1. Introduction

A disciple is a ‘learner’. Hence, it may be assumed that a church, which is a community of disciples (learners) will be a learning organisation[1]. Unfortunately it is not so. The church has always been slow to embrace changes and remain relevant in a rapidly changing world. Recently, mainly through the works of Peter Senge, ‘secular’ organisations has discovered that they need to be learning organisations if they are to survive in this rapidly changing socio-political and economic climate (Senge 1990). It is the intention of this paper to show that the idea of a learning organisation is not new. Jesus, in the spiritual formation of his disciples was building a learning faith community. It will also show that Jesus was using and teaching his disciples the learning disciplines of systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building a shared vision and team building. And finally, it will also show that Jesus was a capable and credible leader, using many ‘modern’ leadership concept and tools.

2. Defining a Learning Faith Community

Peter Senge was named ‘Strategist of the Century’ by the Journal of Business Strategy (September/October 1999) because of his seminal work on learning organisations(Smith 2005). In his definition of a learning organisation, Senge wrote, ‘Learning in an organisation means the continual testing of experience, and the transformation of experience into knowledge, accessible to the whole organisation and relevant to its core purpose’ (Senge et al. 2000). Senge’s concept of a learning organisation goes deeper than the traditional schooling learning pedagogy. It involves transformational change or metanoia in the leaders and people of the community so that they can be who they are meant to be (Senge 1990:13). Kerka summarises the characteristics of a learning organisation as:

- ‘They provide continuous learning opportunities.
- They use learning to reach their goals.
- They link individual performance with organizational performance.
- They foster inquiry and dialogue, making it safe for people to share openly and take risks.
- They embrace creative tension as a source of energy and renewal.
- They are continuously aware of and interact with their environment’. (Kerka 1995)

Senge wrote, ‘This, then is the basic meaning of a “learning organization”- an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future. For such an organization, it is not enough to merely survive. “Survival learning” or what is more often termed “adaptive learning” is important—indeed it is necessary. But for a learning organization, “adaptive learning” must be joined by “generative learning”, learning that enhances our capacity to create.’ (Senge 1990:14). For such an organization to exist, Senge highlighted five disciplines that the organization must have mastered and is continually practicing: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision and team learning (Senge et al. 2000; Senge 1990; Senge et al. 1994)

Senge’s learning organization is about empowering the people and correlates with the educational theories of Paulo Freire who believes that people has the ability to teach themselves and learn from one another (Lyons 2001). However one must acknowledge the limitations of these models when applied to religious communities or organizations as it exclude Divine Revelation and the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals and the communities. Therefore, keeping in mind these limitations, we may study the development of a learning community by Jesus Christ as documented in the four gospels. As Jesus began his public ministry, he first called together the twelve apostles as the core of his learning faith community. This gradually expanded to the seventy two and eventually numbered about 120 at the time of his death and resurrection. The
3. The Disciples and Personal Mastery

Personal mastery goes beyond learning new skills or new disciplines. It is internalising what we have learnt so that we ourselves are transformed by what we have learnt. Senge described personal mastery as ‘the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of development patience, and of seeing reality objectively’ (Senge 1990,7). Jesus helped his learning community towards personal mastery in helping them to make informed choices: who does God want them to be?

a. Teaching how to pray (Lord’s Prayer)

Jesus knows that all this learning disciplines will be meaningless if there is no spiritual vitality. Spiritual vitality is the relationship between a disciple and God. In Matthews 5-7, Jesus gave his Sermon on the Mount which is basically a desired outcome of spiritual formation of his disciples. In the middle of his sermon, he taught them about prayer (Matt.6:5-14). Here is an example of teaching towards self mastery: correct and relevant information in the correct context. Then the disciples are required to practice it.

