

Executive Council Committee on
Science, Technology and Faith
22-23 April 2004
Las Vegas, Nevada
Minutes of the Meeting

Attendance: Barbara Smith-Moran and Bob Schneider (Co-chairs), Norman Faramelli, Neil James, Jim Jordan, Paul Julienne, Tom Lindell, Sandra Michael, John Miers, Johnnie Ross, Stephen Stray, Susan Youmans; consultants Phina Borgeson and Peter Arvedson; invited guests Bp. Katharine Jefferts Schori (Dioc. of Nevada) and Deacon Gail Phillips Bucher (leader of the ELCA Alliance for Science, Technology and Theology)

The meeting was called to order on Thursday, 22 April 2004, at 9 a.m. with Prayers for Morning.

After the members introduced themselves, Barbara gave a short background and history of the Network, the Committee, and the Committee's mission. Members discussed the importance of this mission for the church's future, and the necessity of using the web effectively for reaching Gen-Xers and younger.

To focus its attention on the proposed website, the Committee brainstormed about the kinds of concerns they hear from their different contexts in their church and work. They generated a list of about 30 topics, including:

- stereotypes about science-and-religion interactions
- the biological basis of homosexuality
- the planet's future
- genetic modification of food/other agricultural issues
- prayer and health
- commodification of life (e.g., patenting of life-forms, sale/purchase of organs/tissues)
- nanotechnology and robotics
- HIV/AIDS

Committee members will continue to reflect on this list through the lens of social justice, and discuss by email which are most important to begin to work on right away.

Interspersed with these topics were the following suggestions regarding approach:

- The church should admit that it doesn't have all the answers. It needs to invite people into struggle to make sense of things. People want to find others who are asking questions, and want a safe place to do that. We should try to invite people into dialogue without pretending to have all the answers.
- The big picture needs to be broken down into small pieces, small enough to engage.
- The trick will be to avoid the culture wars in the presentation of materials to help people thing through issues.
- The topics that have the greatest impact on people's everyday life will have the best chance of attracting people's attention, such as g.m. foods. Before we can bring people to the concept of creation, for example, we need to hook a person with a specific.

After Noontime Prayers and lunch, work was resumed.

Bp. Jefferts Schori suggested that we use the assistance of the Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations to increase the power of the Committee's voice. She said that we can call on the General Convention to support positions we take. She also said that she would be happy to carry our concerns to the House of Bishops (She is a member of their Planning Commission), and would listen and report back to us concerning the issues there that could be illuminated with a scientific and/or technological perspective.

Phina and Barbara reported on the two-day workshop they attended, representing the Committee, on 12-13 January in Washington, D.C. Organized by the Program of Science, Ethics and Religion of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the consultation was called "Evolution and the Religious Communities: Theology, Education and Public Policy." The intent of the workshop planners was to engage religious science-and-religion leaders in learning and discussion about so-called Intelligent Design, including the strategy of its proponents to get it into the science curriculum of public schools. At this workshop, Phina and Barbara wrote five proposals to bring before the Committee, the first of which has already been carried out:

- Write a lead article with an eye-catching headline in the next Network Newsletter ("Intelligent Design: Is this any way for science to behave?" led off the Ash Wednesday issue).
- Continue work on the Creation Catechism (see below).
- Make Intelligent Design and Creationism one of the topics to be treated on our new resource center.
- Review, update, and strengthen the resolution on creationist science from the 1982 General Convention.
- Approach - by letter or in person - the managers of cathedral and other Episcopal bookstores with a short bibliography of suggested books to stock.

The Committee agreed that the other four proposals were important for follow-through.

Action Item: Susan suggested writing up a short, simple analysis of Intelligent Design as a case study in science-and-religion interaction, with a view toward publication in Forward Movement or The Anglican Digest. Susan, John, Phina, and Jim agreed to work on this project.

Action Item: Bob will work on a short bibliography to send to bookstore managers. Bob and Barbara will write a cover letter on Committee letterhead and send the list out.

Phina distributed copies of the 1982 resolution for study and discussion at future Committee meetings.

After Prayers for Early Evening, the Committee adjourned for the day.

The group was reconvened on Friday, 23 April 2004, at 9 a.m. with prayer. John Miers had to be absent for the remainder of the meetings, having been admitted to Sunrise Hospital the previous night for surgery to remove his gall bladder. General Convention Staffperson Tony Jewiss joined the group for this day's discussions.

Tony was introduced to the group. He introduced the new members to his work at 815, and expressed his strong support for the work of our committee.

Bob reviewed for Tony the committee work of the day before, and then those present asked him some questions about church polity, what's happening at 815, the ST&F budget, and how best to proceed with our mandate.

Susan gave the report of the Subcommittee on Genetically Modified Foods. She noted that several denominational organizations are collaborating on food security issues, and provided information on several summits, conferences, study groups, grants. There was a discussion of the possible reasons why the Resolution on Food Security failed to pass the 2003 General Convention. Given the increasing importance of food security and the voices of several other Christian denominations, Tony encouraged the Committee to revise the resolution and resubmit it in 2006. Work on this will continue at future Committee meetings.

Bob presented the draft of the Christian education tool he calls "A Creation Catechism," which he has authored with help from a small subcommittee. The project was well received by everyone as filling the need for scientifically informed educational material firmly rooted in the Anglican tradition. Suggestions were made for improving and augmenting it, and a lively discussion ensued addressing the various formats into which it might be cast for reaching people of different ages and backgrounds, and in various venues.

Action item: Bob will revise the draft over the next few weeks, clear it with the Committee and then send it to Tony, who will discuss it with Rosemari Sullivan, the Presiding Bishop, and possibly others. Bob will also send it to Kendall Harmon and Milt Coleman, former members who were enthusiastic supporters of this project.

The next meeting will be in the Boston area, on 17-18 September 2004, to make it easier for those members who are able and interested to attend the conference on neuroethics at MIT, organized by the AAAS and co-sponsored by the ST&F Network.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Smith-Moran and Robert Schneider
Co-chairs