Distilled Theology Indy

The Thirsty Scholar
Indianapolis, IN
Vision of Ministry

• An opportunity for theological conversation
• Outside the church
• With diversity in participation
• But not a replacement for church

• Inspiration came from the Brethren community Matthew McKimmey – “Distilled Theology” and the Catholic group, “Theology on Tap”
Program

• Meets 1x a month, 4\(^{th}\) Tuesday of month
• In a local bar “The Thirsty Scholar”
• Family style seating about tables
• Lasts 1-3 hours
• No cost to attend
• No preparation necessary
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Communications

- Facebook page “Distilled Theology”
- “Indy Star” – local newspaper article
- Church announcements
- Weekly church bulletins
- Word of mouth
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Faith Traditions

• Mostly All Saints Episcopal Church
• Other Episcopal churches
• Methodist, Presbyterian
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Participants

• Leaders in the church
  – Vestry, Stewardship, former Search committee
• Active in the church (multiple activities)
• Demographically mixed:
  – Male/Female
  – Age: 30-70 years
  – Mostly single
  – Caucasian
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Discussion Preparation

- The leader picks a topic or theme in advance
- Topic is announced on Facebook
- Adds a few quotes or pictures
Discussion Participation

• On Tuesday, the leader brings a handout
• Gives a short theological/historical background
• Free-form discussion follows
• All encouraged to participate
• Usually starts as intellectual discussion
• Usually moves into experiential conversation
• Sometimes the leader would offer continued reading (books and articles)
Topic: JOY

• “To get the full value of joy, you must have someone to divide it with.”
  Mark Twain

• Joy is the serious business of heaven.”
  C.S. Lewis
Topic:  FEAR

•  “The enemy is fear. We think it is hate; but it is fear.”  
   Gandhi

•  “There is no fear in love. Perfect love drives out fear....the one who fears is not made perfect in love.”  
   1 John 4:18
Can you guess this topic?
LOVE:

“I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.”
HOPE

• “Hope is the thing with feathers –
  that perches in the soul –
  And sings the tune without words –
  and never stops at all”

  Emily Dickinson
What I liked (participants’ views)

• Focus on a single theological theme
• Deep exploration
• Various view points represented
• Brings focus and flexibility
• Ask questions. Raise doubts.
• Lets the mind grapple with something
What I liked

• To hear other people’s ideas and perspectives
• To hear a completely new perspective
• To have experts in the group
What I liked

• Everyone participates
• People feed off one another
• There’s a quality of listening (You are heard)
• No one dominates
What like

• Being challenged
• Being affirmed
• Being on our own
• Can go deeply
What like

• Fellowship – fun to be with people
• Community
• Bonding
• Kinship
• A gathering of fellow believers
• An anchor point
What I like!
Value over normal faith experience?

• Episcopalians have tradition, ritual, liturgy in worship
• Can’t hit “pause” button to explore deeply
• Provides forum for faith discussion
Meets These Spiritual Needs

- To probe deeper than normal church service
- To provide meaning to life
- To explore one’s spiritual life
- To form community
- To be with people with similar beliefs
- To be with people who challenge beliefs
- To contribute to the common good
Surprises

• Not attended by a young people. Why?

• Lack of opportunity for deep conversation within the church. Is this an opportunity for a change in liturgy or educational programs offered.

• An affordable model of ministry. How would it change if the leader was compensated?
Insights/Musings

• Is part of the value of the experience that it helps take faith out of the church building and into the community?
  – They publically prayed together one night.
  – Comments about needing more outreach in their congregation. They used to be known for their outreach.
Their Words

• “Someone speaks and you think ‘Wow! I never looked at it that way!’”

• “It was life changing. [The discussion] sent me down a road I had never expected.”
Their Words

• “I was afraid it would be ‘chit chat’, ‘deadly dull’ but it’s a group conversation. I have to go to that!”

• “One of the most enjoyable fulfilling things we do!”
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