



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 I: Christian Faith & How We Learn to Live It (Saturday morning)

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

Group A:

- We are more alike than different
- The beginning of a circle of trust is telling our story
- The core of the relationship is experiential, but we need not compromise with our tradition
- Our lives are spent learning & unlearning our faith
- There is something about our identity in the Episcopal Church that opens up our faith.

Group B

- The awakening of the faith comes at a time when knowledge of what to do was absent
- The surprise was that there was a community of faith ready for us
- This mystery and The Mystery are far larger than we can comprehend
- Exposure to those of growing faith gives other a reflection of what is potential in ourselves
- Learning that common to all faith experiences is the source of strength within that brings peace and....

Group C

- Received many gifts but don't have the context to recognize & celebrate the gift
- Forget how to live in community & as members of the larger community

Group D

- Creating opportunities where people can tell their stories & stories can be heard/ insight & information
- Celebrate God's presence w/in the stories & to be able to give thanks – to find God's blessing
- Spending time in physical presence of one another
- Creating safety zones even w/in discomfort – where discomfort can be put aside

Group E

- What we need is here-community
- Church is about small group
- Looking at gifts that we have, not what we need
- Storytelling – important – establishing community

Group F

- Faith formation occurs within relationship
- Authenticity & trust are essential
- Faith formation & education ignites through reflection on experience
- Awareness & trust in presence of Holy

Group G:

- It can stretch us to realize that people see things differently
- We must be respectful of cultural ways
- Symbols and liturgy can be a source of tapping into our inner souls
- People live their faith at the level with which they're comfortable at the time
- It is important to be able to share all of your feelings and emotions with God

Group H:

- Telling our stories – both the telling and the listening is equally important. Stories reinforce and reveal our belief and a place of acceptance and understanding
- Being open to new ways of doing things – fit the context, do things differently
- Teaching the teachings of the church while honoring the person – compassion for all – belief in people & trust
- Theological reflection – where am I in the story? Take you out of your comfort zone while guiding and leading and building community / relationships / family; struggling together, working together, finding what is important

Group I:

- We are all on a journey – individually & together and we need to be awake & aware to that journey
- Faith changes our perception – moving our hearts & souls to a new awareness
- The transformation happens within each of us / within each community – and then we move into action to give away what we have
- We must also be open to the changes that are necessary to leave the assumption & stereotypes behind and claim each part to discover God in us

Group J

- Primacy of relationships
- Intentionality about hearing & receiving our stories & communal stories & language of faith
- Ritual & rhythm for storytelling that helps us weave a fabric of faith
- Opportunities for stories bringing us to action – ways to live into baptismal covenant

Group K

- Listening to stories: hearing stories = being witness to the task
- The work of taking risks to be open, to share self is a struggle

Group L

- People are afraid to be vulnerable – because they might have to be who they are
- It's risky to leave everything for God
- We human beings make things too complicated-need to reduce to the simple – what we are called to be.
- There was great power of spirit in the room. Sometimes we need to proclaim – our renewed life- the power we've experienced

Group M:

- Life long learners coming together is a joy – we are raising new models
- Churches should capitalize on experiences in providing formation
- Worship in community is formation
- God has fed through people “coming to the trough”
- The importance of living in ambiguity

Group N

- ‘Relationships’ among people in the community of faith trump ‘program’
- Need to shift church’s perspective from a ‘program orientation’ to relationships
- Can’t put entire burden of formation on clergy
- Can’t expect liturgy to carry entire burden of formation of people for life of faith
- Liturgy can’t be a ‘one-stop shop’ for Christian formation – congregations need other venues in which to be formed for life of faith

Group O

- We are theologians. People can find their own answers
- Need for diversity of vision, honoring all the voices, getting beneath the “costumes” and seeming homogeneity.
- Being willing to embrace need, longing, loss of self-control.
- Need to overcome our paralyzing individualism

Group P:

- Faith is about questions as much as answers. Faith is found in uncertainty
- The “aha” moments and the (individual and communal) recognition of them form our faith

- Faith is about “head knowledge” becoming “heart knowledge” (we had many examples of stories that moved doctrine into lived witness)
- Faith can also be experience or heart knowledge being given story/language in the Christian community

Group Q

- Its about relationships – when thinking about Sunday School memories it’s a person that comes to mind not curriculum
- Sharing our stories is important – not so much what we believe but HOW we believe – building communities within.
- Liturgy is about the tactile motor memory of being in community and worshipping God – worship is the primary formation tool
- Reflection on content in terms of our life experience is key

Group R

- What we have to contribute, the stories appear different but all connected because we are all Christians (followers of Christ)
- Telling these stories might become stories in secular setting but hear it differently in context of Christian community
- Non-identical repetition – imitation of Christ creates diversity
- Our faith allows our hearts to break open to these people.

