

# Book of Faith Jubilee Report

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Luther Seminary

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The Book of Faith Jubilee was hosted by Luther Seminary and Augsburg College to inspire congregations to delve into “opening the Scriptures” in all sorts of ways. The conference included 4 keynote speakers, 23 workshops, inviting worship, and opportunities for people to engage in dialogue with others in “affinity groups.”

The following is a summary of the keynotes and workshops that I attended.

Plenary Session 1: Eugene Peterson, retired pastor and author of *The Message*, in dialogue with Diane Jacobson, Associate Professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary and Director of the Book of Faith Initiative

- A. The Bible is a book by God and we are invited to enter in
  - 1. The language of the Bible is not a Holy Ghost language; the Hebrews used their language of the time as they did in the New Testament.
  - 2. We need to listen to people today – what is their language?
  - 3. Theological education can be too abstract and disconnected from the Bible. Need to start with the first language of children, songwriters, poets.
- B. God is not an abstraction; God is about relationships: Father, Son, and Spirit.
- C. Living the Bible
  - 1. One can't understand God without participating with/in God
  - 2. As we are reading scripture, we are always praying “How, Lord, are you going to live this in me today?” New term of “scriptureprayer.” Process is:
    - a. Read the scripture.
    - b. Meditate (Gnaw on it like a bone – see Psalm 1: 1-2) Go over it like a love letter.
    - c. Pray it.
    - d. Contemplate it by living it unselfconsciously.
- D. Reading the Bible is a communal activity. It is easy to be a heretic – heresy is an attempt to simplify and make it easier for you to follow. Can't do this if reading in community.
- E. Learn to read the Bible as a book – read the stories as stories and not as chapter and verse.
- F. Others will become interested in the Bible, if you get interested in it yourself and show your passion and interest. Enthusiasm is contagious. It is least effective when giving rewards or laying on obligations.

Plenary Session 2: David Anderson, Pastor and Director of Congregational Renewal and Leadership, The Youth and Family Institute

Three challenges to face:

- A. Move beyond cultural Christianity to biblical Christianity
  - 1. We've had a dependence on public, congregational, and institutional church; need to add the home.
  - 2. Too much pressure on the leadership – trying to get it all in on Sunday
  - 3. Need to move from “I and me” to caring about God’s creation and people; move from judgmental to mercy; from “waving the flag” to “bearing the cross;” from getting ahead to following – in other words, “Do this for the sake of the world”
- B. BOF is not a program, but a movement
  - 1. Bring it to the home, wherever that may be – family, at work, etc.
- C. Create new habits; what we are doing is not working!
  - 1. Adult Christian Education has gone from 23% to 17% participating, some even as low as 9%
  - 2. Not enough to have resources, encouragement; need to follow up face-to-face
  - 3. Need to meddle – don't wait to find out what happens – go find out
  - 4. Practice publically – use pieces in the service to teach new habits (Resource – Taking Faith Home insert)
- D. Powerpoint presentation is available at [www.tyfi.org/staff.html](http://www.tyfi.org/staff.html)

Plenary Session 3: Deanna Thompson, Professor of Religion, Hamline University

Thompson talked about using popular books as avenues to get people into the Bible. She specifically dwelt on David Plotz's book, *Good Book*, and William Young's book *The Shack*. Both are popular, but are problematic in their outlooks. However, it gives leaders an opportunity to bring readers into dialogue and study.

Plenary Session 4: Rolf Jacobson, Associate Professor of Old Testament, Luther Seminary

- A. Of particular note, Jacobson gave a member of the audience a cow bell and asked them to ring it if at any time they didn't understand something he said. His point: even in a room full of Lutherans, we use language that people don't fully understand. (The cow bell was rung at least a half a dozen times during the presentation.)
- B. Those involved with the Book of Faith Initiative are sent with blessing and permission
- C. Need to look at different models
  - 1. Look for leaders who have the gift of hospitality – making people feel welcome is key
  - 2. Pastors need to not be facilitators, but instead be recruiters, encouragers, and equippers
  - 3. Hire babysitters so that people can meet without distractions
  - 4. Be different in worship – the three readings from the lectionary provide no context for people – how do they connect these, especially if they have little experience in reading the Bible? Bring in context, focus on one.
  - 5. Be different in preaching – have people talk with each other
- D. Help people find themselves, their story, in the greater story of God and his people.

1. Use Fryer's "Just Three Questions" for Bible study: What do you think God is doing here? What do you hear God saying to you personally? What do you hear God saying to us as a community?
2. People feel that they won't get anything out of a bible study: bored, ashamed they don't know enough, irrelevant, etc.

Workshops were divided into 5 categories: Teaching the Bible in Congregations, Opening the Bible at Home, Book of Faith in Your Congregation (these were more resource driven, than topical), Bible and the Arts, and Bible and Culture. It was difficult to choose from the tremendous selection.

Workshop #1: "World of the Bible . . . Bible in the World" Facilitators: Karl Jacobson, Assistant Professor of Religion at Augsburg College, and Phil Quanbeck, Associate Professor and Chair of Religion Department, Augsburg College

- A. Look at the cultural applications and appropriations of Biblical text in popular Christian and secular culture
  1. Examples: Good Samaritan laws, movies like *Pulp Fiction*, *The Passion of Christ*, action figures, graphic novels, etc.
  2. Reveal certain cultural perceptions about the Bible and the church
    - a. Wider society mocks the church in its perceived use of the Bible –sees it as the "answer" book, but disconnected, unfamiliar, strange.
    - b. We don't help by having disconnected readings in successive services or even in one service.
- B. These applications provide an entry point into the reading and study of the Bible:
  1. How do we read (have we read) this text?
  2. How might this text be read?