b. Ministry Tools and Skills

Luke 9:1-6 and Luke 10:1-24 recorded the sending out of the twelve disciples and the seventy two disciples to preach the nearness of the Kingdom of God respectively. After being with Jesus and seeing him perform miracles, the disciples were sent out without Jesus and given the power to heal and drive out demons. They were successful in all they did and were rejoicing when they reported to Jesus. Jesus rejoiced with them (Matt.10:21-22) but took this opportunity during the debriefing to impart an important lesson (Matt.10:6): reminding that being in the Kingdom is more important than performing miracles. That is a good example of personal mastery of ministry tools and skill- do it but do not to get so carried away that they forget what the basis of their ministry is.

c. Modelling

Jesus models self mastery. He walks the walk and talks the talk. His life is an object lesson to his disciples. The disciples learn by watching and living with Jesus for 3 years. They watched Jesus as he prayed; getting up early in the morning and moving to a secluded area to pray, praying before major decisions and praying his dependence on God. They watched and learnt about his compassion for the poor, the helpless and for Jerusalem (Lk.13:34, 35). They watch as Jesus performs miracles but take no personal credit but glorifying God for them.

d. Building Creative Tensions

Jesus also teaches his disciples by creating creative tensions so that they can learn. Creative tensions occur when there is a gap between our vision and our reality (Senge 1990, 150-155). One example of a situation in which Jesus taught by creative tension is in the feeding of the five thousands as recorded in Mark 5:32-44. The disciples and the crowd were in a remote place and needed to find enough food to feed five thousand persons. The vision was to feed the people. The reality was that they were in a remote place and it would cost too much to buy food even if food was available. The disciples were emotionally challenged. The solution was to obey Jesus’ instructions and start distributing the five loaves of bread and two fish. The lesson given was in obedience.

e. Self Understanding

One of the desired outcomes of self mastery is a better understanding of ourselves. Peter illustrated this when he claimed that he will never deny Jesus as recorded in Matthew
26:31-35. Peter will fit the personality profile of fire/wind according to Path Elements Profile (Jones 2005). He was impulsive, fiery, confrontational and outspoken (p.242). Peter’s vision is that he will be loyal to Jesus. The reality is that his courage did not match his words. The emotional tensions arose when Peter did deny Jesus thrice. In this lesson, Peter learnt more about himself. John recorded the moving conclusion to this lesson when Jesus forgave Peter (Jn 21:15-19).

4. The Disciples and Mental Models

Mental models are the filters through which we look at reality. All of us have mental models which filled with imperfect assumptions. Senge described ‘the discipline of working with mental models starts with turning the mirror inwards; learning to unearth our internal pictures of the world, to bring them to the surface and hold them vigorously to scrutiny. It also includes the ability to carry on “learningful” conversations that balance inquiry and advocacy, where people expose their own thinking effectively and make that thinking open to the influence of others (Senge 1990, 9). By his teachings, modelling and prayers, Jesus was changing the mental models of his disciples, transforming a group of bigoted, egoistic peasants to a world changing group of evangelists.

a. Teaching by Parables

One of the most effective ways of communication is by story telling. Story has a way of slipping pass our mental models or assumptions and getting us to be open to new ideas. Jesus taught by parables. When he was teaching about the kingdom of heaven, he told the parable of the weeds (Matt.13:24-30, 36-43); the parable of the mustard seed and the yeast (Matt.13:31-34); the parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl (Matt.13:44-45) and the parable of the net (Matt.13:47-51). Jesus will tell the parables and when his disciples were fully immersed or puzzled by the stories, he would then explain to them what the meaning of lesson was. One of the most powerful parable that Jesus told while teaching about God’s love is the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). The parable cut through the mental model of the listeners about the limits of forgiveness of a Middle Eastern father who went against all his cultural conditioning to welcome back his wayward son.

b. Nicodemus

Nicodemus, a Pharisee came to quietly learn from Jesus about the kingdom of God. To break though his mental model, Jesus suggested that Nicodemus can only be saved if he were to be born again. Nicodemus was stuck because his mental model did not allow him to see another alternative to be saved other than to be physically born again. Jesus explained that one can be born again by water and Spirit (Jn 3:1-9).

