

Questions to George Maxwell posed by the Future Committee

1. Is there a book you would recommend that we read?
2. What is the state of The Episcopal Church nationally and internationally?
3. What is the state of Episcopal seminaries and enrollment?
4. How are his church and other churches he is knowledgeable about, responding to those changes?
5. How best to deal with the All Saint by-the-Sea culture of religious diversity and inclusiveness within the tenets of the formal Episcopal church?
6. How to be respectfully open to and challenged by differences in thought and perspectives without bowing to behaviors and positions that are against our understanding of the teachings of Jesus Christ – “to make the comfortable, uncomfortable”?
7. What is the difference between spirituality and religion and how can we as a Christian community of faith in the Episcopal tradition be more inclusive of individuals who are less religious and more spiritual?

In response to the question about if there was book to read, George suggested we read Transforming Congregational Culture by Anthony B. Robinson.

Responses and perspectives of George Maxwell of May 22, 2023

George’s response to the remaining questions took two forms. The first form is represented by his email response (below) as well as references to two other sources of information –

Lily Foundation RFP “Thriving Congregations Initiative” – as an example of what Lily wants congregations to think about and as a good place to start.

To address our question regarding “what is spirituality” George writes:

“I thought this monograph, while purporting to describe contemplative spirituality, might be of help. More broadly, secular interpretations of spirituality often point to anything that draws you out of yourself and connects you with something bigger than yourself. Christian, and indeed contemplative, spirituality is predictably more specific and, accordingly, more demanding.

“Contemplative Spirituality” – A Shalem Senior Staff Monograph

“In preparation for our conversation, you and the committee might enjoy looking at the following materials:

1. Ted Smith’s piece titled “The end of theological education” does a nice job of framing the current challenge to the Christian church reflected in declining numbers of people claiming denominational affiliation and the claims to be spiritual but not religious. You can find the referenced lectures here -- <https://www.upsem.edu/news/alumni-news-news/2021-virtual-sprunt-lectures/>

2. Kristen Sanders' *Christianity Today* piece titled "Why Church? Is the Wrong Question" gets to the question of the relationship between social justice and the church, which I take to be at least part of the issue behind "making the comfortable uncomfortable."
3. Andrew Root's definition of "moral therapeutic deism" will be helpful in conversations about spirituality. My thought is simply that we have in many ways embraced this and need to let go of it! If this is what people are rejecting, then I agree with them.
4. Ian Markam's (the Dean of Virginia Theological Seminary) piece in *Prophetic Preaching* titled "The Political Work of the Church" gets to my point about how we might address social justice issues. As I said to you, I think, the sweet spot lies in doing the work to get to the underlying issues in an effort to make sense of our political moment. The trap is to accept the issues and framing of the political parties and encourage our people to choose the right one.
5. As to the question of being an Episcopal Church and open to those who do not identify as Episcopalians, you might take a look at the description of Episcopal identity used by my stepsons school. I think the school has done a good job of claiming an Episcopal identity while at the same time how that identity demand inclusion of others. You can find the discussion here -- <https://www.hies.org/about/episcopal-identity>
6. As to our being a sacred place, I think that All Saints is doing a lot of things right and the key to the future probably lies in figuring out how to do those same things in a changed environment. One of the things that we do well is hospitality. We (All Saints) connect people in and through a Christ-based community. You don't have to look far to see the isolation people are feeling across our society. You can get a sense of the nature and scope of this problem from Krista Tippett's interview of the Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy. You can find it here -- <https://onbeing.org/programs/vivek-murthy-to-be-a-healer/>

"You are asking very good questions. I hope that these materials provide some helpful background to our talking about them (the questions!)."