

Discussion Questions For

“Claiming the Vision: Baptismal Identity in the Episcopal Church”

Video 1: Baptism and the Sacramental Life

The Meaning of Baptism

1. In what ways has your baptism bound you to God and to other Christians?
2. When Dr. Stevick says the church exists for the sake of those outside it, what does he mean?
3. Remember a time in your own childhood or youth where you were called to be a minister of the Gospel.

The Early Church’s Pattern of Baptism

1. Bishop Griswold equates life in Christ with life lived in Christian community. How does this compare to other Christian perspectives about what baptism means?
2. Considering the historical origins of Lent as the time for preparing persons for baptism, how might your own Lent be changed by a focus on the community of faith rather than one’s own individual practices?
3. The early church understood that Christians need to talk about and reflect together on their sacramental life and religious experiences in order to grow in faith and understanding. What helps you to continue to grow in your faith and understanding?

The Baptism Rite

1. What do we mean when we renounce Satan in our baptismal rite?
2. How does seeing baptism as initiation change or inform your understanding of the baptismal service and your part in it?
3. How do you understand for yourself the symbolic act of making the sign of the cross on the forehead of a baptizand?

Why the Baptism and Confirmation Rites Needed to be Rewritten

1. How do we prevent confirmations from being rites that graduate young people from church?
2. Who should be confirmed?
3. If baptism is what makes one a full member of the body of Christ, and the rite of confirmation is the mature affirmation of our Christian faith, by what means might we effectively prepare and authorize persons to be Episcopal leaders of Episcopal communities and governing bodies?

The Days Set Aside For Baptism

1. Talk more extensively about the ways in which each of these days helps us to understand the meaning of baptism more fully. Easter Vigil, Pentecost, All Saints Day, The Feast of Christ’s Baptism, the bishop’s visitation.

The Relationship between Baptism and the Eucharist

1. How is your own understanding of the Eucharist enriched by seeing it as the repeatable part of baptism? What does that say to you about the act of communing?
2. When have you tasted Christ in your life?
3. Remember an important moment in your life that involved eating and drinking.

The Open Table: Can Those Not Yet Baptized Receive Communion?

1. What is the practice in your community regarding communing the unbaptized?
2. Is it possible to invite all to the table and still maintain the deep unity between baptism and the Eucharist?
3. What should churches do about disputed questions within the church?

The Relationship between Word and Sacrament

1. Dr. Weil describes the sacraments as the Word made visible. What does he mean by this?
2. When has scripture nourished you in your own life?
3. How has scripture nourished and constituted your community in its life?
4. Why is scripture so important to our faith?

The Relationship between Sacraments and Daily Life

1. Does your own experience on Sunday mornings help you make the connection between your spiritual identity and your everyday life?
2. Why is it important to pronounce the sanctity of basic human acts through our ritual life?
3. What do rituals and sacraments do for us? To us?

The Prayers of the People

1. How do we keep our weekly prayers of the people from becoming mechanistic and rote? What is the community's responsibility with regards to this?
2. Why is it the role of the deacon to lead the prayers of the people? How does that help shape the nature of those prayers?
3. When have you been transformed by the prayers of your community?

The Peace

1. The peace is the acknowledgement of our baptismal reality. It is the place where we meet Christ in one another. Is this your community's experience of the peace?
2. How can reconciliation take place through the peace?
3. Some congregations move the peace to the end of the service to keep the service shorter. What is lost in doing this? Why did the prayer book authors put the peace between the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the table?

Christ's Presence in Our Worship

1. Describe a time when you were healed, forgiven, or able to forgive as the result of a worship experience.
2. Why are our Christian symbols so powerful? Why is it so easy to forget their power?
3. Talk about a lay person in your community who clearly has a gift and is exercising that gift within your church.

The Importance of Daily Prayer

1. Imagine a world where daily we all joined across the world in prayer no matter where we were and what we were doing. How might the world be changed?
2. How, when, and where do you pray in your everyday life?

Relating To Other Faith Traditions

1. Why can't we make common cause?
2. What does Bishop Griswold mean when he suggests that Christians do not have exclusive rights to God?
3. If God is "all permeating mystery" how do we leave room for mystery in our own lives? Our own churches?