c. The Samaritan Woman at the Well

The mental model of the Samaritan women was firm on that Jews were the enemy, that they (the Samaritans) have the true worship and water was only for drinking. It took Jesus some time to open her eyes and removed some of her assumptions. The encounter was the first one where Jesus revealed that he is the Messiah (Jn 4:9-26).

d. Sabbath

The mental model for Sabbath was a day for religious observance and rituals. Hence there must be strict observances of all rules and rituals. Jesus’ disciples were in a grain field and they were hungry. So they began to pluck the grain to eat. This would not have been an issue except that it was a Sabbath and no work was to be done on that day. This event was brought out as an accusations but Jesus changed it into a lesson about Sabbath for man or man for Sabbath. (Matt.12:13)

e. A Crucified Messiah

One of the strongest mental model that the disciples have were that the coming Messiah will overthrow the Roman empire and make Israel, the number one world power. So it was very hard for them to accept when Jesus explained that the Messiah will go to Jerusalem, be betrayed and condemned to death by crucifixion so that he can rise from the dead three days later (Mk.10:32-34). A Messiah that did not come in front of an angelic army but was
Jesus realise the importance of mental models in a learning community. It is interesting that he has used so many parables to teach his various lessons.

5. The Disciples and Building Shared Vision

Senge observed, 'When there is a genuine vision (as opposed to the all-too-familiar "vision statement") people excel and learn, not because they are told to, but because they want to (Senge 1990, 9). When the disciples first came together, they did it because of the charismatic leadership of Jesus. Slowly, as we read the gospel accounts, this motley group of individuals from various backgrounds and agendas began to see and shared the vision that Jesus has for this learning community-to be his church. The Church is a faith community of disciples of Jesus Christ who existed to be God’s people. Its vision is to reach out to the rest of the world to spread the gospel and bring the lost back into the fold of God’s people. The followings are some of the ways in which Jesus helped them to develop a shared vision.

a. ‘Fishers of Men’

Matthew recorded that Jesus called Simon Peter and Andrew and later other fishermen, James and John. This act of Jesus is an intentional act and not a random selection of people. There is also a purpose in forming this team. In terms that Peter can understand, Jesus gave a rough idea on why this team is being formed- they are to be ‘fishers of man’ (Luke 5:1-11) This was to be the seed of the shared vision of the team.

b. Peter the Rock

As more information become available to the team by telling, selling, testing, consulting and co-creating, a shared vision a gradually arose. In Matt.16:18, 19 Jesus playing on the Greek word petrus and petra was actually guiding Peter to understand his role in the building of the Church. This event happened after Peter acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ (Matt.16:13-20). This meant that Peter had overcomed the obstacles of his mental model to see Jesus as the Christ. Gradually, Peter and the other disciples began to perceive that Jesus was not just an ordinary human being but was actually the Christ and was on a mission to save humankind. The disciples were called to help him fulfil this mission. It took some time before the disciples began to buy into and gradually shared the vision. That was a slow process.

c. The Great Witness Program

It was only after his death and resurrection that his plan became obvious. The disciples were to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1: 7-8). But then, the disciples were not surprised. They have been out on mission trips before (Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-24). The shared vision of the church they are forming was a missionary church.

d. The Great Commission

The clearest mission statement of the new church was given by Jesus. ‘Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”’ (Matt.28:18-20) This is the mission statement for the soon to be born church and the shared vision of the disciples.

