

“Tell me again – why do we need to be doing this work?”

“We have been comfortable doing ministry our way for the past 50 . . . 75 . . . 100 . . . 150 years, why do we have to change now?”

“This is Iowa (South Dakota, Nebraska, Montana . . .) after all. Why do we need to concern ourselves with reaching across race, culture, and class?”

You have worked through many exercises and discussions to come to this point, but some of these questions may still be coming up. Moving into and accepting a new reality can be difficult and challenging. It requires us to see things we may have been passing by. It requires us to hear with our heart in new ways. It requires us to look around and see and notice that our communities are changing.

Despite what our perceptions might be, we live in a diverse society that is growing more diverse each day. Note the following numbers from the 2014 Income and Poverty Census.

- U.S. as a whole, 62.1% of the population was White, non-Hispanic;
- 20.9% Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+
- California, 38.5% White, non-Hispanic; 43.8% language other than English
- Colorado, 69.0% White, non-Hispanic; 16.9% language other than English
- Iowa, 87.1% White, non-Hispanic; 7.4% language other than English
- Kansas, 76.8% White, non-Hispanic; 11.1% language other than English
- New Jersey, 56.8% White, non-Hispanic; 30.3% language other than English
- North Dakota, 86.6% White, non-Hispanic; 5.4% language other than English
- Pennsylvania, 77.9% White, non-Hispanic; 10.5% language other than English
- Washington, 70.4% White, non-Hispanic; 18.8% language other than English
- Wisconsin, 82.2% White, non-Hispanic; 8.6% language other than English

(<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/>)

In light of the national figures, what does it mean for a church body to be predominantly White, non-Hispanic when all areas of the country are more diverse? What would it mean to reach out within our communities?

Diversity comes to Pelican Rapids

What can demographic change mean to a community? This story of a small town in Minnesota is an example of assessment and planning that led to a community-wide effort. The result was a hands-on welcoming of diversity that continues today.

Pelican Rapids, Minnesota is a town with one long main street bookended by stop-lights. It also has 40 language or dialects spoken in their school system...and grocery stores specializing in Latin and Muslim foods...and houses of worship that include Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches and a mosque.

Diversity has come to Pelican Rapids, a town of 2,300 residents. In fact, diversity was invited. In 1958, the town was almost entirely Norwegian. Some local business leaders invested in a turkey processing plant to create more jobs in the area. That's how Mexican people first came to live there in the 1960s, so that the town's population includes several hundred Spanish-speaking residents today.

After the Vietnam War, the town welcomed Vietnamese refugees. They came in smaller numbers than the Mexican population, but were as distinctly present. In the mid 1990s, about 100 Bosnian refugees arrived. And by 1998, about 50 African refugees came from the Sudan, and a number from Somalia as well. About 200 Somalians live in Pelican Rapids now.

Five hundred new residents from various lands in a town this size? That's major change. Currently, 23% of the students live in homes where languages other than English are primary.

See <http://pelicanrapids.lib.mn.us/> for a splendid overview of what the town has achieved so far. The community is now a hub for helping other towns nearby to cross barriers of race, culture and class. The state of Minnesota has put money into multicultural collaboratives, so that the town can teach others what they've learned. And the Pelican Rapids' International Friendship Festival that churches and community groups organized in 1988 is still going strong, every year!

(For a full story, see Part III of this resource, "How Pelican Rapids Said Welcome.")

Diversity Comes to . . .

Assessment is part of the continual process of action/reflection. Many of the activities and discussions in the opening sections engage the congregation in that ongoing cycle. The tools for assessment provide a means to reflect on the makeup of your congregation, the neighborhood, and the current interaction between the congregation and community.

Before moving on, take time to engage in these assessments. A clear picture of the current realities will help shape your vision, inform your decisions and strategies for moving on, and provide grounding for your next steps.

- Gathering Demographic Data on Congregation
- Gathering Ministry Information on Congregation
- Gathering Demographic Data on Neighborhood
- Gathering Information on Congregation and Community

Use the questions in "Checking In" as a guide within your leadership team to reflect on what you have learned and your readiness as a congregation to move on. Use the surveys as tools to begin to look at yourself as a congregation through an expanded lens.

Continue to Exercise: Gathering Demographic Data on Congregation.



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Exercise: Gathering Demographic Data on Congregation

If you are an ELCA congregation, you will find membership, worship attendance, and giving trends of your congregation on the ELCA website. Go to www.elca.org and go to the churchwide unit of Research and Evaluation. You can access both a trend report for your congregation and demographics for your zip code area from that site. If your congregation is of another denomination, check your church body for comparable demographic data.

In addition to membership and worship attendance trends, the ELCA trend report gives details on the congregation's racial/ethnic composition and shows the relationship between baptized membership and zip code population over a period of years.

To supplement the information, gather current information regarding your current congregation members. Compile and chart this information in a format that is helpful for you.

- Age categories
- Gender
- Marital status
- Racial/ethnic background
- Place of residence, noting distance from church building
- Educational background
- Employment
- Socioeconomic class
- What does the information say about your congregation?
- Are all the categories of membership represented in the ministries and leadership?

Exercise: Gathering Ministry Information on Congregation



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Exercise: Gathering Ministry Information on Congregation

While the life and ministries of the congregation are often taken for granted, prepare a report on the congregation that gathers information into one place.

This information will be helpful in assessing whether the ministries continue to serve the needs of the congregation and how the ministries intersect with the people of the neighborhood.

