



**Church of the Redeemer
Continuing the Discussion
Christianity in a Secular World**

Following up a discussion on August 15, this group met again on September 12, 2011 to explore their desire for a more structured approach to Christian education and spiritual formation. There was also a desire to reach out to the “seekers” in our midst – those who are still seeking answers to the questions of meaning, existence of God, etc. Both desires are part of the new reality that we live in a secular world, where Christianity is not a “given”.

All conversations were distilled down to the following desires/goals/needs:

- a desire to deepen our understanding and awareness of what it means to be a Christian in the 21st century in a more structured manner
- a desire to be able to communicate what is important about Christianity to those who are indifferent or opposed to organized religion generally and/or Christianity specifically
- a desire for a more structured approach to Christian education
- a desire to “help people experience faith of the heart as well as the head”
- a desire to deepen the experience of community at Redeemer

Various ways to respond to these desires were discussed, particularly in light of the fact that Learning @ Redeemer is looking for ideas for new programming and/or new direction.

The following is what is being proposed to be included in the Visioning Process Report.

- New vision for education at Redeemer would have 3 streams
 - **Stream 1**
 - A multi-year continuing education/Christian discipleship program consisting of courses covering a pre-determined curriculum roughly modelled on the curriculum offered at a seminary to give structured content to the program (e.g., N.T., O.T., Church history, liturgy, systematic theology, etc.) - purpose is to ensure that those in the parish who are interested receive a well-balanced education in the Christian faith and spiritual formation – would also provide subject-matter for programs (so don’t have to keep thinking of different topics). To be considered are courses on other faiths.
 - Courses would be offered in cycle over a number of years and be integrated with existing continuing education programming at Redeemer (e.g., Monday Night Bible Study, Redeemer Readers, Telling the Story) and at other Anglican Churches (to pool resources) (intent is not to overburden anyone)
 - Intention would be to focus not just on education but integrating education with practice, e.g., we could have an intro on liturgy and then those taking the course

could assume responsibility for putting on a liturgy, e.g, an Elizabethan liturgy, or we could have a course on social justice, and as part of that, the attendees do some volunteer work at the lunch program or put on a half day seminar on social justice for the parish, or on pastoral care and people could get involved with the pastoral care committee.

- Idea is to use as many different formats as possible in order to provide maximum flexibility so that all parishioners who want can participate, e.g, lecture format could be taped and made available on line, could do a Friday evening/Sat. session/ monthly small group book studies (this would also build community)/self-study courses with reports and/or one-on-one meeting with the course “supervisor”, online discussion groups on specific books/topics
 - Could earn “credits” towards a “Redeemer continuing education certificate” if people like the idea
- **Stream 2**
- Would offer more in-depth programming in two areas for those in the parish who already have a theological education or are specifically interested in these areas
 - Spiritual formation – could do book studies on Christian contemplative tradition and well-known Christian contemplatives, organize retreats, spiritual pilgrimages, opportunities for spiritual declaration and opportunities for exploring living out the Christian faith in more intentional ways such as through “oblate” or “third order” programs
 - Radical discipleship – offer intentional opportunities to delve deeper into opportunities for radical discipleship, including Christian responses to social justice, environmental issues, political issues, world events, etc. through, inter alia, examinations of historical movements for social justice, lives of prominent Christian activists, volunteer opportunities, etc.
 - Envision this stream as being developed by groups of interested individuals in the parish and as being mainly self-directed, but with some sort of clergy direction, etc. – would want to develop some sort of rough program so that the group(s) had direction
- **Stream 3**
- This stream is aimed at outreach
 - Propose forming a separate standing committee to organize one public lecture (or lecture series) and/or debate on a subject of general interest designed for the public and/or university students
 - Interfaith dialogue could be one subject area
 - Could be held offsite, e.g., at OISE or George Ignatieff Theatre
 - Would be desirable to give the event a title and make it a regular signature event
 - Could partner with other organizations/churches and seek sponsorship in order to cover costs of obtaining prominent speakers
 - Committee could also potentially sponsor book studies/courses/online discussion groups aimed at “seekers”
- Enthusiastic volunteers with imagination, vision and creativity would be needed to take responsibility for each of the streams

- A “curriculum” would need to be developed, instructors identified, etc. – as indicated, there are many resources in house to put on this type of programming. There would also be an intentional effort to identify programming offered in other parishes or by the diocese.
- Programs would be phased in over several years as part of strategic plan as resources become available
- WOULD TAKE COMMITMENT BY THE PARISH AND CLERGY TO THIS INITIATIVE
- An ultimate goal might be to establish a separate “Institute for Modern Christian Thought and Spiritual Formation” in Toronto in partnership with other interested Churches and organizations for purposes of pooling resources but that is a long way down the road....

In the short term, The Most Rev. T. E. Finlay has indicated he would be willing to give a couple of introductory talks tackling some issues around being “Christian” and “Anglican” in the 21st century. The group would also like to organize a couple of 6 week “book studies” for interested parishioners on recent developments in Christian thought.