Workshop #2: "The Bible in our Homes" Facilitator: Eugene Peterson

Peterson led a group discussion about what worked and didn't in various settings. Common themes:

- A. Family devotions work when they are relaxed and are a part of daily living – at mealtimes, bed times, in the car. It has to become a habit, a part of natural conversation.
- B. Programs work, but not over the long haul unless building relationships is part of the goal. This needs to be a priority.
- C. The Bible needs to part of the service – pastors hold and show the bible, have people underline passages, ask, "What does God have to say to me?"

Workshop #3: "Teaching the Bible to the Biblically Illiterate and Uninterested: Facilitator: Greg Meyer, Lead Pastor, Jacob's Well, Minneapolis

- A. Jacob's Well is an ELCA congregation for "people who don't like church." It is three years old. Website is [www.jacobs-well.com](http://www.jacobs-well.com). Pastor Meyer has been a missionary,

pastor at a large suburban church, involved with youth, and now is lead pastor at Jacob's Well.

- B. Myths (and truths) about the biblically illiterate and uninterested
  1. They are unchurched (and in our pews!)
  2. They care about being illiterate (not – otherwise they would engage)
    - a. They consider the Bible in a negative light as more baggage than authority.
    - b. However, Jesus is very popular and they are curious about him.
  3. They know the basics of the Bible because of our culture (NO)
  4. They are totally secular.
    - a. The statement heard is we are not religious, we are spiritual. Many have high ideals, especially on social justice issues, but they are continually frustrated that they don't live up to those ideals.
    - b. They look for meaning, but are uncommitted, unconnected, and unfocused.
  5. They know they should go to a church like yours, just haven't done it. (not really)
    - a. Suspicious of church and Christians.
    - b. Don't believe that there is such a thing as Truth. (Have grown up in a pluralistic society.)
  6. Myth is that they won't commit, but in reality look for relevance and value.
    - a. The analogy was used of sprinters and marathoners from Ken Callahan's book, *The Future that has Come*.
    - b. We have more sprinters than marathoners these days – the sprinters decide each week whether they will come to church; the marathoners decide from the beginning they will be there – so we need to give the sprinters a reason to be there each Sunday or Wednesday.
  7. People who have given up on church are just in one age group – no, it cuts across all generations
- C. Bible teaching can happen:
  1. In worship
    - a. Start with the hearer like Jesus did
    - b. Authority is not automatically given to the Bible by the hearer today, so need to engage the hearer through their needs
    - c. We tend to start with scripture – read three passages, tend to explain scripture rather than illumine life
    - d. Goals of preaching should be:
      - 1) Engagement – what you are talking about is relevant to me
      - 2) Enlightenment – I never thought of it that way before
      - 3) Repentance – this is more than an interesting idea, this is a truth about me
      - 4) Discipleship – how can I make this part of my life (should be 50% of preaching and teaching or more!)
    - e. How to start with the hearer:
      - 1) Be honest about what you believe
      - 2) Say exactly what you mean
      - 3) Drop religious language
      - 4) Explain who biblical characters and parts of the Bible are

- 5) Create rich context
  - 6) Use the best translation for that text
  - 7) Believe that the Bible is transformational
  - 8) Engage the senses
  - 9) Focus attention by using exactly the amount of a passage/story that is needed.
  - 10) Admit that theology is descriptive not prescriptive
  - 11) If you want them to know it, print it.
  - 12) Ask people to read along with you.
  - 13) Ask people to circle a word, repeat a verse
  - 14) Ask people to memorize pivotal verses and then return to those verses.
2. Group study – tends to be the most effective
  3. Personal reading and study
  4. Need all three

Workshop #4: “Hearing Our Scripture into Youth” Facilitator: Jeremy Myers, Assistant Professor of Religion, Augsburg College

- A. Myers says to bring our youth successfully into scripture we need to have 3 things: cultural competency, biblical competency, and pastoral care.
- B. Cultural competency - Find out the answers to the following questions:
  1. What are the youth cultures where you live?
  2. What holds your youth captive – what’s threatening their well-being?
  3. Where do they experience life and death in their day-to-day experiences?
- C. Biblical competency:
  1. Suggested using Lectio Divina with youth (See Opening the Book of Faith: Lutheran Insights for Bible Study, pp. 48-51 or this modified version)
    - a. Reading
    - b. Reflecting
    - c. Expressing (give students different ways to express themselves, not just orally)
    - d. Resting
    - e. Sharing and Reinterpreting Reality
  2. In the Reinterpreting Reality, we as facilitators need to be competent so that we can answer the following:
    - a. How does the text fit into the overall narrative?
    - b. What did it mean in its original context?
    - c. Why is it still important
  3. This method can be used cross-generationally – gives all ages space to share in new ways. Has been used in all settings successfully. Expect some to be uncomfortable with this at first.
- D. Don’t walk in without planning. Consider the following:
  1. How does the life experience of this young person going to influence the way he or she hears the text?
  2. How might God’s spirit in this text change how this young person understands his or her reality?

3. How can I facilitate this?
4. Where might I get in the way?