

CONSULTATION AIMS

This Consultation is a journey. It is one of those strange journeys with an undetermined destination. We will all study the same Bible passages, reflect on the same books, and listen to the same speakers but each of us will get something a little different from the experience. What we do know is that we are all trying to answer one central question: how do we speak about God?

Importantly the exercise is a collaborative one. We work towards answering the question by entering into dialogue with, and by listening to, people whose experience and patterns of ministry may be very different from our own. To get the most from this rare opportunity we will all need a degree of openness and generosity.

The success of the Consultation depends entirely on you. Without you and this group of people it simply will not work. Feel confident, therefore, to give your opinion; we want to hear it. Everybody attending this Consultation has valuable experience to bring to the table. If we listen carefully we have much to learn from, and much to offer to, each other.

On each day of the Consultation we tackle a separate theme. And for most of the time the days comprise the same components. Details of each component are found later in the folder but below you will find a brief description:

Attending

In these sessions we attend to the scriptures. What, if anything, have the scriptures to say to us about contemporary life? At the end of each passage you will find a list of suggested questions. Your study group may well prefer to ignore these and to follow your own explorations. In general, however, these studies should concentrate more on textual interpretation than on historical criticism. We are more interested at this stage in application rather than theory.

Why do we attend?

- To understand something of God's Word speaking to us today
- To learn from others about different styles of interpretation
- To root our thoughts in the scriptural reasoning that holds us together

Reflecting

Through a variety of book reflections we examine some contemporary themes. In leading these sessions it would be useful to give a very brief summary of the plot or argument; it may well be that there will be participants of your study group who have not read the book. It would also be prudent to raise some questions or themes for discussion but do leave plenty of time for your study group to make their contributions.

Why do we reflect?

- To think about the themes through a variety of literary genre
- To reflect theologically on a range of popular books
- To understand something of what other people see in material that we have read ourselves

Discovering

For these sessions all groups come together in the Vicars' Hall so that we can hear an expert speak on the subject of the day. This is an opportunity to clarify facts and to request information that we feel would be helpful when we later come to discuss the matter theologically. Following each talk there is usually time for break-out groups and a plenary discussion.

Why do we discover?

- To listen and learn about the topic
- To work with other Consultation participants
- To further develop our own questions

Engaging

In some ways these sessions are the most demanding. By the time you get to the Engaging session of the day you will already have been attending, reflecting and discovering; you will now need to bring all that together into a theological response. This is not to say that you must arrive at answers, although you might, but rather that your group understands the theological issues at stake and makes some effort to suggest ways of how best to speak of God in relation to the subject matter.

Why do we engage?

- To say something theological about our topics
- To listen to debate that goes on in our own study group
- To ask how we speak about God in the context of these issues

Presenting

Before the Consultation you will have written a short paper. It is during these periods that you have the opportunity to present your paper to your study group. Exactly how you go about this is entirely up to you. You may wish, however, to consider giving an outline of the content and argument and to chair the group discussion.

On arrival you will be given a copy of the paper written by each participant of your study group. You are requested to read these papers before the relevant presenting session.

Why do we present?

- To have the opportunity to deliver a paper to our peers
- To test our ideas or the strength of our arguments
- To listen to other papers broadly related to the Consultation theme

Worshipping

There are daily services in the Chapel. To some of you this style of worship will be second nature to others it will be rather foreign. It would be good if we could all share some part of the active worship but the extent of your involvement is left entirely up to you.

Why do we worship together?

- So that we can come together to worship the one whom we all serve in our various ministries

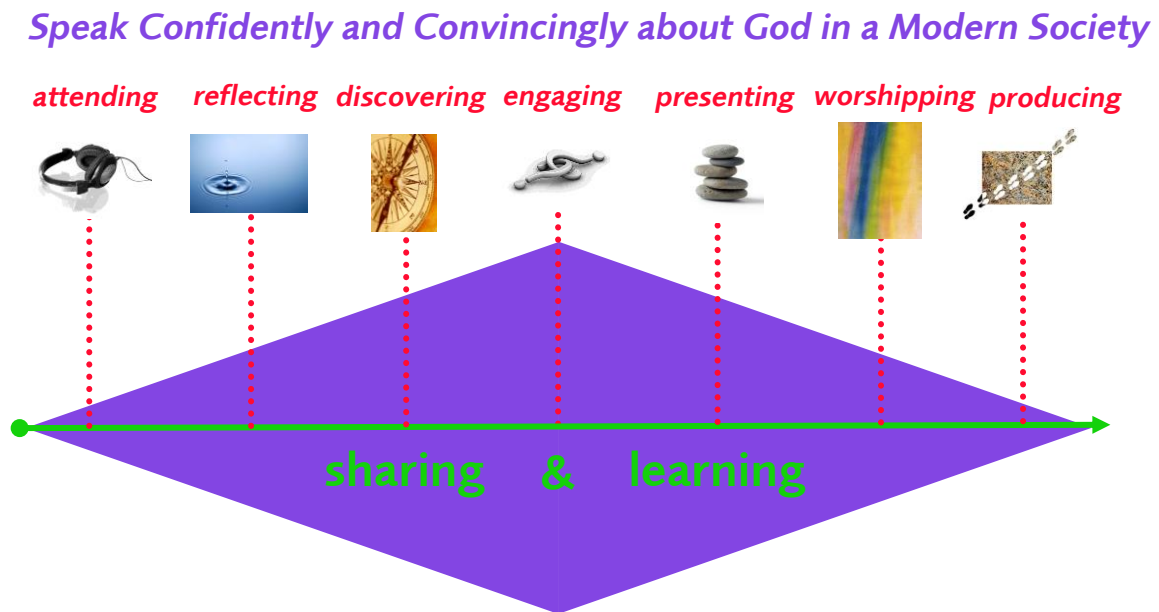
Producing

As the Consultation draws to a close each study group offers a reflection on how they believe we can best speak about God. That question has been the overarching theme of the Consultation and it is here that our various sub-themes are drawn together. These presentations represent a valuable insight into the dilemmas encountered and the areas of possible agreement.

Why do we produce?

- To collate our understanding and present it coherently
- To identify both agreement and disagreement
- To suggest possible routes for further thought, discussion or practice.

Diagrammatically these all fit together something like this:



As a whole the Consultation aims to bring about a renewed sense of purpose. Having been informed, challenged, supported and encouraged we will return to our place of ministry refreshed and reinvigorated, speaking more confidently and convincingly about God.