

CONCLUSION

The chapters in this book give consideration to Christian formation and education from a learning community perspective. There is a focus on the whole congregation as a learning community. There is an emphasis on learning in a Christian congregation. In chapters six and eight four aspects of a congregation that learns are considered. In chapter nine some of the leadership requirements for a learning community are outlined and two practical exercises of review and overview for workshop use are described. The review workshop format suggested in this book has proved to be very successful in use. The total learning scene of a congregation is visually presented and the questions asked have hit the mark and responses have indicated future directions. This review workshop format, with a skilled leader, brings the local educational context under a spotlight. The importance of the local context is emphasised.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONTEXT

The learning community approach presented in this book is people and process centred rather than content centred. One limitation of the learning community approach as outlined in Chapter 8 could be that it is perceived to be process and people oriented rather than content or Christian knowledge directed. Yet, in this perceived weakness is a definite strength. The learning community approach does not, as it were, take sides in the theological debates of the churches but rather insists that there be a sound biblical, theological and educational base for any Christian education outcomes. Except for the prerequisites of the Christian learning and biblical content/curriculum of the Church year through the lectionary, the learning community process could be said to await a final decision about content until a particular context is engaged. In this sense context is everything. Then the particular content appropriate to the people, place and culture of a congregation comes into play (Chapter 10). The process of review makes room for the individual and congregation to make a contribution from their perspective (Chapter 9).

Various church cultures in the Anglican Church in Australia may have different educational programme outcomes for mission. For growing new Christians some may select Alpha for example, others Emmaus or Credo or Connect? The stages of the catechumenal process in the formation of new Christians might be used by a variety of church traditions. This learning community approach allows different Christian perspectives to emerge and be educational in application. Some churches may choose to emphasise ecumenical learning, others the teaching of a particular theologian or writer. In whichever case the approach outlined in this book offers an educational way forward. The outcome is a Christian learning that is God/Christ centred, people and context centred, as well as process and Bible/content centred. Shared leadership is essential (Chapter 9).

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

This learning community approach is very practical when applied to particular issues. The overview workshop format suggested in chapter nine provides an educational framework for a congregation to use. In a learning community it is appreciated that there is an educational aspect to every activity in congregational life.¹ Chapter 8 highlights education in Christian Practices. In chapter ten the learning community approach is applied to a particular issue, namely the essential task of the church to make disciples.. There will be other issues about Christian learning in congregations that will be illuminated by the application of the theory and practice of the learning community perspective or attitude.

Peter Senge suggests in his book *The Fifth Discipline* that our “mental models”, our mental attitudes and ways of thinking “determine not only how we make sense of the world but how we take action”. “Our mental models are active- they shape how we act” he writes. They can impede or help accelerate learning.² Peter Senge’s ideas apply to Christian formation and education too. Our mental models of and attitudes towards formation and education shape how we act.

The learning community approach invites us to reflect on our current practices in Christian formation and education and then to consider alternative scenarios for future practice. When the learning community perspective or attitude is applied it has the potential to transform the understanding and practice of Christian formation and education for individuals and congregations “in the name of Christ”.³

1. Westerhoff J.H. (1979) *Inner Growth Outer Change: An Educational Guide to Church Renewal*, Dove Communications, p. 58. This understanding is articulated by John Westerhoff in relation to catechesis.
- 2, Senge P.M. (1990) *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation*, Random House Press, pp. 174-179.
3. The Anglican Church of Australia, (1995) *A Prayer Book for Australia*, Broughton Books, p.144.