Group S

- We noticed that: Very often our experiences of pain & aloneness either bring us into community or evoke formative communal experience of our childhoods (family, church, school) and how we carry them with us – how crucial these experiences are for sustaining us in hard times
- Leaders must learn to distinguish facing new/various conflicts in community for the health of the whole and naming the conflicts that compromise the community’s shared values and therefore, are simply disallowed.
- A leader/teacher can greatly influence the collective imagination of a community by neither subsuming nor enforcing one’s own needs, but by making enough space for people to experience wholeness, as they define it.
- When we welcome (rather than cut off) our own experience (good/bad/other), it can inform all our new questions & help us dialogue with different perspectives

Group T:

- Faith is a verb not a noun. Faith is trust.
- Faith is courage.
- Faith is behaving in abundance.
- Spiritual nurture should begin at home – it should not be outsourced to the church.

Group U

- It is essential to be open and that the Holy One calls us to ministry of all sorts of surprising, even shocking ways
- Even those who disagree radically can stay connected if we share our stories, have a relationship
- Mentors (even antagonists) are necessary to our faith development to be part of numinous/transformational moments

Group V:

- We need to remember how broad the church is
- The importance of talking with each other not at each other.
- Words of honoring one another in diversity
- Everyone embracing learning “outside of the bar”

Group W:

- Stories told were mostly about people feeling “impelled” to do something but not knowing why so they had no rationale explanation
- No one used the word “Jesus” but all of the stories were profoundly incarnational
- So many people said they changed the story they decided to tell because of an internal response to hearing another’s story

- God's goodness is here in the experience, not just on the other side of the experience

Group X:

- Common experience of being wounded – share that with Christ – when most vulnerable / exposed – God makes us know that we are loved
- Help others to deal with situations
- Someone who mentored us – revelation to us later on – listened to us, accepted and welcomed us – relational is important
- Faith journey is relational
- Appreciation of people coming out of comfort zone (God, stretching out – bordering, protecting, saluting – circle = offering to God)

Group Y

- God shows up in unexpected places.
- Liturgy brings us home; the light leads us home
- We can choose to be intentional (for our faith development)
- The children can carry the memory for each other

Group Z

- Power of listening
- Image of Brokenness to be a part of the whole
- Faith formation is about interaction with others

Group AA:

- Real learning happens in the world of hands-on engagement
- Real leaning takes place in intimate relationship with one another
- Learning is a life-long process full of challenges and conflicts and bumps as well as great joy and success

Group BB

- Our understandings of faith come out of the reflection in the event, the meeting etc. – as can our recognition of God's presence and that occurs best in community
- Faith has many definitions – its almost a “non-definition”

Group CC

- Essential role of storytelling
- How much broader formation is than just information
- How we are with one another – attention is deeply important (circles of trust)
- Help people to enter journey in new ways again & again

Group DD:

- Acknowledgement that faith and God can happen in/with any time, location, people
- Importance of being present in the moment – being open to God's messengers, ah-hah moments, epiphanies
- Faith is incarnational – faith grows in our relationships with one another

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

Group A:

- Safe places are extremely important
- Episcopal Churches offers safe places – we need to define safe places to tell our stories
- The Bible is ALL stories and we can't forget that. It is a book of questions; most people use it as an answer book.
- You can't go wrong with your own story
- Our Episcopal curriculum does not help us to form our stories as part of the Biblical story

Group B:

- It is the listening that gets us to the knowledge that is needed
- A receiving safe community is essential – awaiting the arrival of “those who come in faith” to support nurture and incorporate those who wish to stay

- Nurturing and growing in the ability to be fully alive in healthy, life-giving relationships is an ex???? Agenda for Christian education
- Education needs to be the process built on and continued in the experience of the people/groups

Group C:

- Need a way to talk about/share the important experiences of our lives
- How can we trust each other with the precious life changing moments?
- Metaphors – work with them as a teaching tools
- Seed us – soil our circles & what we’ve learned; plus water our lives

Group D:

- How do you process this information at home in real time and space?
- Don’t have a program on storytelling, but use stories within the context of a meeting
- Using norms in ministry to create safe spaces
- Provide ‘intentional time’ for stories and remember that all stories are sacred

Group E:

- Telling stories – modeled by Parker Palmer was useful
- Combine groups – not just youth ministries, etc.
- Listening with respect is very important

Group F:

- Mentor environment of trust that forms relationship to self and others and God is important
- Provide ways to help diverse learning styles engage the process

Group G:

- We should be about creating spaces, not filling spaces
- We need to be able to help people tell their story as well as to be able to help people find their story
- Listening to and exploring God’s story is vital
- It is important to take the time to create the space to deal with issues that might seem small but which have deep implications
- Telling the story, as in the Godly Play tradition, can be a powerful tool for people with dementia
- The discernment process is vital in many areas of life and ministry
- Liturgy should be examined in the light of how it forms people

Group H:

- There is a disconnect between clergy and lay
- Seminaries need to be intentional about educating clergy about empowering the ministry of the baptized – shared ministry between clergy & lay – all ministry has to do with diaconal ministry
- Act out of experience of abundance
- How does the community choose to minister?