How the 1979 Prayer Book Has Changed the Episcopal Church

1. Do you experience worship passively or actively?
2. How does the prayer book call you to active participation in Christ and active engagement with the world?
3. Where do you believe the Spirit is leading our Episcopal Church?

Video 2: The History and Theology of the Baptism Rite in the 1979 Prayer Book

The Process for Developing the 1979 Prayer Book

1. Dr. Stevick describes the work of developing the 1979 Prayer Book as the most important work of his life. Why do you believe this work was so important?
2. What has been the most important work of your life?

The Early Work of the Christian Initiation Committee

1. Why might it be necessary to consider prayer book revision after twenty-five years of use?
2. Is it time for us to consider prayer book revision again? If so what might a new prayer book need to take into account? What would be the costs? What would be the gains?

The Last Band-aids on Cranmer

1. Dr. Weil describes the committee's growing consensus that what was called for in the church was not modest revision of the 1928 baptism rite, but instead a radical return to the commonly held ancient practices regarding baptism. What did we reclaim by looking back to the most ancient sources?
2. Dr. Weil alludes to the complicated history of confirmation when it began as the bishop's blessing of baptizands after their baptism. As a result of medieval historical developments, that blessing moved to some years after an infant's baptism. Later Reformation theologians re-envisioned this blessing called confirmation as an opportunity for those who had been baptized as infants to make a mature affirmation of faith. Why might such an affirmation have been important to the Reformers and why might it still be important to us today?
3. Describe a time in your life when you truly felt ready to make a mature affirmation of faith.

Key Principles of the Baptism Rite: The Priesthood of All Believers

1. What does the idea of the priesthood of all believers mean?
2. Dr. Mitchell describes the difference between ritual performed using minimal signs and symbols and ritual using vivid signs and symbols. What are some of the minimal signs and symbols you witness in contemporary liturgical practice? What do full symbols communicate that minimal symbols can't?

Key Principles of the Baptism Rite: Returning to the Ancient Rites

1. Has the privileged place of the Christian world been dismantled in our contemporary world? If so, what does that mean for the future of the church?
2. If we cannot be guaranteed that society will help raise up new generations of Christians, what will it take from us to make that happen?

The Nature and Purpose of The Christian Initiation Committee's Work

1. Dr. Weil asserts that the radical rethinking of what it means to be the church that has been an outgrowth of reclaiming a baptismal vision has still not been fully realized in the church. What do you think he means by that? What still needs to be realized?
2. The authors of the baptismal rite in our prayer book acted courageously and with conviction and vision. In what ways are we, the next generation of Episcopalians, being called to think and act courageously?
3. In what ways is the Episcopal Church's understanding of baptism as full initiation into the church both leading the way and offering challenges to other churches in the Anglican Communion?

How the Early Work of the Committee Was Received By the Church

1. How might current debates within the Anglican Communion find new expression if we all assumed that no matter how radical the assumptions might sound to us, we were all acting on the highest motives?

Major Contributors to the Revisions: Margaret Mead and Bonnell Spencer

1. Much of the history of the development of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer is the story of individual Christians and grassroots movements willing to offer their best to the glory of God and the health and future of their church. How might their story of faith and courage inspire us to meet the challenges of the life of faith in our own day?

Major Contributors to the Revisions: The Women of the Committees, Howard Galley, and Charles Mortimer

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Major Contributors to the Revisions: Frank Griswold

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Christendom

1. Dr. Stevick describes Christendom as a world where faith is passed from generation to generation through a societal process. How is faith passed from one generation to the next in your community? What role, if any, does society have in forming us as Christian people?

2. Has the privileged place of the Christian world been dismantled in our contemporary world? If so, what does that mean for the future of the church?

3. If we cannot be guaranteed that society will help raise up new generations of Christians, what will it take from us to make that happen?

A Rite for a Post Christian World

1. Do you see your own community living in a post-Christendom era? How is that demonstrated?
2. How do you believe living in a post-Christendom era will change life in the church?
3. When in your own life have you experienced a ministry that was exhilarating?

