

Anglican WORLD

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A decade of churches getting messy

Doing too much/not enough at church?

Find out how to serve using
your strengths

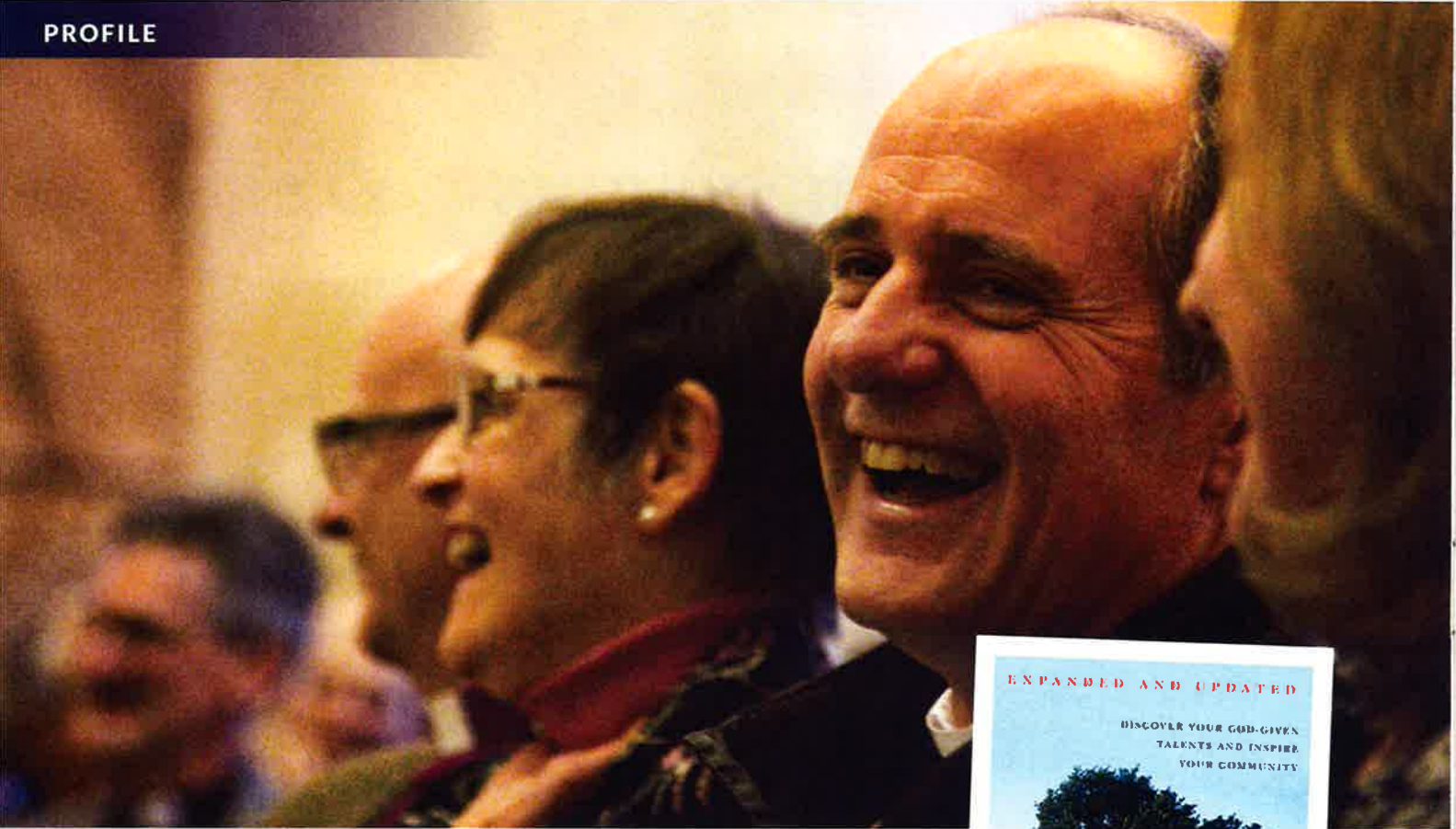
The 7000 km-wide diocese

Europe's newest bishop speaks about
his road map

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Bishop Lee says if people understand how God has made them, they can play to their strengths

Becoming God's gift to your church

BY JENNIFER BUTTER

AS OUR CHURCH service ended, the children raced out of my Sunday school class to claim their post-service biscuit. I was left smeared with paint, surrounded by an explosion of craft materials, and utterly exhausted. As a mother of two small children, my heart had sunk at the invitation to spend Sunday mornings with more little darlings, but there were too few volunteers and so I had agreed to fill the gap.

Being on the Sunday school rota also means attending the Children & Youth Work team meetings. At the last one, other enthusiastic souls were alive with stories of how children were really engaging with the Bible thanks to different resources they had prepared. I knew in my heart that I had no talent for

all this, but I gritted my teeth and decided to make an extra effort.

