us together and
has re-ignited us, we
must allow this to distil,
I was so lost but I feel
this is so right for me.

Members of Life Together group

PAUSE POINT

How might
you abide
together
and listen
together
to grow as
the body
of Christ
together?

IN SUMMARY...

'Life Together' is about...

- Being an intentional community with God and one another.
- Being with Christ, listening and responding together.
- Being filled and refilled with the Holy Spirit.
- Being people of whom it can be said: 'See how they love one another'.
- Being faithful in loving God, our neighbour and ourselves.
- Doing what you can do, not what you can't.
- Being confident about changing something if it is not working having tried it for a while.
- Connecting with God and each other locally and across the Diocese.
- Living out Jesus' lifestyle.

INTERESTED?

For more ideas and guidance, or to view our resource ideas and suggestions visit:
www.rochester.anglican.org/diocese/lifetogether

You should not feel limited by them. Please add to them but telling us what works for you. There are people willing to come and talk with you about how to set up a group.

If you would like someone to come to your church or Christian group please contact: Rev Jane Winter on lifetogether@rochester.anglican.org



Called together
grow enrich resource