

A Guide for Discussion

You may of course read the books in this series on your own, but because they focus on the transformation of the Episcopal Church in the twenty-first century the books are especially useful as a basis for discussion and reflection within a congregation or community. The questions below are intended to generate fruitful discussion about leadership within the congregations and national churches with which members of the group are familiar.

Each group will identify its own needs and will be shaped by the interests of the participants and their comfort in sharing personal life stories. Discussion leaders will wish to focus on particular areas that address the concerns and goals of the group, using the questions and themes provided here simply as suggestions for a place to start the conversation.

chapter one

A Time of No Longer and Not Yet

In this chapter Katherine Tyler Scott sets the context for changes in church leadership required in the twenty-first century. She believes that “shared ministry between clergy and laity can be an enlivening force” in the church today, especially when church leaders offer a “clear, shared vision, can listen respectfully to one another, can invite participation from everyone, and exhibit congruence between word and deed” (pp. 7–8).

- ♦ What has been your experience of “shared ministry between clergy and laity” in the congregations and dioceses of which you have been a part?
- ♦ What are some of the ways church leaders can offer “a clear, shared vision” of a congregation’s mission and ministry?
- ♦ What are some of the concrete ways church leaders can “listen to one another” and “invite participation from everyone”? How is such listening and participation sometimes discouraged?
- ♦ How do church leaders “exhibit congruence between word and deed” in your congregation or diocese? What are the consequences when words and deeds do not match?



The author notes that according to one study, “The leadership style of the priest determines a congregation’s perception of the roles and responsibilities of clergy, church staff, and laity. It is clergy leadership that enables a congregation to form and strengthen itself as a commu-

nity and to understand the larger context in which parish life exists” (p. 4).

- ♦ Do you agree with this assessment of the importance of clergy leadership in Episcopal congregations? Why or why not?
- ♦ What has been your experience of various leadership styles of clergy in the congregations of which you have been a part?
- ♦ In your experience, how does the leadership style of the clergy affect the roles of other leaders in the congregation, including church staff, vestry members, committee members, and other lay leaders?

chapter two

Shifting Paradigms

In this chapter the author describes “the changing paradigm of leadership,” noting that congregations today are seeking spiritual leadership to guide the search for meaning and significance so widespread today. She notes: “The very charisma that once distinctly defined the Episcopal Church is precisely what so many people are seeking: the ability to embrace uncertainty and ambiguity responsibly. In other words, the spiritual search is for the development of character, the identification of calling, the alignment between belief and behavior, and the opportunity to make a significant contribution to the world” (p. 22).

- ♦ In what ways have various church leaders helped you with character development and a deeper understanding of your baptismal vocation and identity?

- ♦ How has the church supported your efforts to create an “alignment between belief and behavior” in your daily life?
- ♦ How has the church informed and strengthened your desire to make a contribution to the well-being of others in your community and in the world?



In her discussion of the top-down paradigm for leadership versus a paradigm based on relationship, the author asks several difficult questions that must be addressed in order for transformation to take place (see pages 32–33). With your particular congregation or diocese in mind, how would you respond to her questions:

- ♦ What can the church learn from the past that will enable it to strengthen its financial health and change a downward trend in growth and giving?
- ♦ What will need to change in the content, teaching methodology, and preparation of the next generation in order for this group to effectively occupy the leadership positions that will be open in the near future?
- ♦ How will the next generation of leaders be best prepared to assume the governance and leadership responsibilities essential to the survival and future vitality of the Episcopal Church?
- ♦ What will the operating paradigm for congregational life and leadership need to be, in order to have a spiritually strong and healthy parish?

chapter three

On the Margin:
Promise and Possibility

In this chapter the author states: “Being on the margin can be seen as a place of loss and powerlessness, a void in which nothing happens and where no one can make a difference. But being on the margin can be more than a state of loss; it can be a place of transformation” (p. 47).

- ♦ When have you experienced “being on the margin” in your own life? in your parish?
- ♦ In what ways was the experience of being marginalized an experience of loss for you? for your parish?
- ♦ In what ways have you experienced the margin as “a place of transformation” in your own life? in your parish?



The author believes that “being on the margin means having a changed perspective that comes from being dislocated from a position of centrality” (p. 48).

- ♦ How has your congregation’s perspective needed to change in order to adapt to the reality of the mainline church’s movement to the margins of modern society?
- ♦ In what ways has the “location” of your church congregation within the structures and activities of the wider community changed over the years since its founding?



“Being on the margin,” the author notes, “can change the church’s perspective on and strategies for growth” (p. 49).

- ♦ Has your congregation grown or shrunk in size since its founding? What are some of the factors that influenced the change in size?
- ♦ How is “growth” viewed in your congregation?
- ♦ What do you make of Malcolm Warford’s observation that we “often get bigger because we aren’t able to choose what really claims us” (p. 50)? In what ways has that been true of your congregation?



“Being on the margin is a place of many opportunities and options, and it is easy to be pulled in many directions,” the author notes. “Having a clear aim can help followers get through difficult or challenging circumstances and to emerge with strength and joy” (pp. 52–53).

- ♦ Describe an occasion in which the statement of a clear aim by church leaders was able to strengthen your resolve and help you or your congregation through a difficult situation. How was that “clear aim” communicated?
- ♦ When you recall an occasion in which the failure to hold and/or communicate a clear aim led to fragmentation and division, can you identify the points at which church leaders failed to clarify the vision? What caused them to be silent at those points?



