



# GWC Newsletter | April 2026

## Treasuring the Old, Embracing the New

by The Rev. Dr Mark Dickson (GWC Principal)

Welcome to this edition of our newsletter.

The theme running through this newsletter is a simple one, but an important one: old and new. It is a theme close to the heart of Anglicanism itself. We are heirs to a rich and beautiful inheritance – the treasures of the Anglican church, handed down over centuries.

Yet we are also called to live faithfully in the present, asking how that inheritance can be carried into our changing, ever more digitised world. One of the strengths of the Anglican tradition has been its ability to hold those two things together.

Regarding what is unchanging, the English Reformers were deeply concerned that the church should be shaped by the pure Word of God and by the right administration of the sacraments. They were not interested in preserving empty forms for their own sake, but in ordering the life of the church so that men and women might be brought to Christ and built up in him through the Bible and through the visible signs of baptism and Lord’s supper.



This means that the “old” is never merely old. The liturgy of the church, the prayer book itself, and the steady reading and hearing of Scripture are not relics from another age. They are gifts. They help anchor us in God’s truth and help train our hearts in the worship of God. They remind us that Christians are formed not only by theological ideas, but by good Bible-driven habits. This is why Bishop Siegfried Ngubane at his consecration as Presiding Bishop of Reach SA swore allegiance to the original English version of the 1662 book of common prayer. He did this not because of anything Western so to speak, but because of a timeless theology expressed by Cranmer and the English part of the Reformation. Anglican theological expression of the gospel in Africa should be no different to Cranmer’s original theology.

And yet Anglicanism has always made room for the “new”. Article 34 of Cranmer’s 39 Articles teaches that traditions and ceremonies “may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men’s manners,” so long as nothing obscures the gospel. In other words, Anglicanism at its best is not rigid traditionalism. It is rooted faithfulness: holding fast to unchanging Biblical truth while adapting forms for new settings and new peoples. At GWC, we are navigating how to embrace AI and digital tools that can aid learning and discipleship, while being careful to avoid the obvious pitfalls that exist.

All in all then this newsletter reflects something deeply important. Faithfulness is not a choice between past and present. It is not a choice between treasured forms and thoughtful innovation. Rather, it is the task of receiving what we have inherited and then asking how it may best serve Christ in our own day.

My hope is that this newsletter will encourage you to do exactly that.

With warm greetings,  
Mark



# The Formative Power of Worship



*Our new Monday chapel services help students experience the formative value of a set liturgy, preserving and drawing upon the historic treasures of the reformed faith, while also situating our worship within the broader life of African Anglicism.*

*By Dr Jake Griesel*

At the most basic level, “liturgy” (from the Greek λειτουργία) simply refers to any public service. Its more common and acquired Christian connotation, however, is the structure or orderly pattern of public worship. The purpose of liturgy is to ensure that the church accords with the apostolic directive that everything in its assembly should edify and be done “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:26, 40); in other words, that the service both builds up the saints and reflects the orderliness appropriate to God’s worship. A well-structured liturgy helps achieve this by providing a theologically-informed pattern through which the gospel is repeatedly ministered to the congregation.

## Being built up in the truths of the gospel

This is reflected in the historic Latin maxim “lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi”, which simply means that the way the church worships shapes what the church believes, and what the church believes shapes how the church lives. Week by week, month by month, and year by year, the structure and content of worship quietly form the faith and life of God’s people. As believers confess their sins together, hear the assurance of God’s mercy in Christ, praise the Lord in song, listen to the reading and preaching of God’s word, confess their common faith in the creeds, pray the Lord’s Prayer, intercede for others, receive the sacraments, and depart with God’s blessing, they are steadily built up in the truths of the gospel and encouraged to live in light of them.

Thomas Cranmer and his fellow English reformers recognised the formative power of worship, which is why they devoted careful attention to shaping the church’s liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer. Their aim was to ensure that the church’s public worship would be saturated with Scripture, grounded in sound doctrine, shared actively by the whole congregation, expressed with clarity and simplicity, and attentive to prayer for the needs of the church and the world. A theologically well-ordered liturgy is therefore a vital means by which the church’s faith is nourished and its life directed.

