



# Wrestling with the Big Questions

*To bring together and build collaborative relationships in order to transform and advance the Episcopal Church's ability to embrace its educational mission more deeply*

## Small Group Scribe Report

### **Session IV: Leadership for Community & Abundance** (Monday morning)

*Note: many groups dropped answering the questions and submitted a list of what they desire the church to focus on, develop, or address. Many also described what was needed to form a safe community, as learned at this consultation.*

#### **1. What have you heard or learned that you find especially important in relation to the mission of this consultation?**

Group A:

- Learning to let go and trust the inner wisdom of the group
- Jesus can take care of himself
- There are different models of leadership
- In the Episcopal Church we have to share power
- Shared leadership is not absence of structure – sometimes even people of faith, forget to pray and when we do we then ask, “What do we do next?” We act like prayer isn’t enough. Leaders are both born and formed.

Group B:

- Community comes into being in response to an event, often as a surprise, calling us to move to a new space in which we become vulnerable in order to become real
- The key is who/whom will hold the space for community to happen
- Community elements: simplicity, low or no prior agenda, recognition that all of us have an inner teacher, letting each other into our lives

Group C:

- See #2

Group D:

- Formation vs. education – defining and developing
- All stories have contributed to richness of group life and have added a dimension to our discussion

Group E:

- Community was unusual and unexpected at times
- Need to care
- Community is essential
- Community involves listening

Group F:

- Foster attitude of abundance on all levels
- Importance to have an embracing identity
- Community of ongoing forgiveness is grounded in God
- We sometimes hid behind our ignorance and even hold it as a badge of identity

Group G:

- See #2

Group H:

- Community is:
  - Helping where you can with the gifts you have

- Sharing
- Bringing out the best in each other
- Come together as a group – build each other up
- Helping in time of need
- Priest & pastor to each other
- Relational

Group I:

- Community:
  - Safe place / created time & place
  - Relationship / respect
  - Honors all gifts / uses them
  - All have eternal significance
  - Honors voice & honors silence
  - Knows each other / knows names / uniqueness
  - “Gardening” – planting seeds / nurturing / watching growth / sharing harvest – the sower!
  - Spirit-filled

Group J:

- Trust the process – together we have enough
- Common experience is helpful – but shouldn’t be used to exclude people
- We need to look beyond readily observable commonalities
- Experience of small group community enables us to embrace larger community
- Previous experience (both good and bad) can make us read or wary about new communities; how we end up is important

Group K:

- Some of us learned to be able to respect our individual expertise
- There was much discussion about the nature of the “expert” vs. the purpose of a “facilitator.” One person stressed that expertise in a field of study is a valued commodity, which we do not all have; some people do know more than others about a particular topic or field.
- Some of us came because we wanted to hear Parker Palmer as the expert, a known commodity. Yet wisdom resides in the group.

Group L:

- Community can be formed around a common passion and purpose – enables love as well as arguments
- Strongest sense of community comes when people gather in service – to help meet needs of illness, hunger, suffering – everyone went beyond self to serve God and others
- Being honest, real is very important to forming community
- The community of church has come to mean an absolute love from others
- In our ministries – loaves and fishes – what is needed is provided
- Classes can become close communities
- An illness within a community can continue deep, deep family connections – connections that remain even when separated for years and by miles
- Sometimes close community does not need words – just love and action
- Every Sunday – the power of community changes lives – through others’ stories – sadness, richness – it produces miracle of satisfaction, not of food, but of life

Group M:

- Leadership requires listening, clarity of vision and flexibility
- A good leader empowers others

Group N:

- We live in a tension as Episcopalians:
  - We continue to support a hierarchical leadership structure
  - But, at the congregational/grassroots level, we encourage collegial community model in small groups
- Our traditional strengths are disappearing:

- Positive Christian education
- Involvement in overseas mission / cross-cultural experiences
- Campus ministry

Group O:

- Facilitated formation is often more effective than conventional teaching
- Formation integrated into the life of the community as well as done in particular places and ways
- Make community roles, boundaries and behavior open and negotiable
- Intergenerational groups are something we need to work on making happen, because they are fruitful ground for community learning

Group P:

