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Contextual Bible Study

Facilitator's Guide

About Contextual Bible Study

Contextual Bible Study is intended to be both engaging and interactive. It is an approach that honours and attempts to utilize the resources of both biblical and historical scholarship, but primarily as a means to generate conversation and to draw out insights, questions, struggles and deeply engrained beliefs that the participants bring to the room. The starting point is always immersion in the literary and cultural context in which the text is set. The goal

of the exercise is to work from that point, utilizing resource materials for teaching moments and carefully crafted questions, to an awareness of how the text confronts and challenges our own unique contemporary context. The goal is always to engage the text in a way that leads to transformation and action.

The Anglican-Lutheran International Commission has called the church to an understanding that *diakonia*—being engaged in mission and ministry—

is inseparable from discipleship and belongs to the whole people of God. Contextual Bible Study is an approach to the study of scripture that promotes and encourages *diakonia*, not in a general way, but as a specific response to the Word of God in the unique cultural contexts of the participants. This process can work in individual congregations or clusters of congregations. It is also a process that could well be encouraged as a means for Anglican and Lutheran communities to engage with one another and with the Word of God to explore what God is calling us to do and to be at this exciting time in our history.

Facilitating the Process

It is important from the outset to remember and understand that this is an interactive and collaborative process. The role of the facilitator is not to assume the role of biblical expert (even if you are), but rather to gently, yet with determination, move the participants into deeper conversations about the meaning and power of the text, both now and then.

Tasks of the Facilitator

- 1) Make the study your own. The material provided in this series is intended to guide, not control. The unique context in which you live and move may well necessitate adjusting the process and the questions that drive the process.
- 2) The facilitator must make the physical set-up of the space to be used appropriate for the methodology. Leader input and plenary and small group conversations all need to be accommodated.
- 3) It is crucial that all participants have access to the texts that will be studied. Whether it is a matter of encouraging participants to bring their

own Bibles, providing Bibles for them or having copies of the specific texts produced, it cannot be left to chance or until the last minute.

- 4) For the Contextual Bible Study approach to work, the facilitator must work hard at making the place and the moment feel safe. Participation and discussion will happen only if all participants feel safe to engage with the scriptures and with one another. There is no place for judging or belittling articulated thoughts or feelings. Equally, there is no place for anyone to dominate the conversations, or indeed the room. Managing group dynamics is the facilitator's responsibility. Depending on your situation, this may well be your most challenging task. You may wish to develop a set of norms for your first session that will articulate appropriate group dynamics.
- 5) It is important for the facilitator to keep moving the process forward. Since the model is one that should lead to deeper conversation as it moves to its conclusion, it is critical that the group does not get bogged down in earlier stages and then either rush or abandon the most significant discussions.
- 6) Make sure there is sufficient time allotted for discussing the questions. If there is a need to shorten the process, be flexible around reporting back to save time. It is important to note, though, and it is important for participants to be aware, that this approach to Bible study is not a half hour spent over coffee and muffins. Contextual Bible Study demands the time and commitment to really engage with the text and with one another.
- 7) While perhaps self-evident, the facilitator must be prepared ahead of time. Walking in with a canned program just doesn't work. The facilitator must read the whole program in advance, focusing on the key texts and the questions. It is helpful for the leader to anticipate the kinds of

responses that may emerge. That will help move things forward. This is also the time to consider the questions to be asked and discussed. Are they right for your group in your context? If not, modify them.

- 8) Once again, lead but do not dominate. Apart from providing resource material and moving things along, the facilitator is one voice among many.

Note

All biblical texts in this guide are taken from the NRSV.

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