



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 III: The Stranger as Spiritual Guide (Sunday afternoon)

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

Group A:

- More people who see their faith as joyful and cheerful that faith will radiate
- Bear the faith in Christ joyfully – like the cheerleaders
- Those who help see are also blind
- We are always on the winning team even if we lost the game

Group B:

- When we are most certain we are less likely to listen – blindness comes with the quiet judgment
- When we are most comfortable with diversity there is no room for the stranger
- The stranger may be a person we think we have known for years but we haven't; we may be the stranger, but have repressed a side of ourselves to conform
- It is hard to listen to our own voice; we must learn to be bridge people / find bridge people (double agents) which is a skill to be nurtured and developed

Group C:

- The image of 'who' we want in 'our' church isn't who is out there – non-members don't fit in 'here'
- We are blind to those who don't look like us – outsiders, children; blind to call for outreach; need of change; blind to our fears; blind to people we don't understand
- Fear is a hard mantle to shed
- Bartimaeus': children, the elderly, youth (Confirmation with no clout – no voting rights)
- It takes a long time to understand the depth of children

Group D:

- What are we blind to? Who isn't here at this consultation?
- Is the church like Bartimaeus? Maybe we should be throwing off our mantle and going to the world
- Remaining/building community can help filter our blindness when we are practicing open community
- We have a hard time distinguishing between our "core" belief of our faith and what is peripheral

Group E:

- People are searching for "mercy," purpose, understanding
- "Elders" are needed to pass down faith – they can't be gatekeepers
- Raising up the ministry of all the baptized

Group F:

- Using the metaphor of blindness/sight to explore education opens new horizons
- Safety, trust – needed to reveal imperfections
- One story from spiritual director fits and expanded our understanding – "Let me see others as Jesus sees them"

Group G:

- Part of the purpose of our "busy-ness" is to keep us from time to time to be silent
- The mantle of defensiveness must be laid aside if we are going to hear each other

- The mantles of perfection and “the right way” must be laid aside if new ideas and dreams are to be explored
- Growth takes place when you can acknowledge and work with and through creative teams
- Are we listening to all of those who are speaking? If not, why not?
- Transition requires honoring and burying the dead as well as joyfully moving forward
- Even if the church isn’t a place where you can cry for grace, it can be a place where you can begin to discover your true self
- The opposite of the “culture of fear” is the “culture of faith”

Group H:

- Many are so busy finding time to nurture ourselves it becomes a challenge – finding time to be still and listen
- Can’t see the tree through the forest – need time to get more focused
- To have the time to be creative – new & fresh ideas – to see things as a continual journey
- Need time to do reflection and go deeper

Group I:

- Age doesn’t matter – we all have the many of the same doubts/questions/concerns within us
- Identifying both the inner and outer selves and working as hard as possible to find the integrate/mobius strip way to appear to others
- “will anyone love me?” when we change our approach / our behavior – when we shed our blindness and our mantles
- I am the only thing that I can change, that I control and I need to deal with me and what I must do
- Whatever the mask, we all have them and wear them

Group J:

- Themes of:
 - Protecting ourselves (when are boundaries helpful and when do they become barriers?)
 - Control vs. collegiality & cooperation – how do we “give up” control?
- Need to pay attention when we think we know the answer – cue to further examination of assumptions
- Need to be self-aware

Group K:

- Recognizing the stranger and welcome those who differ from our most core values
- Learning to embrace the threat of our own resurrection
- Regretting that all voices were not present

Group L:

- The Church is blind to the needs of its people in the world – too interested in hierarchy and politics. It has lost the essence of the primitive church
- We are so attached to the world that we try to live double life – one in church and one outside
- We don’t want to see the Bartimaeuses and we seldom listen to their pleas
- We come from under all kinds of mantles of fear – fear of truth telling, fear of rejection
- Much of our woundedness comes from perfectionism – fear of being imperfect, fear of change

Group M:

- Be sensitive to the fear of change and other consequences of change
- Specifically ask the question Jesus asked, “Who can I do for you?”
- Listen to the needs of people – then meet them where they are