When churches are on the margin in terms of the life of the spirit, they can become places of “reaching for a fuller and deeper understanding of issues.” The author comments that this spiritual margin is “not a neat, orderly, antiseptic place”; rather, as the birthplace of “a new order,” it is “organic, messy, and unpredictable”—and the “fertile ground for redefinition and renewal” (p. 54).

- ◆ In what ways is your congregation living “on the margin” spiritually? Would you describe your spiritual life as “organic, messy, and unpredictable,” or more on the “neat and orderly” end of the spectrum?
- ◆ In what ways is your congregation afraid to embrace life “on the margin,” and instead chooses to remain where it has been in the past? Where do you see courageous members of the congregation exploring new paths and finding them to be “fertile ground for redefinition and renewal”?

chapter four

The Call: Leadership as Vocation

In this chapter Katherine Tyler Scott focuses on the ways the covenant we make at our baptism, in its call for mutual ministry, forms a “template for the relationship and responsibilities of laity and clergy” (p. 57).

- ◆ Describe some of the ways mutual ministry is lived out in your own life. Where do you see it in your congregation, diocese, and national church?
- ◆ Where is such an understanding of shared ministry lacking, in your view?



Knowing a congregation's "organizational culture" is often an important first step to a deeper understanding of its mission and purpose. Review the chart summarizing some of the key components of an organization's culture provided on page 60, and consider the various "levels" of your congregation's underlying structures and assumptions.

- ◆ *Artifactual:* What do you remember as the important points in your parish's history? Why did you join the congregation? What do the "artifacts" of your congregation—the building, the worship space, the service bulletins, the newsletters—tell others about your congregation?
- ◆ *Structural and Behavioral:* How would you respond to the questions listed on page 65 about coffee hour in your congregation? What do your answers tell you about patterns of communication and community life in your parish?
- ◆ *Philosophical:* What are some of the "unquestioned assumptions and unchallenged core beliefs and values" of your congregation? How are they expressed in your worship or congregational life?
- ◆ *Foundational:* Where are the points of "disconnect" in which the foundational beliefs of your congregation do not match its actions? In your view, what work needs to be done to "realign" these beliefs and actions? If it is true, as Fredrica Harris Thompsett has said, that "*what* we choose to notice reveals *who* we are" (pp. 73–74), then what do the people, issues, and activities your congregation focuses most of its energy and attention on tell you about the identity

and mission of the congregation? What (or who) do you think is missing or neglected?



The author believes that change is the constant and new reality that leaders must confront. She introduces a three-phase model for change that describes what happens when organizations deal with change structurally and emotionally (p. 79). The transforming leader must be aware of both, and be able to manage them.

- ◆ What have been the significant changes in the life of your parish in the past ten years?
- ◆ How have these changes affected your parish?
- ◆ How have your lay and clergy leaders handled these changes in the congregation? In what ways were they able to help the congregation move from initial denial through the confusion of being in “The Gap” and then into an acceptance and embracing of new life?
- ◆ What have you learned through this experience of change about your capacity to adapt and be transformed?

chapter five

The Sacramental Nature of Leadership

In this chapter the author notes that the church is one of the few institutions in which we are able to develop our sense of mutual responsibility for the quality of life for all in our communities. In the church we can be encouraged to nurture our sense of “character, calling, congruence, and commitment” (p. 86).

- ♦ How has the church helped you to live out your baptismal calling to serve others in the name of Christ, both in the congregation and in your daily life and work?
- ♦ How has the church provided support and encouragement in your ministries of compassion and your efforts to improve the quality of life for all? When has that support been lacking or misdirected? How have you been able to provide that support for others?



The author identifies “strategic planning” as one way that sacramental leadership can be manifested in the church (p. 91).

- ♦ Reflect on your experience of strategic planning—perhaps in vestry meetings, committee meetings, annual parish meetings, diocesan conventions, or worship planning meetings—as a manifestation of sacramental leadership in your congregation or diocese. How have the plans made at those meetings expressed the “vision and vocation” of your congregation?

- ♦ How have you experienced your own practice of leadership as a sacrament—a visible sign of spiritual grace?
- ♦ Reflect on Frederick Buechner’s insight that “God calls us to the place where our deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” How would you describe your congregation’s “deep gladness”? Where do you see the world’s “deep hunger” most urgently? What are some of the places they meet in your congregation’s mission and ministry today?



Reflect on the “Models of Ministry” matrix found on page 110, focusing on your experience as a committee member offering leadership in your congregation during the past year or two.

- ♦ What would you say has been the primary model of ministry exercised in the committee? Why?
- ♦ Was that model effective and helpful in supporting the mission of the committee? Why or why not?
- ♦ How was conflict or disagreement handled in the group? Who provided guidance in efforts of reconciliation when needed?
- ♦ Did the leadership regularly provide a “hospitable space for disciplined reflection” (p. 109)? If not, why not?
- ♦ How were the goals of the group defined, clarified, and supported by the leadership?
- ♦ What were some of the failures in leadership for the group? How were these handled?



The author concludes, “The Episcopal Church is at a crevice in history, a crease in time when it is being called to reset and restate in new ways who we are and why we exist. We are being called to identify what we can contribute to resolving the turbulence within and without in transformational ways. We are being called to be a credible and authentic example of Christian faith. We are to exemplify congruence in our beliefs and actions. Our ability to influence and exercise power will be revealed through authentic behavior and integrity of being” (p. 111).

- ◆ Do you agree with her assessment of where the Episcopal Church and other mainline churches find themselves today?
- ◆ How would you describe the contribution we are being called to make in “resolving the turbulence within and without in transformational ways”?