

A Vision for Adult Discipleship Education

Anyone who has ever sat in on a Tuesday Morning Bible class or a Lenten film series or the Nights With Nicodemus program knows I am passionate about adult discipleship education. My vision for this aspect of our ministry together is actually a vision shared by the whole leadership team.

The first vision is that we would be a Biblically literate congregation. This, of course, dates back to Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation when the Bible was wrenched out of the hands of the clergy and placed into the hands of the laity.

By Biblical literacy, I mean the specific skills for reading Scripture critically, bringing the tools for interpretation to the text. In the same way that high school students learn to read poetry with an eye for interpretation, adults can learn to read the stories of the Bible with an eye for grasping the truths that are tucked into the narratives. What does Robert Frost really have in mind when he has the neighbor say, “Good fences make good neighbors”? What does Jesus really mean when he looks the disciples in the eye and says, “You are the salt of the earth”? My vision is that every adult would gain the skills needed for Biblical interpretation.

The second vision has to do with theological reflection; that is, the skill of knowing how to name the presence of God in the midst of the ordinary and in the midst of the extraordinary. One evening on our middle school mission trip last April, we gathered in a circle and took turns sitting on a chair in the middle of the circle. Sitting in that chair, we each listened to the community name aloud where they had witnessed the Christ in us. Those middle school youth were doing the work of theological reflection. They were naming the presence of God as they recognized it.

I see this work of theological reflection needing to be done at home, with families, between generations, on vacations, in the back yard, in the middle of the night, in the garden, at South Park Inn, at the dinner table. Theological reflection happens anywhere and everywhere because known or unknown God is ever-present!

In July, the church received an unsolicited gift of \$1000 for the building project. A local resident who had attended some funerals here and who had had some difficulty moving from the Meeting House to the social hall read the article in the Citizen about this being a justice issue, about God provoking us to provide access to those challenged by stairs. In that moment, this neighbor was serving as a theological reflector, seeing the hand of God on the earth-moving equipment and on the concrete that would become the elevator shaft. My vision is that all the adults of this church would put on this special set of lenses that allows us to see the Risen Christ in our waking, in our dreaming, in our working, and in our resting. For it is in naming the presence of God that we build up the community of faith.

The third vision for discipleship education for adults is what I call 'faith formation'. This is really a life-long process. It has to do with wrestling with the tough questions that keep presenting themselves to us, that keep us up at night; questions we thought we had resolved when we were in Confirmation, but somehow demand now a deeper understanding. Faith formation has to do with challenging assumptions we have held about the nature of God, with being open to a new perspective. Faith formation has to do with finding vocabulary to name our own insight into the nature of humankind, into the purpose for our existence, into what difference it makes to believe.

This is why I love to get my hands on a good novel! A novelist is a person who dares to open up the other side of the story, who isn't afraid of the shadow side of life, who tosses out the window an assumption I've made all my life and forces me to consider a different angle.

This is why I love to make my way into the Impressionist gallery of the art museum. These men and women who paint understand light in ways that feed my imagination.

This is why I like to learn and maintain a foreign language. The richness of language helps me to affirm the tremendous diversity of Creation!

This is why I still take piano lessons. Every dissonance that gives way to resolve is like a little announcement that hope is real and that peace has a chance.

So, I have this vision that faith formation never ends; that it's for everyone, that it's essential for a healthy spiritual life.

I am very excited to be on a team of ministers who are passionate about discipleship education. Can you tell? In the greatest of hope, Amen!