

Discernment Session 1

January 12, 2020

Topic: Identity

About three dozen people participated in this session. They sat together in five groups of varying size. We met for 90 minutes.

The group answered two questions:

- Which Jesus story best describes Southampton at the present time?
- What would you tell someone about Southampton if they expressed an interest in attending? What makes Southampton unique?

The following were the groups responses

Jesus story

Group 1:

- Loaves and Fishes
- House Divided
- James 5:16 (“Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.”)
- Lamp under a basket (we have a lot of potential here, but we seem reticent to use it)

Group 2:

- Loaves and Fishes
- Healing the leper
- Great supper

Group 3:

- Loaves and Fishes
- Blessing the Children
- The Easter stories (from all the gospels)
- Mary and Martha
- Stilling the storm

Group 4:

- Woman at the well
- Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount
- House Divided
- Stilling the storm

Group 5:

- Stilling the storm
- House divided
- Jesus’ baptism (linking us altogether)
- Loaves and Fishes

Common themes arising from the Jesus stories

- We reach out to the outcast, to the wider community, and to those who need help. (We are ONA.)
- There is a lot of love as well as a lot of hurt. (We're hurt and need to come together, which is our hope)
- We have possibilities and potential. (Are we hiding our light?)
- Can we get to know each other better?

What makes this church unique? (*as noted by each group*)

Group 1:

- Welcoming
- Loving
- Very active
- Have good food at our suppers
- Only church in town
- We are the community center (used by groups outside of the congregation)

Group 2:

- We are like a second family (we can be angry with each other, but we will stick up for each other)
- Church suppers
- Giving and generous church
- Strong history

Group 3:

- We will talk about divisive issues
- Right now we're reluctant to bring new people in
- We've been hurt by our Sunday School program
- We are to be here for on another
- This is my "other" home

Group 4:

- We are a close-knit family, but not always great for a newcomer
- ONA
- Church fair

Group 5:

- Equality (we've welcomed everyone. we've had gay female clergy)
- Freedom
- Caring for others
- Fighting for the common good
- We're a work in progress

Pastor's Comments

Loaves and fishes was the most common Jesus story cited by the group. It seems to have come from the congregation's long standing practice of helping other people.

The house divided and stilling the storm were tied as the second-most cited Jesus stories. Both of these seem to reflect the current state of the divide among the congregation.

Several people noted that the congregation has a strong sense of family. They love and care for each other, but like a family they can also fight among themselves. A few comments arose that perhaps they need to know each other better. A note of caution regarding families in that sometimes a stranger can't find an entry into a congregation because it feels too much like family. (*Martha Grace Reese referenced this in her book, **Unbinding the Gospel.***)

This session also made some people realize they need to learn their scriptures better. Strengthening the knowledge of scripture could offer an opportunity to share their lives on a deeper level and thus, helping them get to know each other better.

No one mentioned the Community Cupboard as something unique about this church.