- Places we have found community: EFM trainers, Vacation Bible School, a community of peer teachers of piano, a long-term community of life friends, an online community of parents of disabled children
- We feel an absence of the kind of educational community (Adult Sunday School) that exists in some other denominations (Baptist, Methodist). We wonder what it would take to create that kind of Sunday school-based learning community in our tradition

Group Q:

- Community is about transformation
- Community takes work and energy
- True transformation takes place in communities that share gently and hold convictions loosely
- The transformation to learning communities has to come from the grass roots

Group R:

- Reason we have Holy Orders. We need some structure and order based on persons. All these formalities can manifest charismatic leadership and overlap with it
- Gifts multiply – all have what it takes within us – because we’ve been given the gift of the Holy Spirit

Group S:

- Interesting that the conversation rarely, if ever, turned toward the idea of abundance
- How important it is to have:
  - Desire of learner
  - Elements in learning community
  - Leadership openness to a variety of methods (including those who considered “out of fashion” methods (lectures, etc.)
- Good community experiences inevitably involved a high degree of honesty, often brutal honesty – and truth telling
- How learning happens when participants identify the thread that unites them

Group T:

- There is a very distinct / different view of Christian formation and Christian education
- We need to clarify these views
- We have to learn how to set the fire – set the stage for formation

Group U:

- Presence, not competence counts most in building community
- Sense of shared community opens space for learning
- We have in our communities all we need to be effective
- Elements of community:
  - Humility (to learn from others)
  - Vulnerability (to be wrong)
  - Commitment to stay engaged
- Leaders need to model abundance

Group V:

- We need to take chances – risks
- The structure cannot impede the process
- Why do we have to give people permission?

- Community can be so difficult because of our “busyness”

Group W:

Group X:

- Hierarchical characteristic of church can be an obstacle – doesn’t need to be! Create more provinces and resource them – provinces as disciples
- More collaboration at provincial level – what if there were field offices in provinces?
- Financial resources should be more available to provinces
- Need to look at communication throughout the whole church

Group Y:

- Blessings of abundance come from holding the space to be safe – resist the need to fix, save, rescue
- We can give more abundantly when we acknowledge/affirm we have gifts to give
- Expect abundance and it will come. “Fixed duration” is easy
- Permission to work on wholistic approach to education
- Need encouragement to take time

Group Z:

Group AA:

- Shared crisis and joys bring us into community with one another where folks just know what to offer for the common good
- Transformation emerges from genuine community
- Intense visiting with one another creates community
- Build trust

Group BB:

- The most meaningful communities we have experienced all had in common that they began (and continued to) find what people hungered for, what their deep needs were – be it a need for presence or validation or even the basics of food & shelter or literacy skills. Attending to these hungers let everyone in the community feel valued – leveled the playing field – and from there they became powerful
- Our life together, in its vulnerability, transcends “programs”

Group CC:

- To be community means to graciously invite and accept – invite gifts (however small – to be able to give makes one part of the community)
- Food helps! (companion – one with whom you share bread)
- Live into the model of plenty – you have all that you need – you simply need to call out the gifts (even in the face of disaster or impending disaster)
- Laughter is important!
- Transformation occurs through acceptance, love, compassion, support, deep friendship, companionship

Group DD:

## **2. What practical implications does this (what you’ve heard or learned) have in relation to the mission of this consultation?**

Group A:

- Sit at a different place in the meeting and know the group will still get it right and the Gospel won’t die
- Empower the group to assume responsibility
- Consciously think to work in the wisdom of the group
- Have to educate the group

Group B:

- Community comes into being in response to an event often as a surprise, calling us to move to and use space in which we become vulnerable in order to become real
- The key is who/whom will hold the space for community to happen

- Community elements: simplicity, low or no prior agenda, recognition that all of us have an inner teacher, letting each other into our lives

Group C:

- Community = being accepted, welcomed, encouraged
  - We work on content – we need to work on relationships; not focus on goals; we need to keep balance
  - We need the institution/church (love it) but we also need to have flexibility – not rigidity
- Building relationships
  - Knowing how much I could receive and needed to receive from others (than others will learn from me) – in leadership a mutual learning experience – can make it a welcoming, hospitable place
  - Having intergenerational groups – opportunities of learning from each other – worship/liturgy at its best
- Create the environment: light the candles, set the scene
- What leads people to not be part of the culture of scarcity? Be counter-cultural – educate us on that
- Be affirming, healing, welcoming, encouraging
- Making connections, community – be part of something
- What is the heart of the content? Share that piece! Be clear about communicating that. One word can feed 1,000
- It is the Quality of the Experience vs. the Quantity of the Information

