



How Common Good training can help build the capacity of churches to serve communities and at the same time refresh mission.

Notes from a talk and discussion session for the Archdeaconry of Bexley and Bromley of the Diocese of Rochester, led by Jenny Sinclair, Director of Together for the Common Good. Held on 10 June 2019 at 3.45pm-5.15pm at Salomons Estate, Tunbridge Wells. Includes briefings on the new Here: Now: Us Workshop and Common Good Schools – see pp 11-12.

Thank you so much for inviting me; it's great to be here with you. Paul has asked me to tell you about our new Common Good training workshop, and I hope that some of you might want to use it. It can act like a catalyst for your community engagement, and in your disciple-making, open up new ways for people to put faith into action and deepen their sense of purpose. As a new tool in your toolbox, it will help your church refresh its mission in the community. I'll also tell you about our Common Good resources for schools.

But first, I'll explain why the Church needs Common Good capacity building at this point in time, and I'll tell you a little about Together for the Common Good.

About Together for the Common Good

Together for the Common Good is a small charity working to strengthen the bonds of social trust.

Our inspiration is rooted in the partnership between Bishop David Sheppard, my late father, Archbishop Derek Worlock and the Free Church leaders in Liverpool a generation ago. They disagreed a lot in terms of churchmanship and doctrine but resolved to work together for the good of the city – at a time of social unrest, division, political instability and sectarianism.

They saw themselves as brothers in Christ and became known for putting people and community first, they brought people together across divides, the black community and the police, business and unions, Catholic and Protestant. They helped to build up community organisations like the Eldonians Housing Association, and the Liverpool 8 Law Centre and supported local working class leadership. Their view was that the community is only complete if all can participate. They chaired a monthly breakfast meeting with local business leaders over many years that contributed to the regeneration of the region. Their partnership lasted twenty years. This was an outward facing church that earned public affection.

Above all, they listened to communities and joined in. Joined in with what was going on. Listening to what was needed. Always a servant leadership, in partnership.

This is a new time that warrants new responses, but what we draw from their legacy is their solidarity with local communities and their complementary gifts: in particular the wisdom of Catholic social teaching and the concept of the Common Good, the hospitality of the outward-facing church, the sense of vocational responsibility, the idea of a church not only *for* the poor but *of* the poor.

Like them we believe in the sacred nature of our common humanity and that every person has a contribution to make.

Our work

The work of Together for the Common Good is Spirit-led and calls people to fulfill their vocational responsibility, by putting Common Good principles into practice and by working with others of different opinions and backgrounds in shared purpose.

In essence, it is to become carriers of the gospel in the whole of life.

We create online and offline resources for church members, church leaders and schools, we hold public conversations to raise the profile of the Common Good and respond to requests for advice; our newsletter is read by about 2,000 people across the UK and beyond. Senior church leaders support our work. Relationship building across the Christian traditions is at the heart of what we do.

We draw from across the Christian traditions, but in particular from Catholic social teaching which is meant to be a gift to all people of goodwill. Sometimes it is referred to as the theology of the Holy Spirit in practice. It's a coherent values framework for good judgment, and correctly understood, it is non partisan, critiquing ideologies with a tendency to dehumanise, whether of the left or the right, vital now at a time of political upheaval. We've worked to make it accessible for Christians of all traditions and all people of goodwill.

Among those who know us, Together for the Common Good is seen as a bridge where Christians can meet - to reimagine a culture that overcomes division and puts people, communities and relationships first.

We are volunteer-driven and partner with people across the churches, as well as with allies from fellow faith and non religious traditions. We are ecumenical and non partisan. We run on a shoestring, punching above our weight thanks to our pro bono associates, working groups and strategic partnerships across the churches.