Group N:

- There are a variety of templates for healing, not just the Bartimaeus story. In some of them, relationships of community take on a positive role (the 4 friends who lower the paralyzed man through the roof, for example)
- Sometimes we throw off our mantles out of desperation at hitting bottom and there is nothing else to do
- Church is so focused on what is dividing us that we have lost track of the “Bartimaeuses” on the margins who cry out for mercy

Group O:

- It's not the curriculum / practices / BCP, but how we handle them that is the problem in welcoming people
- We need to attend to the "hidden rules" in our church
- Be Christian, rather than "upholding Christian tradition"
- We don't market ourselves well – If it was up to us, Bartimaeus wouldn't know Jesus was passing by!

Group P:

- We are blind in many and various ways – to the deeper story under a polished surface, to the legitimacy of people's objections (some said, "I don't like to hear 'no'."), to the Bible as a primary source
- Some of the things that keep us blind are self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, holding onto being right, judgementalism, anger, disappointment, fear and not wanting to see

Group Q:

- Faith is taking risky "uppity" action; but if you are "uppity" you will be marginalized
- Why can't we have dialogue like this in our churches around the things that marginalize us?
- We as a collective group have the knowledge to name the blindness, name the mantle, name the marginalized, and can fix it if we want to
- If we are going to survive, we have to have this dialogue to listen to and be listened to

Group R:

- Ask – listen – act
- "The Episcopal Church is not ministering to young black males (and females) in urban America. The Episcopal Church is not meeting their needs." This comment broke open our hearts and our dialogue focused on hospitality
- Marginalized people – mental illness, class issues, race
- In church, each group called the 'other' marginalized

Group S:

- Importance of asking for help in curing our blindness, recognizing the need for other perspectives and support
- Habit of a rush to judgment; blame the other
- Recognition that removal of blindness is not a "once for all" = ongoing
- Liberation and peace come from viewing the other; they way I want to be viewed
- Key – per Jesus – ask questions – the rush to judgments leads us to the rush to implementation – often off-base

Group T:

- Risky action – welcoming the stranger – we are often acutely aware of the importance of welcoming the stranger
- Immersion experiences are valuable – places where you may be the minority

Group U:

- The integration of faith and life is counter-cultural
- It is scary and risky business to cry out for our vision or to lay down our mantles and risk resurrection
- We cannot assume: levels of biblical literacy; knowing the tradition and the stories; "God-talk"
- We need to throw off the mantle of consumerism, of the specialization/out-sourcing – we are all ministers in the formation process
- We must help people find their ministry gifts and not make assumptions or rush to fill gaps rather than discern gifts in relationship

Group V:

- Engagement: Are we so worried about performance that we are not lifting up the gifts that are being given?
- Expectations are too low and not being met right where they are
- Not recognizing there are different styles of learning can be a disaster
- A leader's role is to be publicly what you hope to release people from privately – be real to others

Group W:

- We are broken. If we are the Church we need to say that it is broken. The church can be more supportive of us than it thinks it can.

Group X:

Group Y:

- If we want healthy children, we need healthy adults
- Mantles (and we named more than one) keeps us from being open
- Conversion/transformation frees us/congregation from culture – systems need to change
- We need to be still long enough to know Christ in our midst/passing by

Group Z:

- Crossing over into “other” cultures – embracing others (in crossing over we don’t need to accept the culture – just listen and be open)
- Messiness is part of the given
- It is complicated and frustrating but we need to do more
- We all have blind spots
- To change the world we need to change

Group AA:

- Our various forms of fear keep us from fully professing/exploring our shared faith, from growing more deeply in our faith
- In reflection on this Gospel passage, it occurs to us that the church is NOT the great multitude on the road, but is actually a marginalized community, living/operating on the edges of society. This can work against us, silencing us, but also for us, and helps us stand in solidarity with those who are outcasts
- Formation ministry in the church must empower us for ministry in the world

Group BB:

- We marginalize those with whom we should be in solidarity and from whom we stand to learn much: cheerleaders ((how to have fun in the Body of Christ); un-churched young adults (what their experiences of the divine have been); people out doing stuff on Sunday mornings (what’s ‘out there’) – their gifts/assets
- We feel like Bartimaeus when we’re asked Big Questions we can’t answer, and we feel like we’re waiting for the Healer too
- Throwing off mantles of pride, prejudice, being wedded to tradition, in order to be able to ask questions and see God more deeply

Group CC:

- Stumbling blocks in our faith include:
 - Claiming what we already believe to be “right” and liking it to remain “as is” because it tidies up the world
 - Fear – of losing control, of learning what God wants for us
 - It is in RELATIONSHIP with others that we come to true understanding, truth, forgiveness
 - We get STUCK in our faith and unexcited
 - When we risk something new/different, it can lead us into new, amazing learning

Group DD:

- We all experience blindness. Freedom comes with acknowledging our blindness
- Assumptions about others can be useful until we find they are inaccurate and cast them off; this is an ongoing process
- Laughter in reflection groups is important
- Recognition that faith is developed and expressed through our stories

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

Group A:

- Learn to show our faith as both happy and sour

- Step out of our comfort zone
- If we think it's good news then we should act like it
- Jesus is always the winning team and there is always good news

Group B:

- Circles of trust establish an environment in which all are stranger, but whose stories carry a part of the truth of and need for the whole
- Theology of Easter Even – The Resurrection is carried by the stranger – (Eastern orthodoxy – if there are no baptisms on Easter Eve the resurrection will not arrive in that community)
- Continually teach and develop skills to meet on new ground (circle of trust) where we all build the future together

Group C:

- Be open to other possibilities of doing faith community / church
- Our energies could be channeled to encourage new possibilities
- Crossovers happen in our lives even if we can't see them at that moment – clarity breaks through
- Dialogue between institution (church) and Body of Christ – is hard to deal with; a heavy mantle is being constrained to live within the institution

Group D:

- Look outward – define issues – do not stay in survival mode – we may be our own problem
- “What's in my box” Do personal / discernment of my core values to become more aware of how I (we) proclaim the Gospel, teach, etc. – Self-definition

Group E:

- We need to learn (relearn) to pray
- Institutions need to clearly define mission to specific communities
- We need a deeper conversation between Academy and congregations

Group F:

- Time to gather stories around “receiving sight” and use them to identify elements that would address what needs to be learned
- Find/invent ways to “name” our “blindness”

Group G:

- Is the church honoring the “come and see” invitation?
- There is a general fear of ministering to the 20-somethings because we feel ill-equipped to engage them
- This consultation is frustrating because the process is very white and does not acknowledge other ways of thinking and being; the word “safe” is a white privilege word. The words “circle of trust” are more inclusive
- Rather than to try to create “safe” spaces that aren't real, we might need to learn how to live in unsafe spaces
- There is a hunger for living the social gospel

Group H:

- Marginalized groups in the church include:
 - Youth
 - Children
 - Young adults
 - Hispanic & small ethnic groups
- We need to throw off the mantles of:
 - Clericalism
 - Living with being a layperson with authority
 - Being the “boss”
 - Being a “J” and knowing not everyone wants to live in a ‘staff-driven’ church
 - Leadership – allowing people to use their own strengths

Group I:

- Keep finding / using / creating circles of trust where we can go
- Share “The Hidden Wholeness” with others

Group J:

- We do not do an appropriate job of teaching and maintaining healthy boundaries
- To support each other in taking risks – how do we reward risk-taking
- How do we keep going – faith journeys require risks
- How to hold expectations and when to let them go

Group K:

- Recognizing and being respectful of how many values we have in common
- Desire to hold better the tension of differences in voices
- We acknowledge there are still too many marginalized groups
- Are our churches safe places to learn when homosexuals are marginalized and do not have access to all the sacraments? How can we be a church that does not cast anyone out?

