

WRESTLING WITH THE BIG QUESTIONS

SESSION III: SUMMARY

The Stranger as Spiritual Guide (Sun. afternoon)

A critical part of every kind of education, not least education in the church, is the capacity to “cross over” into that which seems alien to us, whether it is the viewpoint of “the stranger” or a mode of learning that stretches us in unaccustomed ways. Reflect together on the story of the healing of blind Bartimaeus and, using it as a template, explore three questions: (1) Where and how have I encountered my own “blindness” when it comes to learning about faith? (2) What “mantle” do I need to throw off in order to approach the teacher, the teaching and the healing that I/we need? (3) Who does Bartimaeus represent in today’s church life, and what can we do to become more supportive of those marginalized voices in the way we teach and learn? (Text: “The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus,” Mark 10: 46–52)

What have you heard / learned:

- We continue to be “blind” to those that are often excluded in the decision-making / program planning / visioning process, especially in the area of education & formation, especially:
 - Children
 - Elderly
 - Youth
 - Non-churched – those in the greater community
 - Other races, cultures, beliefs, economic levels
- We need to be less defensive and protective of what we have done / been in the past in order to move forward
- We need to lay aside what “we” (the leadership) feel others (the followers) need – we need to truly listen to what they are saying and calling us to do
- People are searching; they are hungry – we need to listen to what they are saying and asking for. For many, this does not seem to be addressed by:
 - General Convention
 - Seminaries
 - Clergy
- Formation ministry involves:
 - Discernment
 - Ministry in the world
 - Building community
 - Telling our stories of woundedness, fear, marginalization, mercy
 - Ministry of all the baptized
- Our ‘educational system’ in the church continues to be patterned after the white, secular model – on the seminary & national church level (and most dioceses and congregations)

Practical implications:

- More communication / relationships between the institutions (seminaries & congregations)
- Better education / teaching in the areas of:
 - Building circles of trust
 - Maintaining healthy boundaries

- The social gospel
- Prayer
- Listening to the marginalized
- Hospitality
- Ministry in daily life – applying the Gospel to living in the ‘real’ world
- Better use of websites and the internet
- Letting go of things that don’t work
- Leadership / Authority needs to ‘get out of the way’
- We need to define our mission and articulate it better (for the newcomer as well as those who are already part of our church)
 - Our core identity
 - What it means to be an Episcopalian
 - Our language
 - Our worship
- Shed the mantle of clericalism in our church – we are all priests – ministry of all the baptized
- Become more Christ-centered in all that we do
- Be risk-takers in opening our doors to those who may be different or think differently

Also needs to be shared:

- More opportunities need to be made for various levels of leadership to be in communication / collaboration
- The church needs to be more responsive to the broken, inside and outside of our buildings / institution
- We need to reclaim our identity as followers of Christ and proclaim the Gospel – in our churches and the secular world