My story

How did I get involved in this? Well, growing up in a clergy household I must have absorbed a lot but I was a bit of a rebel and drifted away from the Church. I'd had a poor education, a misspent youth, and drifted with no proper career. But in my late twenties I was drawn towards the Catholic Church and underwent a dramatic conversion experience. I was

received in 1988. This was not about any kind of church politics or intellectual choice. I was called, that's all. All my assumptions were turned upside down and I felt as if I'd come home. Nothing particularly impressive had happened in my life apart some graphic design work, a lot of volunteering, a good marriage, and two lovely sons. In some ways I felt I'd failed to live up to my potential.

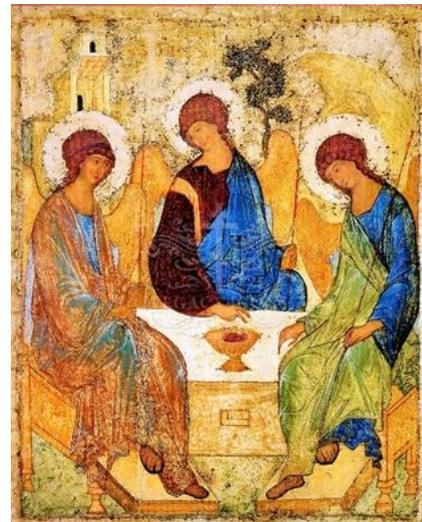
But in 2011, I felt a prompting of the Spirit. I can only describe it as if I was being drawn to look at something compelling that was very blurred. I asked God for it to be made clear to me what I should do. I prayed, read, and over that year a number of eminent people joined me.

We looked more closely at the Liverpool partnership. Their body language said it all, in standing side by side with communities, they demonstrated they were *for* people and not acting in their own institutional self interest. This was a lived reality of what it could mean to be a Church that really lived the gospel, building relationships, strengthening families, community and above all, where the human person was paramount.

Now, we think this inspiration is not for only church leaders, but the whole people of the Church, especially lay people.

Over time, Together for the Common Good has grown and unfolded in an organic way. We believe all the people of the churches are called to be missionary disciples, to live and engage with the world.

Like the relational model of the Trinity, we are called into relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to strengthen the bonds of social trust, to fulfill our vocational responsibility. We can do this by putting Common Good principles into practice and by working with others of different opinions and backgrounds in shared purpose, to play our part to build a common life, a shared life in which everyone participates, takes responsibility, building connections between human beings, rehumanising. A Common Good.



What's going on?

So why does the Church need Common Good training? How can this help build the capacity of churches to serve communities? Can it refresh mission at the same time?

So I want to pull back and look at a bigger picture. And as we explore this, the themes we address in the workshop will come through.

I think it's important that if churches are going to make a constructive contribution as we go forward through these times of upheaval we've got to be clear about what are the drivers, the causes, behind where we are.

So we are seeing a dealignment that's happening between the governed and those who govern us. These fault lines that have come up over the last say 20 years at least are now values divides. This is why our current political system is struggling to cope because it's no longer really about left and right. Our politicians are struggling to catch up with a realignment of cultural values.

Looking through the prism of the Common Good, it becomes clear what has happened. We're seeing people turning inward. We're seeing a breakdown in social trust. But it's been a long time in the making. And really it's to do with decades of individualism. An individualistic society – an understandable response to the 50s perhaps - but it's gone too far.

- So we've seen an extreme individualism on the right - in terms of the way the economic system has been captured by neo liberalism, which has been bleeding into all areas of our lives, commodifying human beings and nature, the degradation of communities.
- And we've seen it on the left as well in a kind of social individualism with its emphasis on rights - the me culture. We have lost the language of mutual obligation.