The Prayer Book Leads the Church into Its Future

1. How has the church changed since 1979? In what ways do you think our prayer book has led us into the 21st century church?
2. What principles drawn from the prayer book do you see as central to being an Episcopalian today?

Video 3: Understanding the Baptismal Ecclesiology of the Episcopal Church

Baptism as Incorporation into the Body of Christ

1. What were you taught about the meaning of baptism? Does this idea of incorporation into the Body of Christ fit with your community's sense of what is taking place at a baptism?
2. How are incorporation and personal salvation related to one another?
3. Dr. Weil implies that the Augustinian theory of original sin is not a fundamental doctrine of the church. What other understandings of sin might one hold?

Baptism and the Priesthood of All Believers

1. In what way has your own spiritual journey been a journey of climbing a mountain to be able to see the next peak?
2. How is one's life changed by putting our Christian baptismal identity at the center of our self-identity? What other aspects of one's self do you see people placing at their center instead?
3. How is your own vocational identity shaped and reshaped by placing it in a room constituted and structured by one's Christian identity?

Clericalism in the Church

1. How does clericalism hurt the church?
2. Describe a time in your own life when your gifts were acknowledged and affirmed within your faith community.
3. Are lay people's gifts more likely to be affirmed in our churches or in the secular world? How do you see that playing out in your own life?

The Omnivorous Priesthood

1. Dr. Mitchell describes an early church where the assumption was that all Christians are ministers. How do you see this understanding of ministry expressed in your faith community?
2. Many believe that one of the chief causes of the omnivorous priesthood was the increasingly limited education of the baptized regarding scripture and theology. How can we better address this important issue for our own day?
3. Why is it so invaluable for churches to have deacons? For dioceses to have bishops?

The Meaning of Ordination

1. How are our understandings of church governance changed if we look at the church as a circle rather than a pyramid?
2. What is different about leadership if we understand that no order is higher than another? That all orders are about utilizing particular gifts for the good of the church and the world.

The Laity as the Ministers of the Church

1. What ministries are important in your own life?
2. What might it mean for someone to be the servant of the assembly?
3. What responsibilities must the assembly embrace in this model of ministry?
4. How does a Christian treat a servant?

What is a Priest?

1. How does the definition of a priest as one whose primary ministry is about word and sacrament fit with the responsibilities of priests you have known?
2. What attributes make a person an effective minister of the Word and Sacraments?

What is a Deacon?

1. Who are the bridge people you have known who helped connect the church with the world and the world with the church?
2. If you were going to create a bridge between your church and some aspect of secular society, around what issue would you build it? How might it help to have a deacon involved?

What is a Bishop?

1. How would our church life be changed if bishops were seen as the chief pastors to their flocks?
2. What makes someone a good overseer? What particular skills are required to offer oversight?
3. Are overseer and pastor complementary or contradictory responsibilities?

Being an Episcopalian

1. How does our baptismal covenant help us understand and live out our faith?
2. What does the church gain by inviting all baptized persons of all ages to come to the communion table?
3. What do you think Dr. Weil means when he says Episcopalians have not yet fully embodied their own theology of baptism?
4. Does it surprise you to learn that all Anglicans do not share the same understanding of what it means to be a full member of the church? Is this a positive or a negative to you?

Mature Faith

1. Describe a situation in which your definition of justice and another person's definition clashed with one another. What can we or should we do in such a situation?
2. Through what means does the church teach us to participate in the kind of mature spiritual processes Bishop Griswold points us toward?

Life in Community

1. Describe a time in your own life when you have learned and grown through a process of communal dialog.

The Future of the Church

1. Describe a time in your own life when God has done something in a crooked way.
2. What do you believe the Spirit is doing within the Episcopal Church right now?
3. How do we embrace and prepare for our future?

Video 4: The History of the Rite of Confirmation

Two Historical Meanings for Confirmation

1. Dr. Stevick identifies two historical meanings that have been attributed to confirmation. One is the post-baptismal laying on of hands by the bishop following baptism. The other is a rite in which one makes a mature affirmation of faith, owning for one's self the Christian responsibilities articulated in baptism. Why do you believe the 1979 Prayer Book authors did not believe this should be understood as an adolescent rite?
2. Part of the work of the Prayer Book authors was to take elements of baptismal imagery that had been transferred to confirmation and return them to their place within baptism. Look at the seven fold gifts of the Spirit prayer on page 308 in the BCP. How does your own life reflect the lifelong process of growing in these gifts?

