

**THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION, CHRISTIAN EDUCATION &
LIFE LONG FORMATION CONSULTATION**

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CONCEPT PAPER

“Wrestling with the Big Questions”

Loving God with our Mind as well as our Heart & Soul

Prepared by

Rev. Wally Fletcher, D.Min

The Dialogue Center

For

The Office for Ministry Development

The Office of Children’s Ministry and Christian Education

The Episcopal Church Center

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Luke: 12:22 ff

“There are innumerable concerns in our lives and in human life generally which demand attention, devotion, passion. But they do not demand infinite attention, unconditional devotion, ultimate passion. They are important, often very important for you and for me and for the whole of mankind. But they are not ultimately important.”

Paul Tillich, *The New Being*

“Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned...”

Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*

“Spiritual formation in a broken world (means) the creation of bounded, safe and trustworthy communal spaces where the soul is welcomed and invited to show up, to speak its truth and to make its claim on the living of our lives”

-Parker Palmer, *The Trinity Institute*, 2001

On January 13-16, 2006, the Office for Ministry Development, The Office of Children’s Ministry and Christian Education and the Council of Seminary Deans sponsored a unique stakeholder gathering to begin addressing their “big questions” about the 21st century vocation of theological education in the Episcopal Church. “Wrestling with the Big Questions” will provide opportunities for stakeholders to enter into deep dialogue with leaders in their own disciplines as well as with disciplines they could collaborate with more fruitfully. Dr. Parker Palmer assisted with the design as well as the actual facilitation of these conversations. This event is an important step in a multi-year process funded by the Constable Fund for re-visioning theological education in the Episcopal Church.

CONCEPT

- What are the “Big Questions” really on the hearts and minds of people in our times?
- How are congregations, clergy, Christian educators, seminaries and others involved in theological education called to help people engage these questions?
- How are *varied* disciplines called to collaborate in new and fruitful ways for strengthening theological education in the church and the world?

- What preparation and resources do theological educators in various settings need most to meet these calls?
- What new directions do responses to these questions suggest for theological education, Christian education and life-long Christian formation in the Episcopal Church now and in decades to come?

This consultation will bring together a wide range of leaders and groups involved in “theological education for all” and provide unique opportunities:

- To listen together to diverse voices, asking the “Big Questions” that concern them most.
- To build relationships that enables these leaders and groups to cooperate more deeply and creatively in “theological education for all”.
- To engage with one another (both within and across disciplines) in processes of effective dialogue that will generate new understandings and new direction for theological education, Christian education and life-long formation in the Episcopal Church.
- To strengthen participants’ in their personal journeys toward integrating “soul” and “role” in their work as leaders and educators in the Episcopal Church.

OTHER OBJECTIVES

- To meet the common interests of the Office for Ministry Development and Office of Children’s Ministry in collaborating on a major conference/consultation event for 2006.
- To provide an additional way of accomplishing the objectives of the “Council of Deans/ TeforAll” project funded by the Lily Foundation.
- To provide a foundation or even a ‘launching pad’ for the broad/deep strategic planning envisioned by General Convention Resolutions A120 and B024 that is being lived out by an Executive Council appointed committee, “Proclaiming Education for All” (PEALL).

PHASE ONE

SAMPLE PRE-CONSULTATION WORKSHOPS AND CONVERSATIONS

A series of Workshop and Conversations were held at several strategic sites around the country. These provided opportunities for diverse gatherings of children, young people, and adults to share their “Big Questions” as well as how their faith communities do or could help them engage those questions. These meetings were structured and led by trained facilitators. During the workshop sessions participants had the opportunity to share/discuss responses in a small group format. Learnings from these workshops were summarized and analyzed for use in the 2006 Consultation.

Sample Questions

- What do you love most in life?
- What do you fear most in life?
- If you could ask God three big questions, what questions would you ask?
- How does your faith, church or the Bible help you with these questions?
- How do you wish they helped you more?
- When you pray for other people, who and what do you pray hardest for?
- When you pray for your country or the world, what do you pray hardest for?
- What makes the world better today?
- What makes the world worse today?

PHASE TWO

CONSULTATION: “Wrestling with the Big Questions”

A major 3-day gathering/consultation of some 300+ educators and formation workers across the church was held in Indianapolis, January 13-16, 2006. The gathering provided opportunities for various stakeholders and practitioners of theological education in the Episcopal Church to build relationships and consult with each other on matters of concern to all. The consultation will make use of learnings gathered from the pre-consultation workshops to focus the various stakeholders and disciplines on how the church is called to help ordinary people of all ages engage “Big Questions”—questions rooted in “Ultimate Concern”. It will draw implications for the types of resources, training etc.; various theological educators need to faithfully meet this task today. And finally the consultation will consider ‘new directions’ suggested by what has been learned from the pre-consultation workshops and the consultation itself, to be used for further collaborations and especially the work of PEALL.

PHASE THREE

POST CONSULTATION REPORTING

Reports of the workshops and consultation will be prepared for General Convention and for the various sponsoring groups. All materials will be made accessible to participants and the larger church through the use of the website, www.TEforAll.org. A meeting of the Consultation Design Team and PEALL (sponsored by the Constable Fund): will be held to debrief the consultation, further analyze outcomes; and draw implications for the Constable Strategic Planning Process. In addition to the sponsoring offices, PEALL will be one of the main vehicles for developing recommendations and strategies for the future.

KEY SPONSORS

Office for Ministry Development
Office of Children’s Ministry & The Episcopal Council for Christian Education (ECCE)
Council of Seminary Deans

PARTNERS

The Trinity Institute
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