Group L:

- We must teach people how to stop living “double lives” and start new integrated ones
- We need to accept and hear the plea of each Bartimaeus by taking leadership and inviting them into our churches – making leadership changes in old attitudes
- We need safe places to be able to step outside our fears. And to find our own voices. We throw off mantles every day in small ways; and wonderful changes happen when our faith allows us this
- If we remember how much God loves us, we can let go of our blindnesses and love ourselves
- The church’s blindness in its goals need to be replaced by recognizing the needs of the world – healing, friendship, happiness in salvation, sharing our stories, the great good news of Christ!

Group M:

- Empowering of lay people – leadership development and defining ministry
- Open our walls for others to join as in the Celtic tradition
- Websites should be attractive and updated
- Letting go of things that don’t work

Group N:

- Young people and children are on the edges of the church and we need to bring them into the center – the core of our faith community

Group O:

- We need creative ways of showing liturgical hospitality
- We need new ways of thinking about membership, apart from the “pledging unit”
- What is the balance between expecting too much of people and expecting too little of them? How do we make it (the Christian life) compelling, exciting, worthy of people’s commitment?
- Let’s promote our faith, our hope, our community, as well as our comfort with the big questions

Group P:

- Some things that we have done to throw off the mantle / seek mercy in our blindness include:
 - Listening to the Gospel text from different points of view
 - Sharing an unwanted mantle with others
 - Letting others assume responsibility even when we were inclined to jump in and fix something
 - Accept that there may be a time delay between shedding the mantle (of whatever stands in the way of our seeing) and the healing of our sight
 - Asking people what they want/need, but getting out of the way if they can’t yet articulate it

Group Q:

- Asking the right question is critical
- Nothing is more hurtful than inviting dialogue and then nothing changes – need to be clear about expectations
- We need to include those who feel marginalized by the changes in the church
- We operate under different assumptions that can lead to unintended offenses and omissions

Group R:

- We need to know our core identity – liturgical church, liturgical year, etc.
- We get hung up on our language – sexton vs. janitor – that can put people off

- Make worship accessible to newcomers – include the teaching of hospitality
- If we can't meet the needs of the newcomers, be honest and help a plan that meets their needs – we need to tweak our liturgy to make it work for more people
- Liturgy is a vehicle – we need to break it open to facilitate the worship of Christ

Group S:

- Reach out rather than talk about it and don't invent programs without consulting the marginalized
- Willingness to be open to giving up notions of security, safety, stability
- Let liturgy be alive – and tolerate differences in worship style
- Help model asking better & better questions

Group T:

- Being ready to get to know the person who sits next to us
- Often we need to know ourselves first so that we can get to know one another
- Doing church and being church are two very different things

Group U:

- We educators need to push back on doing everything – and get into the ministry development business
- Lay leaders (let alone the average laity) are marginalized
- Even in compensation, pension, wellness – lay employees are not paid in such a way to model what God's Kingdom looks like
- Lay professional networks are not as well developed as clergy networks (because they are not supported)
- We may need to shed the mantles of church buildings, paid clergy, pension fund bias toward highly compensated clergy
- Build lay ministry assets – avoid being rector-centric
- There are many ways to talk about faith issues – don't assume there is one way to do faith formation

Group V:

- Working on General Convention resolution on Faith Stories as a way to truly engage people – this process works!
- Why do we keep feeding people (esp. youth, young adults) what they are not interested in learning?
- Engage young people in what they want to learn; don't create it for them

Group W:

- The experience of the Body of Christ (in this 3rd small group session) was so deep that it is very hard to get back to the task of summarizing. We agreed that we need to resist trying to quantify and qualify. To impose the demand for an outcome to this process does not honor the process – so we trust that on this one occasion these answers must suffice if we want to follow the will of the Spirit.