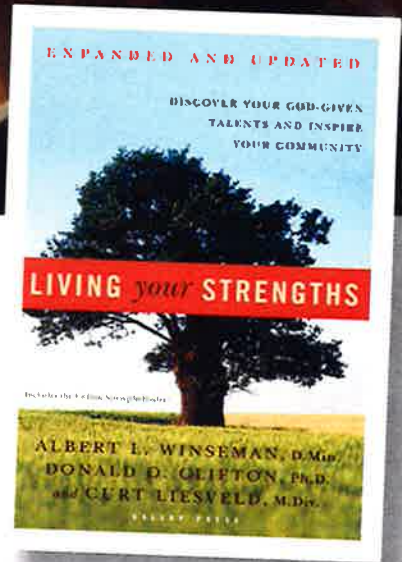
This morning the children in my Bubbles Sunday school class had done it all: crafts, a group drama, singing and games. Convinced I'd nailed it I asked my five-year-old daughter afterwards: "So, can you tell me who Jacob and Esau were?" She thought a moment before chirruping "Muslims?"

Most churches around the world rely on volunteers – willing or otherwise. People step up to do whatever is needed which, while admirable, has the potential for disaster. Not everyone has a gift for singing in the choir, or cooking church meals, or visiting the bereaved, or leading Sunday school classes. Put the wrong person in charge of a ministry and they are likely to do more harm than good – to themselves as well as to those

around them. Failing at something you've been asked to do, or doing it badly, knocks your confidence and stops you trying anything new.

It is hardly surprising that so many people are 'pew-sitters' content to watch others run themselves ragged juggling multiple church responsibilities. The well-known global performance-management consulting company Gallup, famous for its opinion polls, has discovered many congregants feel disengaged from their faith communities, to the extent that they eventually choose to leave. Alana Draus from Gallup said, "More than half report that they don't get the opportunity to do what they do best in their congregation."

So it seems there are people out there who want to get involved in their church but don't know how. Imagine what a congregation and





KEITH BLUNDY, AEGIES PR

(Left and middle) Serving using the gifts God has give you can be lots of fun. (Right) Tony Shields says to also ask others to identify your talents.

✦ their community might look like, if each church member – including the clergy – was engaged in a ministry that they loved, and were good at?

There are a growing number of Christians who are using traditionally secular methods of revealing individual skills and talents to do just that.

Tony Shields, is a leading member of Emmanuel Church, an Anglican church in Oxfordshire, England. He has done many gift surveys over the years including Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Saddleback pastor Rick Warren's S.H.A.P.E, as well as Gallup's own Clifton Strengthfinder test. Such surveys help show congregation members how to identify and affirm their talents, use them for growth and service, and discover their true calling.

He explained that the value of undergoing such skill surveys is that you can reveal areas of strength you never knew you had. "Initially you tend to look at your worldly experiences and think I can give these to the church," he said, "That's not necessarily what God wants because if you've got [your areas of strength] wrong in the first place, then God isn't going to pat you on the back."

Mr Shields, who recently led Emmanuel's involvement in the town's ecumenical mission and outreach week, said that surveys are just one way of discovering your God-given talents. "Sometimes we need to run these types of exercises, but we should also sit down and talk with people to get their view of how they see us."

The Revd Donald Fishburne, Rector of Saint Paul's Episcopal Church, Chattanooga, USA, believes ministers need to realise how God given talents can be brought together to do ministry a new way. He uses the Clifton Strengthfinder test inside and outside his church to enable people, relationships and ministries to be more effective, "I began using it in my individual coaching of new clergy as well as clergy taking up new posts as rectors and deans of significant parishes and cathedrals," he said, "I have begun using it in my own parish as part of pre-marital conversations, and with [married] couples looking for help and resources."

Mr Fishburne added that he was planning to roll out the talents test with lay professionals and vestry members.

The Church of England's Suffragan Bishop of Swindon, the Rt Revd Lee Rayfield, has also used such tools to enable others to understand how they can best contribute to God's work. He said the key thing to gifting methodology is understanding how God has created us, so people can play to their God-given strengths, "for the glory of God, the benefit of his people, and God's mission in the world".

The Bible is filled with examples of people discovering and utilising skills for the Kingdom – Moses, Joseph, Gideon – and while we should always find our joy in God, using the talents he has given us means we will inevitably be more effective and happier. Gallup found from their 50 years of research, that

people who use their strengths every day report having three times better quality of life.

However, even if we do put our talents to good use in the church, Bishop Lee points out that that shouldn't stop us from sweeping the floor or cleaning the toilet because we are 'not gifted that way'. "You've got to see the gifts you've been given by God in the context of servanthood. They are not there to glorify you or to make sure that you just do the things that you like. They are actually to build up the body of Christ, glorify God and transform the world".

Having done the Clifton Strengthfinder test, I have found that one of my gifts is the ability to relate to people on a deeper one-to-one level. Looking at how I can use this talent to best serve my church, I was able to lay down the childrens work and instead join the prayer ministry team. Doing so means that on Sunday mornings I'm more energised and more effective.

It also means another church member with the talent for it can teach my children about those famous descendants of Abraham, Jacob and Esau.

Jennifer Butter is a life coach and strengths coach based in Bicester, UK.

Learn more about your God-given talents and strengths at

Clifton Strengthfinder test
www.strengthfinder.com/

Myers Briggs Type Indicator personality test
www.myersbriggs.org/

Rick Warren's S.H.A.P.E.
www.saddlebackresources.com/SHAPE-C156.aspx