This kind of individualism over these years has I think led to three overlapping crises:

1. *a crisis of social solidarity*. We're seeing a rise in loneliness, among not only the old but especially the young. We're seeing indifference to struggling families. We're seeing a sharp increase in economic inequality. But also we see a rise in mutual suspicion. Deplatforming, filter bubbles and echo chambers, where people are less willing to engage with those unlike themselves. We are seeing a narcissism, a fascination with the self, with rights. We are seeing a dehumanising identity politics and 'intersectionality', categorising people according to group identity rather than as unique human beings;
2. *a crisis of alienation*, a collapse of trust in institutions; a disconnect between the governing class and the governed, great inequalities of power; whole groups of people have been completely ignored. Some even discarded.
3. *a crisis of purpose*. Of meaning. There is a sense that 'nothing matters'. A kind of nihilism. We're seeing rises in addiction, depression, suicide - all those kind of measures.

This comes from a culture of individualism. Which is contrary to our human nature and to natural law. We are social beings. And it's infected our life together. It's driving us apart. This is not peculiar to the UK, we can see its effects across all the developed economies which have absorbed this culture.

The challenge to individualism

The churches actually have a potential here. To overcome the sort of binaries that we're seeing dividing the West. The sort of binaries that we see between old and young, urban and rural, left and right, conservative and liberal, the so-called open-closed divide, those who have or haven't been to university, those who identify more with the global, and those who feel a strong sense of belonging to place, the Anywheres and Somewheres. All these kinds of polarisations. The past three years have revealed values divides and estrangements but they are not new: they go back at least two decades.

And the reason I think that the churches have the potential to overcome this, at least to transcend it, is because we ourselves live with these tensions. We ourselves are used to navigating the liberal and the conservative divide. Even in this room perhaps! And yet we are united: we know our common identity as human beings is in Jesus Christ.

We, the Church (speaking as a lay person, I mean all the people of the Church, lay and ordained) ... we are more than our hierarchies, more than our institutions. And I think we have the potential – with some capacity building - to play our part to build a renewed sense of community, to overcome this divisive culture of individualism. It won't be easy or quick. This is the great task of our time.

The Common Good

So we talk about the Common Good as an antidote to individualism. And it has been set as one of the C of E's quinquennial goals since 2010. But it has got stuck at the level of rhetoric and few people understand what it means in practice. While this is the case it cannot fulfill its potential.

It is often misunderstood and people tend to project what they want on to it. However it is in fact a rigorous concept and something that can be put into practice. We have a particular definition. But first I'd like to hear what you think.

DISCUSSION IN PAIRS: WHAT DO YOU THINK THE COMMON GOOD IS?

2 MINS EACH, FOLLOWED BY PLENARY DISCUSSION

So we've engaged deeply with this and this is how we define it:

"The Common Good is the shared life of a society in which everyone can flourish - as we act together in different ways that all contribute towards that goal, enabled by social conditions that mean every single person can participate. We create these conditions and pursue that goal by working together across our differences, each of us taking responsibility according to our calling and ability."

So we say the Common Good is the shared life of a society in which everyone can flourish. But it's generated as we act together, in different ways that all contribute towards that goal. And it's enabled by social conditions that mean everyone can participate. And it requires us to participate. It requires us to take responsibility. And to work across our differences of opinion, class and background.

So the Common Good is not a utopian ideal, it's something that exists between us particularly when people come together across difference. So Common Good is different from 'community cohesion' - which is a kind of government-speak, right? Common Good in a Christian sense is about *encounter* between human beings. Something sacred.

This reciprocity is very well expressed in Jeremiah 29.7, probably the clearest expression of the Common Good in scripture, and a guide for the role of the church at this moment:

Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare, you will find your welfare.

Again, we can see there the sense of reciprocity, as well as enlightened self interest and of sacrifice, of mutual obligation.

We have derived a set of principles which unpack the Common Good in a practical way, which we group together under the headings:

the human person, social relationships, stewardship and everyone is included, no one is left behind.

We call this Common Good Thinking and it provides a coherent framework for living out our faith in the world. We can become carriers of these values.

There's something about our tradition, our Christian tradition, that understands the true nature of the human person. Which is transcendent. And so that puts us in a slightly different category. And I think frankly more is expected of us.