## Sustained moments of stillness before God

Our new Monday chapel service follows the Morning Prayer liturgy from the REACH-SA Prayer Book in its entirety. It is deliberately quieter and more reflective: there is no singing, no sermon, and no electronic screens. Students are encouraged simply to listen as the three Scripture readings are read aloud, rather than following along in their own Bibles. After the readings, a few minutes of silence are kept so that students may personally reflect on the Word they have heard and respond to it in prayer. In a culture marked by constant noise, digital distraction, and relentless activity, many Christians rarely experience sustained moments of stillness before God. The Monday chapel service is therefore intended to cultivate habits of attentive listening to God’s Word, reflective prayer, and reverent participation in liturgical worship.

The prayer book’s rhythms of Scripture reading, confession, prayer, and congregational responses reflect a liturgical heritage shaped over centuries. Engaging with this tradition helps students see themselves not only as part of the contemporary church in Africa, but also as participants in the wider Anglican world across time and place. In this way, our chapel services aim to hold together two important realities: being rooted in the African context in which we minister, while also drawing on our deep and formative Anglican liturgical heritage.



## Screen-free GWC?

*At the beginning of the year, Vice-Principal Academic & Academic Dean Dr Jonathan More announced the banning of screens in lectures and chapel services.*

*Here he explains how the significant gains to learning and attention far outweigh the momentary inconveniences...*



At GWC, we want and expect students to use digital technology in appropriate situations when the use of such technology will enhance and improve their learning, and so to say we have a “screen-free policy” is an overly simplistic misnomer. Unfortunately, in classroom-based lectures, it is usually the case that cell phones and laptops detract from the quality of students' learning. There are two main ways in which this happens.

### **Handwriting as an important tool for learning**

There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that, when compared to typing, handwriting is better for learning. Although it's not always clear why, some researchers suggest that handwriting involves our bodies more than typing does. This, in turn, seems to generate more connections in our brains, resulting in better memory and improved learning. As [one study observes](#): “Handwriting activates a broader network of brain regions involved in motor, sensory, and cognitive processing. Typing engages fewer neural circuits, resulting in more passive cognitive engagement. Despite the advantages of typing in terms of speed and convenience, handwriting remains an important tool for learning and memory retention, particularly in educational contexts.” This should not surprise those who hold to a biblical anthropology in which the body, mind and soul are understood holistically.

### **Our attention span in crisis**

The second, and perhaps even more important, reason for banning screens from most of our lectures is because of the attention crisis. Our screens are constantly interrupting us with notices about incoming emails, social media posts, breaking news, and a thousand other things. In her book “Attention Span”, Dr Gloria Mark reports on her research into attention, showing how small interruptions like notifications effect our attention in dramatic ways. A silent notification on a cell phone draws our attention – even if we try to ignore it – and distracts us from whatever we were doing before. These constant distractions lead to decreased performance and increased stress. The effect of these distractions on the deep learning in which we want our students to engage is devastating.

Our decision to ban screens from chapel (except, in some cases, for the preacher!) flows from similar concerns. Even the strongest-willed among us find it difficult to concentrate on the Word when the Bible on our phone has a WhatsApp message displayed above it or when it's buzzing in our jacket pocket. We have a few moments per week that have been set aside for us to meet together as a College for prayer and the ministry of the word, and so we want to ensure that our attention is given wholly to hearing from the Lord and encouraging one another.



“God generated every aspect of creation, not just the material aspects or the immaterial aspects, but even just the concepts that are operative within creation. But when we create AI, we're taking from what God has already created. So we don't create AI out of nothing.

The other difference is that humanity is created in the image of God, and that means we need to also be thinking about, well, in whose image is AI being created? And is it that we are creating something in our own image when we're developing AI? Or are we developing something that really is only loosely related to us, but is almost its own kind of category, a new thing in the world?

And then, even if AI did not have life breathed into it, it's still able to take action, especially when we're thinking about agentic AI. So we need to think a little bit more thoughtfully about what does it mean to have agency? And what is the relationship between the agency that an AI has and the agency that we possess as people created in the image of God? One of the things that I stressed was that we don't want to simply have very simplistic answers to what AI is and how we respond to it.”

*We were delighted to welcome theologian, researcher and Mesa scholar Dr Anthony Buck to GWC recently...*

Dr Buck spoke to us about the seminar that he delivered at GWC to postgraduate students related to an article he is working on about the theology of agentic AI.

## Deepen, Develop, Deploy: The PGDipHTE Journey



GWC's Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Theological Education (PGDipHTE), officially launched in January 2026, is an online synchronous programme designed with the African context in mind. It aims to equip educators to teach with theological depth and cultural awareness, integrating faith, leadership, and mission within the life of the church.