Group D:

- Rethink Christian education conferences – less lecture, more experience
- Asking people to contribute
- Affirmation of what has been done differently – didactic stuff comes last, not first

Group E:

- Sometimes we have to let go of self-sufficiency
- We have to be willing to do it
- Food is important

Group F:

- See #3

Group G:

- Church & Community:
  - The church makes a place for everyone and nurtures them through the smooth and the rough times
  - The church can be a source of great community, where you can give and receive and go on unexpected journeys
- Elements that make community:
  - Empathy
  - Shared purpose
  - Unconditional love
  - Trust
  - Life-giving relationships
  - Openness to the unexpected and to change
  - Making room for people
  - Willingness to receive
- Effective leadership
  - Is willing to give power over to others
  - Ministry of presence
  - Graciousness in hospitality

Group H:

- The community is what is needed & practical
- The role of a teacher:

- Figure out everyone's gifts
- Draw out those gifts
- Take date and make it personal
- Share the role of teacher/facilitator
- Recognizing we are all teachers and learners
- Facilitators get out of the way and let the community teach each other

Group I:

- Okay when some decline our invitation – but invitations still need to be issued

Group J:

- Size of group matters – 8-10 seems best
- Service projects as ways of creating common experience – need to be intentional so that service informs our faith development
- We need to pay attention to being open and welcoming to those we might consider outsiders

Group K:

- Ask the “mom” about her spiritual life. It's informative in the “education” arena
- Learning is not just academic – it is lived.

Group M:

- Telling our personal stories
- Forming circles of trust that are by invitation – not coercion
- Providing for the many modalities of learning
- The Episcopal Church needs to be open to a variety of formation models

Group N:

- Our leaders used to be formed by 3 elements (positive Christian education, involvement in overseas mission/cross-cultural, and campus ministry). The young people going to seminary today are not formed by all 3 of these experiences any longer
- Need to respect lay leaders / Christian educators more. Why don't they have pensions equal to clergy?
- What would happen if the House of Bishops became a circle of trust?

Group O:

- Leaders must be willing to set aside conventional expectations of authority and what is ‘due’ them
- Hospitality is key: welcoming everyone's contribution; giving the very best; anticipating needs
- Keep our structures simple
- “One size” in terms of program and approach does not fit all
- Principles are more important than details

Group P:

- Elements that make for community – love, support, empathy, faith, taking risks, commitment no matter what (in light and dark), like-mindedness & mutuality of mission
- Things that stand in the way of abundant learning in community? Need for invitation. “Come and See.” Unfolding sense of expectation
- BUT MOST OF ALL . . . we need a radical reformation in our teaching authority! The best experiences of learning community required breaking down the clergy/professional stranglehold on adult learning

Group Q:

- Blank space

Group R:

- Hospitality and a charismatic leader (or maybe the presence of charism) is a commodity
- Responsiveness to a need – someone has to express the need
- Listening / awareness
- Need to be able to accept one another's life experiences

Group S:

- Keep clear boundaries / ground rules / know your limitation and know when to call in an expert (e.g. interventionist)

- Leader has an obligation to balance experiential with doctrinal or intellectual
- Balance and timing counteract the pull to “either/or” thinking
- Practicing development of safe containers for exploration of pain can be life giving for all involved – whether sharing or holding
- Short-term communities are often more intense and what happens there may galvanize people (e.g. camp or retreat) in ways that reverberates . . .

Group T:

- Could each diocese / congregation model “safe circle” practice in various meetings?
- How can we take the end result of an exceptional event – how can we make this the norm?
- The miracle of the loaves and fishes was not that the people were fed but they were transformed

Group U:

- Humor, playfulness, acceptance help community to form a part of, or steps of, abundance
- Forming circles of trust will allow us to weather the storms of our disagreements
- “Safe” spaces in the church are NOT unchallenging
- Community does limit us, there is responsibility
- Learning takes place best when differences are accepted as a natural part of life – “different not wrong” is a model

Group V:

- We have a lot to do
- Needs to be a way to mobilize resources – people, financial, etc.
- Start new thoughts or approaches in how we do what we do
- We need deep hospitality!