6. The Disciples and Team Learning

Jesus trained his disciples to function as a team. Each member was regarded as valuable and had much to contribute. To Senge, ‘the discipline of team learning starts with “dialogue”, the capacity of the team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine “thinking together”…also involves learning how to recognize the pattern of interaction in team that undermine learning…if recognised and surfaced creatively, they can actually accelerate learning (Senge, 1990,10). As we shall see, Jesus enhanced team learning in his disciples by dialogue, modelling and training exercises with debriefings.
a. **Itinerary Ministry**

Jesus’ ministry was an itinerary ministry. He travelled with his disciples and spent time teaching them and others. In his teachings and sermons to the people, debating with the Pharisees and Scribes, healing miracles and personal conversations, Jesus would be helping the team to learn. The team members will also be learning from each others as they walked the long hard roads around Capernaum and the cities around the Sea of Galilee.

b. **Jesus Teaching by Dialogue**

Jesus taught the people mainly by telling parables. Jesus taught the disciples by explanation of the parables and by dialogue. One example in which Jesus enhanced team learning by dialogue was recorded in Matt. 16:13-20. By asking a series of questions, listening to their answers, gauging their levels of understanding, Jesus led the team to learn that he is the Christ.

c. **Training Exercises and Debriefing**

As mentioned, the sending out of the twelve and the seventy two disciples on short term mission trips (Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-24) where they are placed in situations where they can either be accepted or rejected are excellent learning situations. The way Jesus debriefed them after the missions were also important to their team learning.

d. **Shared Experiences**

Common shared experiences are important in team learning. The time when they think their boat was sinking and Jesus saved them by stilling the storm or the time they saw Jesus walking on water and they thought that he was a ghost or the time when they fed five thousands people with just 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish are all experiences that enhanced their team learning.

7. **The Disciples and Systems Thinking**

It has long being recognised that all events are interrelated and linked. The chaos theory described that ‘The flapping of a single butterfly’s wing today produces a tiny change in the state of the atmosphere. Over a period of time, what the atmosphere actually does diverges from what it would have done. So, in a month’s time, a tornado that would have devastated the Indonesian coast doesn’t happen. Or maybe one that wasn’t going to happen, does’ (Steward 1989). Senge highlighted that in any human organisation or community, learning can only take place if these interrelatedness of everything is recognised. It is seeing the trees, the forest and the ecological system as one. Hence, systems thinking incorporate all the other learning disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, shared vision and team building. Senge wrote that ‘systems thinking is a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and tools that has been developed over the past fifty years, to make patterns clearer, and to help us see how to change them effectively’ (Senge 1990, 7) However, it was clear from a study of the gospels that Jesus was already using systems thinking when he was forming his learning community.

a. **Jesus First Sermon**

In reading Isaiah 61:1-2, Jesus is proclaiming his life purpose and vision. He realised his existence and ministry is connected not only to the past and the present but also to the future. This is closed-loop thinking in the sense that Jesus is aware of the closed-loop of sin and that only he can break out of that loop.

b. **“Who Do You Think I Am?”**

When the time is correct, Jesus revealed to his disciples that he is the Christ (Matt.16:13-20). The Christ has an important place in Jewish theology in that he is a deliverer of his people. He is also a saviour and this links back to the happenings in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve sinned against God. By eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve has corrupted God’s creation which he said was good. God is connected to everything. Teilhard de Chardin in his book, The Divine Milieu, wrote about our submersion in God who is
everywhere and in his other works, tell of a Cosmic Christ (Chardin 1960). This awareness of Jesus can be likened to dynamic, system-as-cause and operational thinking.

c. The Greatest Commandment
The greatest commandment is a distillation of the Ten Commandments (Matt.22:34-37). It calls us to love God. It also calls us to love our neighbours as ourselves. Here is the interconnectiveness of relationships. There are two triangle of relationships. The first is the triangle of relationship of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The second is the triangle of relationships of the Holy Trinity, ourselves and our neighbours. This will be forest thinking in systems thinking.

d. Servant Leadership
Jesus was training leaders, but a special form of leaders- servant leaders. He demonstrated how a servant leader act by personally washing the feet of his disciples (Jn 13:3). He taught them that servant leaders are humble (Lk.14:17-14), willing to serve (Mk.10:41-45) and to work in a team (Mk.6:7-13). In the systemic structure that is the world, he saw the need of servant leaders to lead learning faith communities. The church is the solution for spreading of the gospel and bringing people into the Kingdom of God. His own role was to offer himself as a living sacrifice to atone for all our sins.

