

THE SMALL GROUP JOURNEY

General Texts: "The Wild Geese" (Wendell Berry), "A Ritual to Read to Each Other" (William Stafford), and "Councils" (Marge Piercy)

The texts cited above (and in parentheses after Sessions II, III and IV below) will be explored by Parker Palmer in his remarks prior to each sessions. Though it will be helpful for facilitators to be generally familiar with each text, none of the small group sessions will be a text-based discussion. Instead, the discussions will be framed by the directions given below, and the various texts will serve simply as sources of images, insight and inspiration for the issues we will be exploring.

Session I: Christian Faith & How We Learn to Live It (Sat. morning). Tell a story about a moment, an event, a situation or a life-passage in which you learned something important about what it means to live in faith as a Christian, whether inwardly, or in relationships, or in your vocation, or as a citizen, etc. Feel free to draw on any sort of learning experience, whether it was positive or negative, and whether or not it was part of a formal educational setting. After stories have been told by all who wish to do so, reflect on what you have heard via three questions: (1) What do people mean by "faith" or "living in faith"? (2) What are some of the key ways in which people learn to live in faith? (3) What do these stories suggest about how education in the church is both supporting us and failing to support us on the faith-learning journey?

Session II: Hospitality in Teaching & Learning: Embracing Questions, Challenges, Doubts & Diversity (Sat. afternoon). Tell stories about two different moments, events, or situations in your own life in the church: (1) A moment when you felt safe to explore your own authentic experience of faith, or confusion, or doubt, or dissent in your own way. (2) A moment when you did not feel such safety and may even have felt at marginalized or excluded. Then reflect on what you have heard in this session and Session I, asking two questions: (1) How can education in the church become more hospitable to the diverse ways in which people engage the faith journey? (2) What are some of the obstacles to such hospitality in the church and how might we overcome them? (Text: "The Road to Emmaus," Luke 24: 13-35)

Session III: 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)

Session IV: Leadership for Community & Abundance (Mon. 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.)