Group I:

- Sharing our life adventures / our stories in the various circles we are part of
- Being part of a variety of circles / communities
- Sharing our gifts and talents for ministry / for action
- Being open to God’s timing in our lives – remember & celebrate those times
- Find ways to turn down the “chatter” – the noise of our lives – to hear the voice of God around us

Group J:

- Ways of story into action back into story in community
- Patience – trusting the process
- Ways to create structure – circles / communities of trust that enables us to share stories

Group K:

- How do we create a safe place?
- How can we BE a safe place for others?
- How do we find new models for education?
- We need to understand that we do not have all the answers, AND still work on the task of being prophetic?

Group L:

- Our parents – both negative & positive – and grandparents – were powerful influences. We need to work with parents.
- Some of most unchristian behavior happens in the church – we don't know how to create safe spaces
- Teach our children to take advantage of safe spaces. Safe space has to be a space of love.
- We wear too many masks in church.

Group M:

- How do we hear back so the work can continue?
- The church should make a conscious decision not to do things separately – always in collaboration with all ministries

Group N:

- When we seek practical helps for Christian formation, we need to select models (formal curricular materials) that support relationships among learners
- Since we can't put the entire burden of formation on clergy alone, we must find ways to form congregants, since they are the people who provide continuity in parishes as clergy come and go
- When contemplating practical programs for formation, need to keep in mind Palmer's contention that all we need is already here: soul, community, Christ

Group O:

- How can we be more open and willing to do what everyone brings to life in Christ? Including vision from youth
- Need for mutual support in carrying the vision we catch
- Need for safe spaces in which we can risk God's presence
- Places where we can tell our stories, even the painful ones, acknowledge our need

Group P:

- We learn by watching "attentiveness to miracles"
- We learn from the practices of family and church community
- We need places of radical hospitality (camps being one example) where outsiders can be invited into the practices of the faithful community
- We invite wonder. Especially Godly Play (cited by many) and visible public faith practices that cause people to ask, "I wonder why they do that?"

Group Q:

- For years the church's focus has been on the cognitive level – learning about the content – but what we are saying is that it is relationship and reflection that are key
- We don't have the opportunity in our lives to reflect on an experience that could be faith forming
- There is a sense that we know within ourselves what we know about God – we need to reclaim and remember what we are already given by God

Group R:

- In creating curriculum, can't have one to fit all
- Every time we take time to tell stories, the work goes well
- Live a little bit of each other's lives through stories – engagement with others
- Intentional suspension of judging self or others' stories – bring your self – bring Christ
- Listen to each other – especially youth

Group S:

- Attention to process: to choose to develop curricula that emphasize process over outcome and the Spirit's prompting over "control" by the teacher. To combine the movements a personal process, group sharing / process in mature ways, and to guard against toxic educational environments (opting for compassion, dignity, respect over competition)
- Ambience-Training: to be conscious in group work, about not importing cultural put-downs into the church (ie: not to mirror medical school / immigration policy / educational tenure competitiveness, etc.). In other words, to be intentional about cultivating a creative space here risk-taking is welcome, where there is communal support for "stepping out in faith," for prayerful "gestation" of dreams / ideas and for the practice of presence.

- Wisdom training: to develop skills in patience and timing in teacher / leaders, so as to allow real learning to arise from the learner; also to recognize the role of community in the reality of “who I am today” – that my wisdom is collective wisdom (past & present).
- Compassion Training: focus on face-to-face interacting sharing pain/struggles, processing occasions when compassion releases fear/inhibition/blindness from dominating the group experience

Group T:

- We must be aware of learning styles
- We must pay attention to millennials
- Every household should have a theology and a mission
- The old Sunday School model is failing
- Christian education needs to be a solid foundation before theological education can take place

Group U:

- Most ministry is about relationship
- We were (most of us) invited to become Episcopalians by someone – we need to stress evangelism
- It is good to be a non-confessional church which allows a wide variety of people to be part of the Body
- Practically, we are victims of a clericalism which retards the formation work and ministry
- Formation and transformation takes place best (maybe only) in community

Group V:

- Real saavy about what is the environment for learning
- Importance of small groups as the place for learning and the relationships of the people in small groups
- Honoring the “outside the box” learning
- This is our form of “show & tell” and by so the hierarchy seems to be flattened.
- Flattening of relationships helps us to be comfortable about who we are. How do we do that in a broad sense?

