



The Spark

By Ruth Schmidt

I am privileged to be able to witness to you about Lay Academy. I first heard about Lay Academy when I was at the Trost Conference Center, taking part, with other members of my church, in the Church Renewal Program: Five Practices of a Fruitful Congregation. Each church group was paired with a mentor who was a lay academy alumnus. During the workshop there was a little plug for Lay Academy by Bonnie Andrews, our mentor. She told us what a great experience it had been for her and encouraged anyone who felt even a spark of interest to consider attending.

Well, needless to say, I felt that spark, and if you feed a spark it becomes a flame, feed the flame and it becomes a fire. Lay academy is a banquet for all of us seeking to develop a deeper understanding of our personal faith and to build relationships with other seekers.

One of the reasons I wanted to attend Lay Academy was to learn the language. You know, the secret theologian language that gives people the insight to be able to speak about the Bible with conviction and authority. I wanted to have the words so I too could sound knowledgeable instead of like the confused seeker that I truly am. The first session was titled “How to Think Theologically.” I figured my main goal would be accomplished the first night and all the rest was gravy. I failed to consider the considerable difference between the words “speak and think”!

That first night I learned that theology is not just words. Theology is reflection upon and with the scriptures. Theology needs us to reflect upon, understand & share the scriptures to bring them to life and Lay Academy is a safe place to question and discern the truth of our own lives, within a community of people who are thinking upon and with the scriptures. It is a place where we can share not only the joys of being a member of the body of Christ but also delve into the sometimes scary and uncomfortable aspects of our faith walk and learn that others may have the same questions and fears that you do. No one has to share more than they are comfortable with, but we are encouraged to stretch out of our comfort zones and be transformed from bystanders into active participants. There are many components to the Lay Academy experience. Each session we are given a book or two to read ahead of time. Our first assignment was to read all of the Psalms. Do you know there are 150 of them? I didn’t but I do now!

The teachers are amazing. Thinking of them brings to mind 2 Corinthians 3:18:

And we all, who with unveiled faces reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the spirit.”

The passion that each speaker has can be seen in their faces and indeed their entire beings seem to radiate with it. A joyful noise echoes throughout the center as we begin and end each weekend with worship led

by Rev. Deborah Payden. She truly is a blessing and I am so thankful to have her as a guide through this journey. She is with us not just when we are at the Trost Center but throughout the months as she prays for us and keeps in contact through email and Facebook. She is indeed a shining example of how to share God's love.

In addition to nurturing our spirits they also nurture our bodies—there is food at lay academy, lots of delicious food. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to attend lay academy and I hope to continue my journey with the next session. I also hope that I have shared a spark that you can take back to your congregations that they catch and they are encouraged to attend Lay Academy.