

WRESTLING WITH THE BIG QUESTIONS

SESSION IV: SUMMARY

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

Ultimately, education in the church must be done in a way that not only illumines the individual's path but builds up the community called the Body of Christ and its capacity for ministry. Tell stories of meaningful experiences of community you have had—of whatever sort, in whatever setting, in or out of church—and identify the elements that made them meaningful. Then, using the story of the feeding of the five thousand as a template, explore three questions: (1) How might these elements of community help us understand what is needed to create “learning communities” in the church? (2) What is the leader's or teacher's role in creating the space for mutual resourcefulness in teaching and learning? (3) What changes in the way the Episcopal Church thinks about and structures its education might enhance the development of dynamic communities of learning where people can grow together in faith? (Texts: “Loaves and Fishes,” poem by David Whyte; “The Feeding of the Five Thousand, Mark 6: 30–44; and “Leadership in the Loaves and Fishes,” chart by PJP.)

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.

What have you heard / learned:

- Community involves:
 - Shared leadership / power – leaders that:
 - Listen
 - Provide hospitality
 - Clarity of vision
 - Openness to a variety of methods & opinions
 - Model abundance
 - Being open to vulnerability
 - Sharing of story
 - Listening to self and others
 - Embracing identity
 - Gifts
 - Sharing
 - Discerning
 - Honoring all
 - Being open to new voices and ideas
 - A common purpose / vision
 - Honesty / truth-telling
 - Transformation
 - Humility
 - Commitment to one another
 - Living into abundance
 - Attending to the needs of all

- Companionship
- Our church lives in a hierarchical leadership structure
- The traditional strengths of the Episcopal community are disappearing
- We need to resist the need to fix things
- Need for holistic education / formation in the church
- Meaningful communities have emerged from a sense of a common purpose, need, hunger or life changing event
- Stories need to be shared at all levels of our church – My Story / Our Story / The Story
- Intergenerational learning is important

Practical implications:

- Instead of working on content / program – we should be working on relational ministry
- Empower all to assume responsibility
- Christian education conferences should be less lecture, more experiential
- Groups should be small (8-10 are best)
- Learning is not just academic
- Telling personal stories is important for formation
- The Episcopal Church needs to be open to a variety of formation models and styles of learning
- At all levels of the Church (local, diocesan, national), more emphasis is needed in:
 - Christian education
 - Overseas mission / cross-cultural experiences
 - Campus ministry
- Circles of trust developed in:
 - House of Bishops
 - Clergy conferences
 - Vestries
- Radical reformation of teaching authority:
 - Sharing of leadership between laity & clergy
 - Balance doctrinal / intellectual teaching with experiential learning
- Resources need to be mobilized in new ways:
 - Financial
 - Human
- We have been creating a new way of ‘being’ church here – it is a paradigm shift
- Education must become a priority in our church (and this should be reflected in budget allocations)
- Need to continue discussion of language – education & formation
- Emphasize learning over teaching
- Church committees should represent all voices (ages, ethnicities, perspectives) of the parish (same for diocesan committees)
- Teach how to create a learning environment:
 - Using all the senses
 - A variety of modes of learning
 - Setting – candles, light, temperature, seating (move around, don’t always sit in the same place)
 - Intergenerational
 - Include worship
 - Hospitality & food
 - Responsiveness to all who are present

- Recognition of those who are absent
- Service / Outreach projects are great means of forming community; often need a process / means for reflecting on them in relation to our faith and the Gospel

Also needs to be shared:

- Provide training in facilitation skills – to create safe spaces / circles of trust
- Bishops need to be more present as teachers, listeners in the education field
- A model has been created at this consultation that needs to be shared in other areas of the church – many plan to take this home and replicate it; how can the larger institution do the same?
- Just because we are part of a ‘circle of trust’ in one place, doesn’t mean we know how to carry it over into other groups we gather in – we need to be continually reminded or else we regress into old behaviors