Group W:

- We need to create environments where people can appear with their soul
- The key question everyone faces is “Do you believe God is good?” How do we support people in answering this question?
- Stories indicated the group experienced God in the different ways by
 - Asking questions
 - Certainty of the answer to a question
- Faith cannot be taught, but when as a group we share the stories, our own faith can be deepened
- The church superimposes a secular model on Christian Ed and we must transform it to encourage storytelling and experiential learning at all levels so that it is incarnate and we can live our lives from “the inside out” through heart connection
- If you have a relationship with a child, then hear their response to a story of scripture or tradition, then their response makes sense. We have to get to know the individual learning in a deep way
- We teach who we are. What are the implications for the church in forming us to be authentic?

Group X:

- Recommendation – to be more intentional about circles of trust – must be a safe place and don’t try to fix each other
- Create liturgies and curricula that wrap around critical times in our lives
- Mutuality – cells – embrace small groups – that is how we enable one another to grow
- More intentionality to train facilitators of small groups – widening circles / widening communications
- Liturgically – incorporate and embrace small groups – all part of community – faith formation can be affected (theological work is needed around this)

Group Y:

- It is never too late to dig the “well” for others

- Each story touches us – it’s all one story (Our story, my story, God’s story)
- God dreams the story – God made humanity because God loves stories
- Stories illuminate or cause us to be stuck – need to revisit – both a memory and future beckoning

Group Z:

- We need to listen and interact in our communities
- Provide opportunities for listening and interaction
- Open to what happens in the midst of program – creating an experience to reflect and be open to the Spirit
- Use wide range of experiences

Group AA:

- We need church leaders to help the congregation that this is a life-long process
- Maintain “a long view” of the formation process – 1st grade teachers need to see this as a beginning, for example
- Theological schools need to be more “in sync” with congregations / parishes; needs to be collaborative effort rather than seminaries leading parishes down the “right road”

Group BB:

- That often our discussion in education is around “what speaker/program” should we bring in and ultimately that can be irrelevant
- How do we “get” that the curriculum is actually the context, the real “stuff” of our lives?
- We need help linking “our” stories to the biblical stories (or else we’re just another self-help group)

Group CC:

- Create safe space
- Assessment and accountability must be a part of education – how?
- Paradox of goal setting and faith formation as a journey – full of surprises
- Craft essential questions

Group DD:

- Importance of keeping our expectations high – expecting the impossible through our faith
- Being aware of the grace / new life that can come out of tragedy
- Standards of success need to be measured in transformed lives rather than ASA
- Structures of Christian Education can be suffocating – need to affirm and build on places of joy and grace

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

Group A:

- Make sure safe places don’t become comfortable places where we aren’t challenged.

Group B:

- Is the Episcopal Church ready to stop being a denomination even exclusively Christian and realize that the mystery of God has a far greater potential to work through us if we erase the borders (transcriber unsure of handwriting)

Group C:

- How do we create our circles / communities of trust?
- How can we take transitional moments & make them life long learnings?

Group D:

- Not to use stories as an icebreaker
- Practice of silence

Group E:

- We discussed how education is more than just “structured”

Group H:

- We need to answer the question – who are the ministers in our church?
- Training teachers needs to be a priority in seminary
- The creation of a “Charter for Baptismal Ministries” (see Children’s Charter)

Group I:

- Way to help create these safe places
- Invite people to come into the ‘circles’ – Ask! And to include / seek people who might be on the margins & not just safe people

Group K:

- To be a teacher or a learner one needs to be willing to be vulnerable and to be in one’s self a self a safe space to another person. St. Alban’s, Indianapolis (catechumenate class) would begin with a question, “What baggage did you bring with you tonight?”

Group L:

- How do we let the “untamed tiger” loose in it? (the church) (come out of the box that encloses us in this space)

Group O:

- The educable moment is when people are in crisis, transition or pain
- We need icons, not idols

Group P:

- Very holy storytelling process. That is the endless “aha” (also an ongoing source of wonder) for your faithful scribe!

Group S:

- Prayer in the home was identified as an important childhood gift brought into adulthood

Group T:

- What would Christian formation in the Episcopal Church look like if the primary goal was the formation of households as the primary focus of our Christian education program?

Group U:

- There is no readily identifiable place to go to see actually what Christian formation, youth or children’s ministry positions are available

Group X:

- Curriculum – the Episcopal Church needs to narrow choices – must be user friendly

Group Y:

- Interrelationship stories are where we relate / build community
- We need to know and be known

Group Z:

- Appreciate opportunity to remain silent
- Not aware of schedule
- Copy of questions to see before session are needed

Group BB:

- The extent to which clergy can be isolated from their families, congregations, and brother/sister clergy

Group CC:

- How do we help people be open to learning that is more than just information? How do we get beyond “elitist intellectualism”?

Group DD:

- More acknowledgement and focus on the place of worship in faith formation
- More balance in faith formation, allowing for emphasis on relational aspects of faith