Non tribal

Especially to be non tribal. There's a great temptation now for people to take tribal positions. And I think that's something we really have to refuse. That's quite a challenge!

I think a lot of people in the churches actually are tribal – liberal, conservative, left and right, Brexit and Remain. Even sadly across our own spectrum of Christian traditions, we have a lot of tribalism going on. I think we need to be honest with ourselves here. Jesus wept! He calls us to be one! John 17: 21-23:

“that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

This is not to say we are meant to be the same. We are not meant to be the same. Like the example earlier – where the church leaders worked together despite strong disagreements, we have different gifts to bring to the table. But certainly, as Christians, we are meant to collaborate wherever possible.

The Church - when it's really at its best - and after all what I think most people, not least the unchurched, expect it to be - is to be authentically itself. Not to try to be like mainstream society, not to be cheerleaders for particular political ideologies. We must be clear about our centre of gravity. But to be welcoming and to offer a sense of family no matter what, a sense of belonging and the numinous - that transcends the two-dimensional nature of materialism. And yet is firmly rooted in every day life.

And I think there is actually an appetite for optimism. People are desperate for a unifying vision of our common humanity – we may want this from our politicians but actually I think it needs to be generated from the grassroots, and the Church has great potential.

The role of the Church

So what kind of vision is authentically Christian at this critical moment? There is a lot of emphasis on evangelism just now. Prayer is our cornerstone. But when we are called, how are we called to act? How will we play our part at a time of social and political upheaval? What people want to know is how does my spirituality connect to my every day actions? This is where Common Good Thinking is so helpful as a guide to good judgement.

What proportion of congregations see it as part of their calling to be welcoming to ex-offenders, or to welcome and support struggling families? Or to support couple counselling? Or to devote mentoring time to young people starting out? How many parishioners realise their gifts and skills could help the local community? Like the chiropodist who holds a weekly surgery for homeless people in her church.

This is not just about adopting a social franchise or fundraising for a charity, but also about *personal* commitment. It is both/and. We are called to be a *relational* church. This is not about campaigns, and is not party political – it is much broader and deeper.

It requires listening. Knowing our neighbourhoods, assessing need, doing our homework. Responding according to our unique gifts and assets, and partnering with others. Finding out about what is already going on, and joining in. It's about working *with* local communities, rather than *for* them. A form of engagement that is not about *doing to* but *working with*.

DISCUSSION IN PAIRS: DISCUSS HOW YOUR CHURCH IS WORKING FOR THE COMMON GOOD IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

2 MINS EACH, FOLLOWED BY PLENARY DISCUSSION

Knowing your own country

And in this time of division, we need to ask if we are really in touch with our own country. How well do we know the different parts of our country. We're all living in tiny slivers of our society. And we rarely step outside those, even in our own neighbourhood! So I think we need to intentionally build relationships with people and organisations we don't know.

At this time of increasing polarisation there is of course a role for reconciliation here. But we need to be careful. There's a lot of talk about reconciliation across the churches right now. But we need to check that it's not actually some kind of patronising, well-meaning attempt at 're-education', because of some pity for people who disagree with us. When we talk about reconciliation it requires respecting the other person's opinion and the integrity of their humanity. And recognising that intelligent people do come to different conclusions.

Respecting different opinions is in fact essential to our survival as a species. As the psychologist Jonathan Haidt says in his book 'The Righteous Mind', it is only by engaging with different ideas and experiences that we can come to effective solutions. To a shared sense of truth. Living in echo chambers in fact weakens us. It makes us less willing to live a shared life with others who think differently, and so threatens our democracy.

So I think intentionally having a one to one conversation - at least once a week - in some depth - with someone we know we disagree with - is really important.

And we have to be the people who are willing to have the difficult conversations. We must be the ones who stay in the room when others leave. When others close down the dialogue. When others refuse to engage.