The PGDipHTE was developed by GWC faculty members Drs Richard and Caroline Seed, who are lecturing the programme's modules. The Seeds lead the College's TEDS (Theological Education Development Services) department, which has been running its TALHITE (Teaching and Learning for Higher Theological Education) short course for a number of years. Both TALHITE and the brand new PGDipHTE are unique professional development programmes in Education and Pedagogy for the African continent. They will continue to multiply TEDS' impact through every classroom it influences as it shapes a generation of theological educators to serve the church with depth, clarity, and conviction.

Reflecting on his experience, PGDipHTE student Julius Kithinji, Academic Dean of St Paul's University in Kenya, shared:

"I enrolled in the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Theological Education at George Whitefield College because I believe in the need for ongoing learning and professional development in theological education. While there is much theological education in Africa, not all of it is grounded in sound methodology. This programme brings renewed focus to the Christian foundations of education that we need to recover.

The PGDipHTE will benefit Africa by strengthening theological education to be both for Africa and by Africa, through the development of sound pedagogy and professional skill."

GWC alumnus Cristóbal Cerón planted the Santiago Apóstol Church (ISA) in Santiago, Chile in 2011, where he is currently the Senior Pastor. He is also the Canon for Church Planting and Training in the Santiago Dioceses. He reflected on how he has experienced the first PGDipHTE intensive:

"The most exciting part is to study with people who are keen to see God's Kingdom grow and who see theological formation as an important part of it. The first module gave me the opportunity to reflect on the history of theological education and the theological suppositions that have been in the backdrop of every stage. This overview led me to think in our own context: 'Why do we do things the way we do, and how can they be improved?'"

## A Joyous Celebration of Milestones and New Beginnings

On 23 March 2026, the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Graduation and Matriculation Service was held at St James Church in Kenilworth, bringing together students, families, and church communities in a meaningful celebration.

A total of 40 students graduated across various programmes, including 10 Higher Certificate, 27 Bachelor of Theology, 8 Honours, and 3 Master's degrees. In addition, 49 matriculants were formally welcomed, with students across both groups representing 22 African countries.

We praise God for His faithfulness and provision, and for the lives impacted through this journey of growth and learning.

The occasion was marked by joy and gratitude, celebrating the achievements of graduates while embracing the promise and potential of those just starting out.



Graduates Nonhlanhla Tshabalala, Joseph Abosi and Tumukunde Mwesiga celebrate the fruits of years of hard work.

*The church in Africa is growing, and a growing church needs trained leaders who can lead people to better understand God's Word and disciple their congregations to Christian maturity.*

*Are you considering full-time ministry?*

**Applications for 2027**

**Open on**

**27 April 2026**



[www.gwc.ac.za/how-to-apply/](http://www.gwc.ac.za/how-to-apply/)



## Can Discipleship Go Digital?

Graham Heslop is Editor-in-Chief at The Gospel Coalition Africa. A GWC alumnus, he spoke to us about the concept of “digital discipleship” and its importance within the context of the African Church.

### What is digital discipleship?

Digital discipleship is essentially helping someone grow spiritually through the use of digital tools, social media, and online platforms to help share the gospel, build relationships and foster spiritual growth. It involves meeting people in virtual spaces to provide community, support, and mentorship, bridging the gap between digital and physical ministry.

### Why is it of particular relevance on the African continent?

The rapid growth of internet infrastructure and well-documented prevalence of smartphones in Africa is an opportunity: an emerging avenue for digital discipleship on the continent. The reality is that more Africans have access to a smartphone than they do to potable water, a statistic that should give us a profound sense of unease; a stinging reminder of just how difficult life is for many Africans.

### What are some of the ways you’ve seen discipleship taking place through digital platforms?

Personally, I’m involved in online publishing – working for TGC Africa and blogging in my own capacity – but the possibilities for fostering spiritual growth through digital platforms are immense. I’ve heard of GWC students using Zoom to host Bible studies or prayer meetings; others belong to groups on WhatsApp where prayer requests are shared and words of encouragement are issued. The Lord is undoubtedly at work through short form videos, honest posts and teaching via platforms like Instagram, albeit in truncated forms.

### Can digital discipleship replace the local church or flesh-and-blood discipleship?

While the expansion of technology will never serve as an adequate substitute for the local church or flesh-and-blood discipleship, as it often lacks the non-verbal cues essential for deep, empathetic and trusting human interaction, these technologies can be co-opted to supplement discipleship and Christian community. This is to say that the notion of digital discipleship is not distinct from discipleship “IRL” (In Real Life), it should never supplant our attempts to fulfil the various “one another” imperatives in the New Testament. But it is a way for us to repurpose some of God’s gifts evident across Africa towards the good of his people.