e. Countercultural Kingdom (Matt.18:1-9)
The church is to be countercultural in its lifestyle. It should not worship money but God and God alone. This is the systemic structure that Jesus and the church are trying to set up. The systemic structure that is the foundation of the world today is a flawed structure, corrupted by the original sin. Hence all patterns and events are flawed. The systems archetype that may be applicable to the church is ‘limits to growth’. The history of the Christian church is characterised by periods of rapid growth, stabilisation and then a decline until a revival occurs and goes into another cycle. These revivals are works of men and women who have a desire to bring people back to the true worship of God and with the help of the learning disciplines and the Holy Spirit brought about periods of rapid growth. The limiting condition to further growth appeared when the church life became a ritual rather than worship and leadership are in the hands of men and women who are resisters and those who desire power and wealth rather than God.

8. Jesus’ Leadership for a Learning Faith Community
The key to creating and maintaining a learning organisation is credible leadership (Kouzes and Posner 2002). In this part of the paper we shall focus on the leadership principles of Jesus who created a learning faith community that has lasted more than 2000 years.

a. Credible Leadership
The character of a leader is the most important ingredient in creating and maintaining a learning community. This cannot be overstated. The character of such a leader should exhibit the attributes of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5:22, 23) and should have a passionate devotion and commitment of the purpose and vision of the community. Jesus’ character was beyond reproach. Of all the various charges that were made against him as recorded in the four gospels, none was made about his character (John 8:12-30). Jesus’ purpose was to do the will of God. His vision was to die on the cross and to form a learning community to carry out his purpose. Jesus modeled by his character, what the desired outcomes of a learning community will be.

b. Teaching and modelling spiritual and relational vitality.
Jesus spent a lot of time teaching and modelling spiritual and relational vitality. His teachings were based on his interpretation of the Greatest Commandment: love God and love your neighbour as yourself (Matt.22:34-37). Jesus taught about and models for his disciples the spirituality vitality arising from prayers, using the Scriptures, worshipping God by fulfilling the cultic requirements of Temple worship. He taught and model relational vitality by demonstrating how his disciples were to behave towards one another, to himself
and to others in and outside the community. The purpose of teaching spiritual and relational vitality was to develop the character of the disciples to be like Jesus’.

c. **Teaching and modelling the learning disciplines.**

As stated in the first part of this paper, Jesus taught and models the learning disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. He was so successful that at the end of his ministry, Peter and John showed that these learning disciplines have become their essence as evidenced in their pastoral epistles (1 & 2 Peter and 1, 2 & 3 John).

Aside from the learning disciplines, Jesus has also instilled a sense of urgency in his teachings: that his time on earth is limited and that after his resurrection, he will be coming again soon for judgment. As Kotter have noted, a sense of urgency is always needed for change (P.Kotter 1996). The teaching and mastering of the learning disciplines was to build a learning faith community that will carry out its purpose and vision.

d. **Concern Based Adoption Model (CBAM)**

Jesus was always assessing the level of concerns of his disciples. He treated his disciples differently, each according to their level of concerns and knows when to intervene at the right time. Jesus was aware that each disciple has to go through the stages of change: awareness, preparation, practice, mastery/integration and renewal. One good example was his use of the CBAM on Peter. The watershed for Peter is when he came to realise that Jesus was the Christ as recorded in Matthew 16. This was the stage of mastery/integration and renewal. Before that, Jesus did a lot of teaching and explaining to Peter. After Matt.16, Jesus allowed Peter to do more on his own. And Jesus began to talk about his impending death. Most of the disciples including Thomas reached the stage of renewal when they met the resurrected Jesus in the upper room. One unique individual, James the Just, half-brother of Jesus reached renewal when the resurrected Christ appeared to him. He was not a member of the disciples’ learning community but instead thought his older brother insane! Yet the impact on James was so great that he became one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

e. **Use of high leverage activities**

Jesus always used high leverage activities to bring about accelerated learning and challenge mental models of his disciples. Examples of such activities were his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:9-26); the transfiguration (Matt.17:1-13); his struggle in the garden in Gethsemane (Matt.26:36-45) and his resurrection (Lk.24:1-8). All these activities would have a tremendous effect on his learning community.