I think it's worth saying too that there is an urgent need to reclaim ground that's been ceded to extremists. So we cannot any longer let the far right for example, claim patriotism, or let liberal progressives decry people's sense of belonging to place as backward. Certain difficult subjects have been vacated by mainstream discourse to the extent that they have been colonised by extremists of the hard left and the far right.

St Paul constantly talks about us being members of one body. So if we are serious as people of the Church, building a Common Good between divided sections of our society is our business.

A humble Church with a relational purpose

We have to reclaim a language of national community - something everyone can adhere to. And so we need to be brave. We need to be courageous. And I think we need to be humble.

The sense of a humble church, a church of humility, even a broken church, that recognizes its own failings but that offers a sense of belonging for everyone in common humanity, a church where people of all social classes feel at home, and also one that has an authentic historical and geographical rootedness.

Churches are well-placed to generate that authentic vision and practical action. A great deal is already going on. We highlight activity across the traditions in our newsletter and blog.

But the potential of the people of the churches is still relatively untapped. We need to involve more people – go beyond the usual suspects, the activists.

Capacity building is needed. To build bonds within and between communities and build relationships between people who are estranged. To be a rehumanising influence. put the Common Good into practice in our everyday lives and work, connecting spirituality with action.

In a few minutes we'll look at our Common Good training workshop - our first contribution to that great task. But first, let's just think for a moment about the role of the Church in society now.

In the coming months and years the Church faces huge challenges. But we have a gift the country needs, and we are in a position to do things that neither the individual nor the state can do. We can offer a personal rather than an institutional kind of care (think of the response to Grenfell tragedy). But to do this we need to be very well stitched-in to our communities.

The Church could be seen by wider society as an asset rather than an irrelevance in our national life - if our character is perceived to be just, outward-facing, relational, generous.

Such a Church has something of immense value to say about the way we live together, the way we do society, the way we do community. It is this kind of contribution within civil society that will help pave the way to a new political settlement for the Common Good.

The Church has unrivalled knowledge at local level, and can help people engage with issues that affect them, not doing *to* but working *with*, raising up local leadership to overcome social inequality, to build communities that bring people together. We are called to be more than a presence.

Churches have not only buildings and resources but people on the ground. We are called to be a body of people whose whole mission is about rehumanising and strengthening the bonds of social trust.

This is what the Church is meant to be. It is about meaning and belonging. A relational Church calling others to Common Good values. So that Common Good becomes part of everyday mission. A part of who we are as Christians.

An important part of this is about connecting across our own silos, our different traditions. Part of what we do at T4CG is to cross-pollinate. But there's no syncretism here, no dumbing down of our traditions. There are distinctive and complementary gifts - from the Pentecostals, Anglo Catholics, Evangelical Anglicans, Liberal Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, charismatics and so on. We don't have to like each other, but we can learn from each other's gifts and be more effective when we collaborate for the good of our communities, and our country.

Strengthening local institutions

One of the building blocks within Common Good Thinking is the understanding that churches are local 'institutions' - among others in civil society – those bodies that mediate between the individual and the state, and provide ways for us to be human with each other – so, local businesses, charities, associations, sports clubs, unions, guilds, other places of worship and so on. We are not talking about the state or big business here.

Each local institution is seen to have a unique vocational responsibility. If a church understands this outward-facing purpose, it becomes obvious that part of its role is to help other civil society institutions in the area live up to their vocational responsibilities too, and to forge bridging capital between them.

This is how we will strengthen civil society and is vital to resist the dominance and dehumanising tendencies of big business and the centralised bureaucratic state. These local institutions are a vital force in ensuring our life together remains human. Good, connected, local institutions are a rehumanising influence.

An antidote to individualism

So what we are talking about here is an antidote to the culture of individualism - of both the right and the left - which has been dominant and has side-lined too many communities for too long. We want to build a shared life where everyone can participate, where all are valued. Churches can play a vital role in reasserting what it means to be human, unveiling the sacred, strengthening social trust, building community, providing meaning and belonging. This is a potent way to refresh purpose and mission, as well as guarding against mission drift.

