



Jonathan Petty

The Church I Want to Pastor

Video (5:54): Jonathan Petty, master of divinity student, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C. and licensed preacher in the AME Church

Jon Petty, a youth minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, shares his vision of the kind of church he wants to pastor – a church that is inclusive, justice-focused, and unapologetically welcoming to youth. He is pursuing a master of divinity degree at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.

The Church I Want to Pastor

Preparation

Select a room or location to offer the study. Every session needs a room that has the capability to access the video via the Internet and to project the video for groups of various sizes. Check to be sure equipment is working properly. Preview the video and make notes of key points that stand out for you. Review the lesson plan. Have for display or sharing a covenant of care for the session. *This video can be found at www.gcorr.org/series/vc3.*

Gather the following materials:

- Bible for reading the Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20 and Galatians 3:24-29
- Listening and Looking Guide (one for each person or project on a screen)
- Pens, pencils, and markers
- Index cards
- Basket
- Construction paper
- Blue painter's tape

Also prepare:

- Prepare a sheet of newsprint for posting with the heading posted on newsprint: "Why aren't people involved in religious-affiliated endeavors?"
- Prepare a "Portrait of Hope."

THE STUDY SESSION

Get Started [15-20 minutes]

Greet group members as they enter. Introduce yourself and welcome everyone to the session. Take care of housekeeping matters. Read statement of purpose (or recruit a volunteer to do so): “The General Commission on Religion and Race presents *Vital Conversations* to help start the dialogue on subjects that may sometimes be difficult to approach. We are all part of the beloved community, and we welcome perspectives that bring enlightenment and understanding.”

Begin the study session by giving each participant an index card and ask them to answer the question posted on newsprint: “Why aren’t people involved in religious-affiliated endeavors?” After three to five minutes, ask group members to share their responses. *(NOTE: there may be some persons who do not agree with the assertion of the question.)*

Introduce the video by saying: Jonathan Petty, a youth minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church bewails the status of the church, particularly in the United States. He wants to know why it seems that fewer people are involved in religious endeavors. And he wants to know what can be done about it. He is pursuing a master of divinity degree at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C. He shares his vision, his hunger for the kind of church (inclusive, justice-focused, and youth-welcoming) that he wants to lead as pastor.

Before showing the video, review or read (post) a covenant that you have created (or the group has created) and highlight the key components: confidentiality; everyone’s voice matters; disagree with care/do not attack anyone. If desired, invite the group to add thoughts and ideas to the covenant. Also, distribute the Listening and Looking Guide; ask the group to quickly review the questions and statements. Tell the participants they are only to jot down short notes on their guide so they can remain attentive as much as possible to the video presentation.

Scripture Reflection [10 minutes]

Before viewing the video, read aloud or ask someone to read aloud these Scriptures that were referenced in the video: Matthew 28:16-20 and Galatians 3:24-29. Distribute index cards and ask members to write down how their church is living out one of these Scriptures or a “confession” that the church is not being all that it could be. Share this example to help get people started:

When I read Galatians 3:24-29, I am glad to say that my church is actively becoming a church where the faces and voices of people from every nation and tongue are welcomed. We sing (perhaps badly) songs in different languages, striving for an accurate phonetic sound. New tempos and rhythms are awakened in our body and I am glad.

Collect all the cards in a basket and read aloud some of the reflections shared.

Show the Video [15-20 minutes]

At the conclusion of the video, allow five to ten minutes for the group members to individually answer questions and statements on the guide, except for cultivating a new vision and creating a social media share. Tell the group that there will be another opportunity to make notes for that and to create a social media statement. After everyone has made notes, ask them to find a partner and discuss some of the information that was shared. What was shocking? What was appalling? What simply seemed untrue? Ask each other: have you ever felt that you have

lost hope for our church? Have them respond to the first five statements or questions on the Listening and Looking Guide. Reconvene as a group and share thoughts and comments.

Portrait of Hope [10-15 minutes]

Share that it can be easy to get “stuck” in despair as you listen to the research revealed in the Quadrennium Project. The antidote to despair is dreaming and hoping – calling forth visions that are fuzzy but fierce in our spirits. Direct the group’s attention back to the guide and ask them to write or revisit their statement on cultivating a new vision. If they have not done so, they could also draft their social media statement. Then distribute construction paper and markers and ask them to create a “portrait of hope,” an artistic representation of what they would like to see in their own churches or in the church as a denomination. You may show your sample portrait or you may simply post it on the wall using blue painter’s tape. Invite them to add their portraits to the wall once they have finished.

Allow time for a gallery walk, that is, an opportunity to view all the portraits. Provide time for general reflections and comments, especially where participants saw common ties between their dreams and that of other members in the group.

Closing Devotions: Shout It Out [10 minutes]

Have the group sit in two lines facing each other. Read aloud this statement from Jonathan Petty’s video: “My ideal church isn’t afraid to meet the community – both inside and outside of the church walls – in the midst of its troubles.”

Say that in the closing devotion, they are going to practice casting out all fear and trepidation. Pass the basket of index cards that were created related to the Scriptures. Have each person select one. (If they select their own, they can select another and then return their own to the basket.)

How to cast out fear? Tell the group that each person, as moved, is to read aloud what is written on the index card that she or he has pulled from the basket. At the end of the reading, that person is to say, “Don’t be scared.” The remaining persons are to respond, “I ain’t scared, no, I’m not scared.”

Continue to practice this call-and-response process until everyone has shared and the group begins to feel the power of saying no to fear, to feel the power of declaring, “I ain’t scared, no, I’m not scared.”

Close with this prayer (or invite someone to pray from the group):

God, how do we get there? How do we get to be a church where the hopeless and the homeless sit with the wealthy and the optimistic? How do we get there? How can we reach the lost and loveless, the cynical and the doubters? How can we get there? We are asking You for guidance because we do not live as people without hope. We believe in the Great Commission. We believe that in You there is no East or West. We believe that we are all welcome at the banquet of life. Build in us a church where everyone finds a home for her or his heart. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Listening and Looking Guide: Jonathan Petty

What stands out about the statistics shared in the beginning of the video?

How have you despaired about the future of the church where you worship in the next ten years?

The next twenty years?

Jonathan Petty quoted Beth Ann Estock and Paul Nixon, who say that, “There has to be a common something that binds us together in our diversity.” What would you say is your church’s identify/common something?”

What is your personal compelling story of why you believe, worship, and serve?

What is most hopeful about Jonathan Petty’s video?

Cultivate a new vision: Focus on your church and your community. What one thing do you wish would happen to create a more ideal church?

Make a commitment: _____

Tweet This/Post on your social media: _____

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