

Case Study – Scottish Episcopal Church

What are the challenges you face as you seek to encourage people to engage more deeply with Scripture?

The overarching challenge to 'deep engagement' with scripture is that most people in the general population have no background at all - statistics claim that a significant percentage of primary school children in Scotland are four generations away from exposure to regular church attendance, which illustrates the problem for most age groups.

Those people who are involved in a faith community lead demanding lives, and we are lucky to see them on two out of four Sundays, let alone ask for additional time during the week to meet for study and reflection. The solutions so far involve working with a variety of adaptable and flexible approaches on offer, usually with only short-term time commitments required. Various on-line and web-based learning programmes are useful, but for real development in faith a sense of community is vital.

Although we may not be alone in this as a denomination, it is particularly true of the SEC that our membership does not share one understanding of what the Bible is - a shared hermeneutic if you like. This may partly be because people from other Christian backgrounds join the SEC, and also due to the breadth of understanding that is in fact a value for many Anglicans. But obviously there are some denominations or sections of denominations where a more homogeneous view of the nature of scripture pertains.

Our leadership's experience in working with congregations is that in even a small group one is likely to find diametrically opposed views (not necessarily hostile) so that discussion on any main aspect of faith takes place in that context. This is not to say that variety is bad and unanimity good but that it adds a layer of difficulty to reflect theologically at any depth without a shared understanding of what kind of a book the Bible is.

Perhaps it would be useful for you to know that especially in some of our more rural and remote communities we rely heavily on community-based learning groups rather than 'Episcopal' or 'Anglican' only. Most local towns and villages have Bible study groups, for example, which feed those seeking deep engagement with scripture. These meet over a period of years together, developing deep bonds of pastoral affection, and are comprised of members from all of the local churches. We also rely on our ecumenical partners (UCC, Methodist, Church of Scotland) in our provincial networking and wider strategic planning.

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