So we've talked through some of the themes which feature in our Common Good resources – we could see this polarisation coming several years ago and so what you see today has been developed and piloted over that time. I hope some of you may want to use them.

© Jenny Sinclair

Jenny Sinclair is founder director of Together for the Common Good, a charity working to strengthen the bonds of social trust. T4CG calls and resources people to fulfil their vocational responsibility by putting Common Good principles into practice. Partnering with people across the churches, they offer resources, training and events to reimagine a culture that overcomes division and puts people, communities and relationships first. T4CG draws from across the Christian traditions, in particular Catholic Social Teaching, and is inspired by the constructive role played by church leaders, for the good of the city, in Liverpool a generation ago.

Find out more at <http://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/>

4.45: BRIEFING: T4CG's Here: Now: Us Common Good Training Workshop

So let's look at our one-day Common Good Training workshop first. Click link below to see the slides that were shown in this session.

INTRODUCTION TO T4CG'S NEW
HERE: NOW: US COMMON GOOD TRAINING WORKSHOP
DISCUSSION AND Q & A

TO VIEW SLIDES ON THE WORKSHOP, CLICK THIS LINK:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1-UA_x_TAW0WTtZcD7yO78_r_AYbl1SxA_YVZ8ukhwDI/edit

For information about hosting a workshop, please email
workshops@togetherforthecommongood.co.uk

This Common Good training is for Christians of all traditions. It works really well as a catalyst for relationships, and helps people discern their unique vocational responsibility and helps churches get better stitched-in to community, to put faith into practice.

Hosting a workshop

We recommend cohorts of 12-20. You can host the workshop in partnership with a neighbouring church or two, and in doing so, forge relationships between your churches for the benefit of the community. Or, the workshop works equally well in a single church: it will refresh your sense of mission.

Facilitation

You can book one of T4CG's trusted facilitators to lead the workshop alongside your role as Local Host. Alternatively, if you are an experienced facilitator you can run the training day yourself - with about a day's preparation. All materials you need are in the training kit.

We will be running a 'train the trainers' day for experienced facilitators in the autumn.

To get involved, please email workshops@togetherforthecommongood.co.uk.

5.05: BRIEFING: T4CG's Common Good Schools 10-week programme

Now let's look at our ten-week Common Good Schools resource. Click link below to see the slides that were shown in this session.

INTRODUCTION TO T4CG'S NEW COMMON GOOD SCHOOLS 10-WEEK PROGRAMME DISCUSSION AND Q & A

TO VIEW SLIDES ON THE SCHOOLS RESOURCE, CLICK THIS LINK:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/e/2PACX-1vQNJPctVX_0LMW3Heyx3YDIwu_VL6hh5Y-9L9_FZGVSMYeg8I4d27zCrAVE-SrMf0Pv1TCR5enolck/pub?start=true&loop=true&delayms=5000&slide=id.p1

For information about running the schools programme, please email schools@togetherforthecommongood.co.uk

The Common Good Schools resource is a comprehensive, versatile 10-week programme of flexible off the shelf materials. It is designed to help young people develop character, cultivates good relationships, foster a sense of personal responsibility and strengthen the school's engagement with the local community. It consists of 10 lessons, 10 assemblies and a community engagement guide.

Running the programme

The 10-week programme is designed for KS3&4 in any secondary school. It is intentionally written in non religious language; passages from Scripture and prayers complement the content well, according to each school's unique context. The materials are designed to be versatile to be delivered in a variety of settings, for example in PSHE, SMSC, Tutor Time, RE lessons or extra curricular.

Induction

We make the resources available digitally free of charge after an induction for which a reasonable fee is charged. Hard copy materials can be ordered from our print partner.

To arrange an induction, please email schools@togetherforthecommongood.co.uk.