Group W:

Group X:

- Offer to all seminary classes – community building, communication and parish administration
- 9 year goal / triennially – all seminaries return for review – church explore where some of these things are being done and report back to rest of province, etc.

Group Y:

- The safe space does not always translate – must create the safe space all over again
- Experiential / process learning is hard
- Light the other end – be open to try things differently
- We got to experience the model of safe space – got to “practice” the model – integrity of participation

Group Z:

- We build our buildings and our building build us. Does the design of the “t” (cross shape) in our church limit ministry?

Group AA:

- Leaders are called to constantly listen and observe – to know their communities and to remind folks that they possess necessary resources for the task at hand
- Pay attention to habits – calling volunteers “ministers” can open the way for those folks to understand themselves – new ways
- Create opportunities for small group affirmation – encourage story-telling!

Group BB:

- A two-part effort is required to begin to transform “education” into lifelong “formation”
  - Upfront – we must give our congregations the tools for storytelling, caring, pastoral skills, being present . . .
  - Second – learning how to reflect on, learn, and draw on the experience and incorporate it into who we are
- We’re creating a different kind of learning. It’s a paradigm shift away from “speaker with credentials” into mutual resourcefulness – in teaching and learning and ministry to one another. It’s radical – we’re no longer reserving certain vocabulary and certain roles for the professionals

Group CC:

- See things from the perspective of many different lenses:

- Invite gifts
- Invite change – change is life
- Be aware of the shadows of community – loving “being the community” can bar others from entering awareness
- People in our culture are so wounded – especially by the messages of (???), but also by the need or message of affirmation – we need to help each other to stop looking outward and look inward to our inner teacher
- Set community standards – valuing all, holding the circle in trust

### 3. Is there anything else that has come up in your conversation that needs to be shared?

Group A:

- Stay grounded in scripture, reason and tradition
- Shared leadership needs a lot of love and openness and trust

Group D:

- Need for follow up in groups formed this weekend – how to do that?

Group F:

- Vital to be confident in our open, searching message
- Language we use as “older” generation sounds simply silly to younger generation present among us
- Language is important and our terms are off-putting to younger folks and other classes
- Day set aside per year for education when the story of Episcopal tradition is told. This is who we are (polity & values) – a “this is who we are” day
- As we move into the future, we must make sure education is a priority reflected in allocation of resources, establishing a Standing Commission on Theological/Christian Education, budget, etc.

Group G:

- Our thinking about the words “education” and “formation” should be discussed and acknowledge that we have different understandings of their meanings

Group H:

- Are we asking the right questions?
  - Grow a desire to learn
  - Help people discover and grow
  - Important to create the environment
- Emphasize the learning over the teaching

Group J:

- The structure of groups needs to allow for differences of learning styles
- Sacred story / our own experience may be enough of a common starting point for a learning community

Group K:

- How is it we can feel safe with a group of strangers? What is happening?

Group M:

- Committees in the Church with all voices coming to the table

Group O:

- Amazing things happen when eyes and souls trade places

Group P:

- Our closing blessing by Sammy Horner: “May your life in this world be a happy one. May the sun be warm and the sky be blue. May the storms that come your way clear the air for a brighter day. May the Saints and Savior watch over you. As you spend your time with your family and friends, as feel the warmth and love they have for you, as you feel the wars and hate that others radiate, may the Saints and Savior watch over you.”

Group Q:

- Our dream would be that General Convention could experience this kind of community and circles of trust

Group R:

- There is charismatic leadership in church and that is Christ

Group S:

- Train facilitators to be weavers – to help people identify the threads and model incorporation

Group T:

- If we strip away our surface stuff – then we can form community

Group V:

- Where are the bishops?
- Why is some form of understanding the process of Christian formation in parishes not taught in seminary?

Group Y:

- The network café almost needed facilitators and scribes
- Take away hope – saw Episcopal Church at its best – Eucharist was special to have children in our midst
- Asset mapping was well received and greatly appreciated

Group BB:

- It seems to us that we have created here, in the work we have been doing, a model – a method to spread – in a grassroots sort of way – we have an abundance of experience and competence. Let's bring this framework home.

Group CC:

- The 'cheerleading' scene has been food for reflection