

*Diocese of Massachusetts  
Newsletter*

From January 13 to 16, it was my great pleasure to help represent our diocese at a national church consultation in Indianapolis entitled wrestling with the Big Questions." The event gathered 320 Christian educators - both lay and clergy - from Episcopal congregations, seminaries, and diocesan offices throughout the country to consider how to transform and advance the Episcopal Church's educational mission in these early years of the 21st century. The well-known writer, teacher, and activist, Parker Palmer, served as our consultant, helping us form "circles of trust" where we could begin to discern a new vision for theological education, Christian education, and lifelong formation in the church. The work we accomplished will be studied and considered by a strategy team that calls itself proclaiming Education for All" (PEALL) as it makes recommendations for change at General Conventions 2006 and 2009.

I came away from this consultation with some important things to remember:

- We who teach are now doing so in the context of a broken and wounded global society and Church. As we teach, we are called to trust that God always comes with special power into our brokenness to accomplish healing and wholeness. Good education in the church is aimed at bringing about transformation, i.e., producing teachers and learners who think for themselves and are actively engaged in addressing the pressing needs of our time.
- Effective educational ministry in the church also creates safe places where people can dare to ask the "big questions" that they are pondering as they journey with God ever deeper into the heart of God.
- Each of us has within us an inner teacher whose guidance often is more reliable than the authorities outside us. We tap into that inner teacher by telling stories from our lives. This storytelling is best done in "circles of trust" where others can help us hear and learn from the truth that resides within, and where the group's shared knowledge can produce a new understanding for all.
- When we gather in small groups to discern new things, it is important to trust the silences that bracket our spoken words. Often it is in periods of silence where the truthfulness of a particular insight has a chance to take root and begins to grow.

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