

## 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 the congregations 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

## changing church, changing world

In this chapter Linda Grenz notes that “how the church makes and nurtures...disciples has changed over the centuries, in order to meet the needs of the people living in any given time” (p. 4).

- ♦ What was your experience of Christian formation and education as a child? How was it helpful? How was it lacking?
- ♦ What has been your experience of Christian formation and education as an adult? How has it helped you to grow in faith? What is missing for you?
- ♦ What aspects of church life have nurtured your faith and encouraged you in ministry to others?



Grenz emphasizes the need for “lifelong formation” in the church, especially in our multireligious, increasingly secular culture. In such a world she believes that the church “must be engaged in intensive, intentional Christian formation throughout the life of every Christian” (pp. 22–23).

- ♦ How do the cultural experiences of your childhood continue to shape your religious beliefs and practices today? How have these experiences changed?
- ♦ How has the church shaped your faith and life? How is the church helping to “form” your Christian identity and life today?
- ♦ What could the church do that would help form you as a more faithful disciple of Christ in the next year?

chapter two  
making disciples

In this chapter Grenz considers the implications of baptism, noting that “the restoration of the baptismal liturgy to Sunday morning and the focus on the Baptismal Covenant has probably done more than anything else to shape the Episcopal Church since 1979” (p. 25).

- ♦ In what ways has the 1979 Prayer Book’s emphasis on baptism affected your understanding of yourself as a Christian, and your life in the church?
- ♦ Turn to the questions following the creed in the baptismal liturgy (BCP 304–305). How has each one shaped and informed your Christian faith and life? How might you live them more fully, more faithfully in the future? In what ways have they been experiences of transformation for you?



Grenz believes that “if we want to move all of us from being consumers of religion to being full participants in the life of faith, we need to raise expectations and raise the vision of the promises of the faith” (p. 38).

- ♦ In what ways have you been a “consumer of religion” rather than a “full participant” in the Christian life? How has your congregation accepted—or even encouraged—members to be passive consumers of the church’s ministries?
- ♦ What expectations for discipleship need to be raised in your congregation? Where do you see a fresh, renewed vision of what it means to be a Christian expressed in the church today?

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chapter three

## building blocks for transformation

In this chapter Grenz explores some of the best ideas and practices congregations are using today to build communities in which Christians are formed in discipleship.

- ♦ Discuss the ideas in the section “Laying the Foundation” (pp. 52–61) as they apply to your own congregation.
  - How are relationships developed and sustained?
  - Is learning considered important at all ages, or only for the young?
  - How are decisions made about educational choices?
  - In what ways is your congregation a “learning community”?
  
- ♦ Discuss the ideas in the section “Approaches to Learning” (pp. 61–71) as they apply to your own congregation.
  - Which of these approaches have you experienced in your congregation? Which ones are missing?
  - How does your congregation “educate the whole person”? What spiritual practices are encouraged and taught? Who participates?
  - What connections does your congregation make with Christians in other parts of the world?
  
- ♦ Discuss the ideas in the section “The Ministry of the Baptized” (pp. 71–76) as they apply to your own congregation.
  - What does “baptismal ministry” mean in your congregation? How do you see it practiced?
  - How would you re-envision the church as a community of people who are transformed by Christ?

chapter four  
a resources travel guide

In this chapter Grenz describes many of the resources currently available for Christian formation, and looks toward new resources needed for the church to be a place of transformation.

- ♦ Consider the educational and formational opportunities for children in your congregation.
  - What is working well? Why? What needs are not yet being addressed? How could they be met?
  - How are children learning to pray? How do they participate in worship? What are they learning about the Bible and the Christian tradition? How are their lives changed by what they learn in church?
  
- ♦ Consider the educational and formational opportunities for youth in your congregation.
  - What is working well? Why? What needs are not yet being addressed? How could they be met?
  - How are young people learning to pray? How do they participate in worship? What are they learning about the Bible and the Christian tradition? How are their lives changed by what they learn in church?
  
- ♦ Consider the educational and formational opportunities for adults, including young adults and older adults, in your congregation.
  - What is working well? Why? What needs are not yet being addressed? How could they be met?
  - How are you learning to pray and participate in worship? What are you learning about the Bible and the Christian tradition? How has your life been changed by what you learn in church?
  - What is keeping you from trying new resources that might bring fresh approaches to learning?

chapter five

a new vision of discipleship

In this chapter Grenz tells the story of a congregation that has embraced many of the transformational practices she describes in earlier chapters.

- ♦ What are your impressions of this congregation? Would you like to worship there? Why or why not? Would you become a member?
- ♦ Identify some of the transformational practices Grenz has woven into this congregation's story. For example:
  - What is its theology of ministry?
  - Who are the teachers? the ministers? the members?
  - How are its faith traditions taught and practiced?
  - What principles inform and guide its worship?
  - How are young people formed in faith?
  - How are newcomers welcomed and incorporated?
  - What is the congregation's relationship with the wider community?
- ♦ If your congregation were to incorporate some of these transformational practices into its life and ministry, what would it look like? What would need to change?