f. **Double loop learning**

To teach his disciples and make sure they learn their lessons, Jesus always used double looping learning. Argyris’ analysis of the thinking process led to the conclusion that double loop thinking is most useful in narrowing the gap between espoused theory and theory-in-action (K.Smith 2001; Senge et al. 2000). Double loop thinking is an action science involving the ladder of inferences (What is action science? 2005). Jesus would state an observation or comment on a response of his disciples which were based on false inferences. Then he allowed his disciples the freedom to make their own mistakes. Later he would debrief and correct them to reinforce the lesson. An example was Peter’s boasting that he would not deny Jesus (Matthew 26:31-35). Peter did deny Jesus and learnt more about himself (false inference). This was the first loop learning. The resurrected Jesus forgave Peter and debrief him on his failure (Jn 21:15-19). That was double loop learning.

g. **Servant Leadership**

In Jesus’ leadership model, the leader is a servant leader. He gave a visible demonstration when he washed his disciples’ feet which he followed up with a verbal lesion (Jn.13:1-17). A leader of a learning community must have the attitude of a servant and of one who serve sacrificially. Otherwise, the community will disintegrate in internal power struggles.
h. Creating, building and maintaining a learning community: succession plans

One of the reasons why many learning organisations fail is that there is no succession plans. The founder is often an innovator and has the ability to build a learning community from a scratch. However, once a learning community has been formed, another sort of leader is needed to keep it going. The founder may not be the best person for this job. Hence, a leadership succession plan must be implemented as soon as a learning community is formed. Peter was the designated successor (Matt.16:18) with John as the alternative. A close reading of the four gospels showed that these two received additional learning opportunities compared to the other disciples.

9. Conclusion

The disciples under the leadership of Jesus were a learning faith community. Jesus used all the learning disciplines: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking in building this learning community. The learning community has succeeded and survived because of the leadership of Jesus of Nazareth. That learning community became the church. When Jesus ascended to heaven, The Holy Spirit came to be the guiding Spirit of the church. It is heartening to realise that some churches have realised that they are learning organizations and need to continue to learn (Herrington, Bonem, and Furr 2000; Kline and Saunders 1993). It is hoped that this paper will further stimulate the Twenty First Century Church to remember that she is a learning organization and that she has to incorporate the learning disciplines into the spiritual formation processes of her people.

Soli Deo Gloria

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For the purpose of this paper, learning organizations and learning faith communities are used interchangeably while recognizing that there are differences between them.

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those in need; working for the common good; and restoring individuals, social systems, communities, and nations to God's intended
design. Dr. Henry Cloud. We believe that wholeness and workability are God's intended design. We believe that God desires peace,
unity, and soundness in individuals and in systems. This authentic community becomes a practical incarnation of the unconditional love
of God for God, self, neighbors, strangers, and enemies. What is Faithwalking About? Connect with us. spiritual formation occurs all the
time. conception. What is Christian Spiritual Formation? a journey of in Christ to Christ. Christian spiritual formation is the intentional on-
going process of the inner transformation of the character of a person to become more like the character of Christ himself, to become a
community of the people of God, and become an agent for his redemptive purposes. Justification. sanctification. Christian spiritual
formation. as a process of becoming. the formative role of the Bible. the transformation role of the Holy Spirit. the human response - the
will to change. renewing of mind. community of faith. a journey in Christ to Christ. Christian spiritual formation. is a means of. Knowing
God is an action of. Knowing ourselves is a life of. Nature.