## Building a Church through Online Fellowship

GWC alumnus Sinethemba Hliso is the Senior Pastor at Khanya City Church, Johannesburg. Planted out of Hope Church Auckland Park in 2022,



Sinethemba says that digital tools and creating online communities have been an integral part of growing their congregation.

“Situated in Braamfontein near student residences in the inner city, we target students and young professionals, while also focusing on homeless ministry given the high rate of homelessness in the area.

In order to help young people navigate the transition from being a student to being in the workplace, and to support them through various challenges, we set up a monthly get together for people in a similar season of life. We meet in a hybrid way, interspersing online meetings with in-person events, which has enabled this fellowship group to grow to include young professionals from across the country and the African continent.

### Using time wisely in a fast-paced city

Being online has meant we can host speakers from different countries on a wide variety of topics, that we would otherwise never be able to afford to do. Life in a city like Joburg is fast, and travel time can be an issue with traffic and long distances. Being able to connect digitally means setting aside only one hour as opposed to three, for example, which helps people schedule the event into their busy lives more easily.

While building relationships through a digital platform is not perfect, we have run games evenings and other online event ideas developed during Covid-19 to help build fellowship successfully. What has been very encouraging to me is when people who have been part of the online group exclusively have started attending services. They said they would never otherwise have set foot in a church, but were drawn in through the online meetings.”



# Advancing the College through Marketing



In February, Julia Benjamin was appointed as GWC's Advancement Officer: Marketing

Julia shares some thoughts on how this role contributes to achieving the College's vision and mission...

## What excites you most about being GWC's new Marketing Manager?

I think it's the many opportunities that exist to elevate and enhance the visibility of the College that excites me the most. I'm delighted to have come on board in this new season for GWC, when growing brand awareness for the College and its work is a priority given the urgent need for sound theological education for the fast-growing Church in Africa.

## In what ways has your career background and experience prepared you for this role?

I've worked in the non-profit sector for more than a decade, contributing to both marketing and fundraising efforts. My immediate previous role was in a pan-African organisation, so I have a good understanding of the nuances of working across different local contexts, and I am passionate about this beautiful continent and her amazing people. Being able to couple that with having a Kingdom-focused impact makes this work both near and dear to my heart!

## What developments are you looking forward to implementing in order to advance GWC's marketing efforts?

I'm looking forward to using the many marketing tools available, both digital and traditional, to inspire a wider audience to become involved in GWC's journey of equipping men and women for gospel-centred ministry in Africa and beyond. This could mean growing partnerships with media channels, with like-minded institutions, or with individuals who would like to invest in what the College is trying to achieve. GWC's students and their stories are unique and powerful in every way, and it's about enhancing the communication that already exists, to take it to the next level. Marketing is an integral part of what looks to be a fruitful season ahead, and it is a privilege for me to be able to use my skills to support the College in this way.



# GWC Explore

Deeper into God's Word, wider into God's world

Explore graduations are significant moments in the life of the programme. They provide an opportunity to celebrate the goodness of the Lord with those who have faithfully journeyed through the course to completion.

These occasions are also important for the wider community, as churches and families gather to celebrate and honour their loved ones who have completed the Explore programme. In this way, graduations not only mark achievement but also help promote the value of theological training within local churches.



Graduates from Explore's Eastern Region.

16 students from Nobles Light House Church, Nairobi, recently graduated from Explore. Their pastor, Bishop James Njuguna, shared the following feedback:

"The Explore Programme has been transformative for our leadership team, equipping the pastors, elders, small group leaders and staff with robust biblical training, a missional hermeneutic rooted in Scripture, and practical discipleship and ministry skills.

These graduates are now leading with greater confidence, fostering discipleship, church growth, and community outreach in ways that align our vision with God's kingdom purposes. Thank you, Pastor Misheck for bringing the Explore Discipleship Programme to us. We will forever be grateful."

## Are you interested in studying at GWC?

We warmly invite you to see our campus, attend a lecture, worship with us at our weekly chapel service, and join us for lunch. We'd love to meet you!

We're hosting 2 Open Sessions this year:

Thursday 14 May 2026: 9:45AM-1:30PM  
Thursday 23 July 2026: 9:45AM-1:30PM

[Click here to sign up.](#)