The History of Confirmation in the Episcopal Church

1. Dr. Mitchell makes it clear that the realities of life in the colonies did not allow for confirmations in the United States until after Bishop Seabury was ordained bishop in 1753. What does that say to you about our understandings of confirmation in this country? Can you remember a time when we understood confirmation as principally the rite that made one a member of the Episcopal Church?

Confirmation and Rites of Passage

1. The prayer book authors' original plan had been to encourage development of a distinct rite of reaffirmation of faith that was clearly separate from the rite of Christian Initiation and did not bear the name of confirmation. How has the linking of baptism and confirmation within our prayer book baptismal liturgy confused our understandings of both rites?
2. Margaret Mead's study group was made up of 16-25 year olds. Why might she have chosen this age group, and what does that say to those who are presently presenting youth for confirmation at the beginning of adolescence?
3. What might congregations do to ritually support the movement of young people from childhood to adolescence to adulthood? How important is it that faith communities help mark these maturation points? If confirmation is not the way to do this, what might be more appropriate?

Confirmation Symbols

1. Why is it important to have a bishop's laying on of hands at some point on one's faith journey? What does that signify?
2. What does it mean to bear the sign of the cross on one's forehead from baptism on and throughout one's whole life?
3. What do you believe it is important to see in one who is preparing to make a mature affirmation of faith? What does maturity in faith look like?

Reaffirming Our Faith

1. Discuss a time in your life when you might have been inspired to publically reaffirm your faith if you had been invited to do so.
2. Are there times when a whole community might benefit from the opportunity to reaffirm their communal faith before the bishop? When might they be?
3. What does making a public reaffirmation of faith do for us as individuals? What does it do for those in the community who witness and support us in this?
4. What has been the most faith affirming experience of your adult life?

Video 5: Advice for Those Designing Liturgies In the 21st Century

Innovation for Our Own Day

1. In what ways might your community become more conscious of and supportive of the needs of the very old, the young, those of other ethnicities or races, and the differently abled in your worship life together? How could your worship life more readily express a care and a welcome for all?
2. Discuss a time when you have understood what the biblical narrative was talking about because it was embodied in your community's actions?
3. Is your worshipping community brave enough to fail?

Important Principles In Liturgical Design

Balancing the Vertical and Horizontal Elements

1. What does Dr. Weil mean when he says that the private and personal aspects of our worship experience are derivative of the corporate aspects?
2. How do our own attitudes and actions in worship change when we understand worship to be primarily a corporate act in which we are together blessed by God?

Attending to Structure and to the Oral Nature of Worship

1. What do you consider to be the primary structural elements of our Eucharist? Compare your list to the list on page 399 in the Book of Common Prayer. Are the elements that are central to you the same as the historical structural elements?
2. What words in our liturgy do you love to hear spoken?
3. Is liturgy poetry or prose?

Bringing Expansive Language to Liturgy

1. What are some less frequently expressed images of God that carry deep meaning in your own interior life?
2. How does the use of expansive language change our understanding of God?
3. What traditional oft repeated image of God do you find unhelpful in your own personal spirituality? In your community's corporate spirituality?

Honoring the Needs of the Community

1. Describe a worship service you wished could have gone on forever.
2. What must be present (or absent) for a liturgy to be energizing for the congregation participating in it?
3. What makes a liturgy boring, frustrating, or exhausting?

Creating Worship That Is Culturally Sensitive

1. How does your community communicate that it is respectful and sensitive to cultural diversity?
2. Even if your community is quite homogeneous, is there a need to hold a commitment to cultural diversity as a communal value? In that situation how might one express that value?

Unbinding Episcopal Worship from Anglican Culture

1. What culture(s) are represented in your community's musical repertoire?
2. What do we gain by becoming truly multi-cultural? What do we give up?