

# **Formation in Small Groups: Benefits of Using the So-Called “African Model”**

**Contributed by The Rev. Mark Wilson**

For our catechumenal sessions at Saint George’s Episcopal Church in Nashville, Tennessee, we usually spend one hour each week in small groups using a variation of the African Model. (We call it the Aural Method of Experiencing Scripture.) This is a very different way of approaching the Bible than the usual analysis and discussion people are accustomed to. Most people find it refreshing, but some find it uncomfortable. Recently I have begun including a brief piece on the benefits of long term use of the Aural Method after we have met for several weeks. This seems to help some of the participants understand the value of using a method that seems awkward for them.

## **Benefits of Long-term Use of the Aural Method**

- We learn to listen to the Scriptures in a certain way.
- We begin to hear the Scriptures in other settings with an “Aural Method” disposition, listening for how God may be speaking to us and inviting us to change. I have found that when the lessons are read in church, I hear them this way.
- We learn to articulate our own struggle with God’s call. Responding to the Aural Method questions in the small group context gives us a chance to put the progress of our personal journey into words. When we do that, it often facilitates deeper understanding of God’s activity in our life.
- We learn to listen attentively to other people. Since the other members of the group are not expected to respond to the person speaking, we are free to focus all our attention on them. We don’t need to be “composing” a response. We can simply listen.
- We become accustomed to silence. Silence is a rare commodity in our world, something we often seek to avoid at all costs. Using the Aural Method, the silence is there for us to experience and to use. We begin to appreciate and even enjoy it.
- We learn to pray for one another. One of the most powerful elements of this method is the time to offer prayer for the person next to us. We also continue to pray for that person throughout the week. What a wonderful experience for both persons! This forms in the participants an expectation that Christians pray for one another, even aloud.

- We learn to keep confidences. Confidentiality is rule #1 for safeguarding the life of the group. I believe that keeping confidences is a good discipline to exercise whenever people share personal struggles with us in any context. The Aural Method is good practice in “keeping secrets.”
- We experience Christian community as we become companions to one another on our journeys. As we continue to report in on our progress, respond to God’s call, and pray for one another, week in and week out, we discover what it means to be the people of God.

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