Describe the ministries in a format that is concise and easy to read and understand. A listing of the ministries, including times and who and how many are served may be more useful than a description of the ministries. Use the headings below, or create your own depending on the structure of your congregation.

- Worship (time, style)
- Education (programs for various ages)
- Evangelism
- Stewardship
- Youth and Family Ministries
- Service ministries, including synod or congregation partnerships
- Neighborhood ministries
- Advocacy Initiatives

Reflect on the information you gathered.

- Who are the people primarily served by the current ministries?
- Who is not being served?
- How do the ministries relate to the community

Continue to Exercise: Gathering Demographic Data on Neighborhood



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Exercise: Gathering Demographic Data on Neighborhood

Demographic information by zip code areas is available through the department of Research and Evaluation on the ELCA website. Go to <http://www.elca.org/Resources/Research-and-Evaluation> You can also reach the ELCA Department for Research and Evaluation at 1-800-638-3522.

- Compare the information to information about your congregation. Does your congregation reflect the community? Use “Zip Code Report: Congregational User’s Guide” prepared by ELCA Department for Research and Evaluation as a guide to assess the data you have gathered. <http://www.elca.org/Resources/Research-and-Evaluation>, select the Synod tab.
- Visit the library, local historical society, and meet with local leaders to gather a history of the neighborhood. Note the changes within the community over time.

Continue to Exercise: Gathering Information on Community



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Chart information on the community and note the ways in which the congregation and people of the community intersect. What you see and note will be different if the congregation is in a neighborhood whose population has changed around it, or is part of a larger community that has seen a new immigrant population settle in the community.

- **List the neighborhood schools, businesses, and community organizations.** Note the connections between the congregation and the schools, businesses, and organizations.
- **List the members of the congregation who are involved in community organizations and service.** Learn about their relationships with the community.
- **List local government and community leaders.** Note those with whom members of the congregation have relationships. Note those with whom you need to meet to learn more about the community.
- **List neighborhood or community people who participate in current ministries of the congregation.** Who are people in the neighborhood/community you know best? How can you strengthen those relationships?
- **Begin conversations with several neighborhood people you have identified.** Sit down with them and listen to their experiences and perspectives of the community.
- **Reflect on the information.** Are there gaps between the congregation and neighborhood? How well does the congregation know the neighborhood and vice versa?
- **What perceptions might people of the neighborhood or newly formed community have of the congregation?**
- **Who are persons within the neighborhood that you could invite to walk with you and to help guide you as you walk the neighborhood?**

Continue to Exercise: Building Survey



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Take action by walking through your building with new eyes. Notice things that you regularly walk by. What spoken or unspoken messages would someone of another race, culture, class, or language receive about who is welcome in your building? Are you as a congregation unconsciously saying things you really don't mean?

It would be best to take this walk with someone who is not a member of the dominant group of the congregation. You will need to have a relationship of trust and to give assurances that you want a deep and honest assessment. Be alert to your feelings and be careful not to become defensive of anything. Simply take in the feedback as it is given. You will have time later to process your feelings and to wrestle with the meanings of the feedback you receive.

From the outside of the building:

- What is the first thing you see?
- What is there to welcome you?
- Is it an inviting place?
- What about it is inviting? What is not?
- Is it foreboding?
- Is it accessible physically and emotionally?
- How do you feel as you look at the building?
- Are all the doors locked?
- Is it easy to find the entrance?
- Can persons of language other than English, or persons who cannot read find the entrance?
- What procedure do you have to follow to be let in?
- How do you feel about how you are regarded in this procedure?
- Do you feel welcome at this point?

Inside the building:

- Once inside, do you feel welcome?
- Is the space warm and inviting?
- Are the people cordial and welcoming?
- What feelings come up as you are greeted?
- Are you greeted?

- Are you ignored?
- How are you received?
- How are you directed?
- Do you feel directed or controlled?
- Does your presence seem to make people nervous?

Decor and environment:

- Do paintings, posters or other things on the wall reflect people like you?
- Are bulletin boards easy to find and well lighted?
- Do they contain information which is relevant and important to you?
- What other information is available?
- Is it relevant to you?
- Is there significant community information available?

Following your walk, review the information within the leadership team.

- How do you feel about what you learned?
- What actions can you take immediately to make your building more welcoming?
- Do you need to address issues of hospitality? How will you do that?
- Who do you need to talk with in order to take action on other issues that were raised?

Continue to Worship Survey



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Following the same process as that for the building survey, look at the worship life of the congregation with new eyes and ears. Again, invite the responses of someone who is not a member of the dominant group in the congregation.

- Is worship easy to follow?
- Is worship confusing to follow?
- Do you have to read a lot, sift through many papers and books?
- Is the music familiar or easy to catch on to?
- Is the music difficult or alien to you?
- Is there a representation of different music or worship styles?
- Does anyone try to make following along easier for you?
- Is worship explained to you?
- If you know what is going on in worship, do people still insist on being “helpful”?
- Do you perceive any assumptions being made about you?
- Are these assumptions correct?
- Does the preaching style reach you?
- How do you feel about being there?

After worship:

- How are you treated now?
- Are you greeted, invited to another activity, made to feel welcome and wanted, treated with human compassion?
- Are you ignored?
- Are you merely tolerated?
- What happens to make you feel the way you do now?
- Would you return?
- What would you change?
- What would you never want to hear said, or see done again?

Reflect on the information you gathered using questions presented after the building survey.

Continue to Self-Reflection



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