Group X:

Group Y:

- It's hard to find a common language – it brings us up short
- We need to agree to disagree
- We need to invest in relationship/community, and training to do process/program, not curriculum – quick fix is easy materials
- It's messy and takes time – we have it in our midst – we need to do the hard work of keeping the tension

Group Z:

- We are all “priests”
- Difference between listening and agreeing and what we do with it
- We need to create safe spaces for all people
- Redefine what is successful by seeing God's measure
- Keep our focus on God as center

Group AA:

- It's never enough to preach and teach the Gospel; we (Christians) have to enliven it in the world
- We need to help people integrate their daily lives with their lives in the church. There's too much of a divide!
- Church must stop hiding behind established structure and existing programs and think outside the box
- Transparent decision-making and clear communication keeps people from feeling excluded, silenced

Group BB:

- That we are each the curriculum from which others may learn about Christ: we have to learn how to be the Healer for one another. How do we strengthen educators (and others) to be able to "be" curricula?
- It's important to call others to an encounter with Christ (or to someone who can be the Christ to them) just as the crowd did to Bartimaeus and Philip did in this morning's Gospel

Group CC:

- We need to rid ourselves of:
 - Clericalism
 - Elitism (expert-ism)
 - The need to be perfect
 - The need to be busy
- We need to stop doing what we hate doing!
- We need to encourage others to do
- We need to notice what we notice, pay attention to what we pay attention to

Group DD:

- We've all promised to form little circles of trust when we get home
- Important to walk toward difficult people and situations rather than avoiding them
- Connecting souls transcends stereotypes, assumptions, marginalizing

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

Group A:

- Can we really be Christian if we have never been in a place of brokenness that makes us vulnerable?

Group B:

- We judge people who are superficial, when in fact we are being superficial ourselves
- We do not take time to hear each others' stories

Group C:

- A church for 'bored' Christians and interested pagans would be welcome

Group D:

- The question is not "How do we save the Episcopal Church?" but "How do we bring the world to Christ?"

Group H:

- Bring resources together to mentor groups
- Remove barriers to leadership

Group I:

- When we do bear ourselves to someone, usually the person we never thought we could "tell," and they say, "You, too?"

Group J:

- Tossing off the mantle isn't a one-time deal – continuing, on-going process

Group K:

- We didn't explore enough of the others who are not Christian – other denominations and theologies
- Among young Christians there are those who accept modern science and find that they cannot reconcile biblical faith and science. Can the church overcome this problem in reaching young adults?

Group L:

- We've let our identity be stolen by others. We need to get over ourselves! God is in love with you, and that changes the whole world.

Group N:

- What would the church look like if we stopped, as Jesus did, and paid attention to people on the margins who cry out for mercy?

Group O:

- Are we willing both to hear people crying out, and to hear them into crying out? And we will do this in our life in the world, not in the pews, because they aren't there ye?
- Despite a great deal of programs, the children are often the Bartimaeus in our midst

Group P:

- Someone said, "My hurts are your hurts, my weaknesses are your weaknesses, my joys are your joys."

Group R:

- If our tradition prevents us from welcoming, we are doing something wrong

Group S:

- Remember the tiny outlying churches with us who hope to grow

Group U:

- Home visits could allow us to build relationships

Group V:

- How can we have our congregations sit in groups for 2 hours following the same process we have been doing here?

Group Y:

- Congregations need truth-tellers; those who will say what no one else will say
- God does not force relationships
- The greatest challenge is apathy

Group Z:

- We rarely have opportunities to have open conversations in our churches – and when we do we do not set up the guidelines well
- The broadest base is part of this consultation – do we each know what we want? Is it the same thing?

Group AA:

- The church needs to claim its authoritative voice in the culture!

Group BB:

- One participant observed that he didn't see any "Big Question" about "Windsor Report issues" when those are the questions tearing us up.

Group CC:

- If the Church is a place where people cannot (feel they cannot go) in their brokenness, how can we provide places/circles of trust that are already in place for them? (unemployed, parents of teens, sick, grief-stricken, depressed). The beauty of Jesus' question was that he offered Bartimaeus the dignity of having the question asked – rather than assuming
- How can we get to a place where people CAN ask for what they need? Do we have a responsibility to help people figure out how to live in our crazy-making culture?
- What REALLY is best for children? All "As" or real learning? Soccer superstar-to-be or rest, fun, play?

Group DD:

- How does the marginalization of the church encourage us to speak power to truth? Jesus is saying to the church, "What do you want?"
- How do we identify the marginalized for whom we must make access?