

You have begun the journey. Hopefully you had a good experience sharing your stories and recalling the history of your congregation, even when those stories included pain and conflict. How we gathered strength and grew from times of pain can assure us that we will be able to accept the pain that will come as we re-connect as the body of Christ with our neighbors across race, culture, and class. How we handled conflict in the past can inform us with new insights and deeper learning about improved communication in listening and in speaking with an ear to how we will be heard.

You have shared time together in Bible study and have gathered glimpses of visions and hopes for your congregation. You may already see differences in where and how people see the congregation living out its mission. “Parking lot” conversations, phone talk, and coffee meetings may be filled with people’s uncertainty and anxiety about all of this activity and talk that is threatening change.

The longstanding popularity of home and personal “makeover” shows on TV is a sign that people do yearn for change. They may have no idea what the outcome will be. They are just taking a chance, and there’s a bit of uneasiness. But there’s definitely excitement in the air. They and/or their homes are going to be transformed!

Our journey across race, culture and class is an adventure toward change of a deeper kind. It’s a spiritual makeover, and we may be just as nervous stepping out in faith to try it. But if we don’t, how else can that journey begin? One of the best ways to dispel uneasiness is to travel with friends. That’s what the “One Body, Many Members” process is here for. With Christ and community, let’s explore further how to manage the change process.

Why not begin a “prayer and travel journal” now, to record your memories? In it you can write and draw your feelings and learnings on this journey across race, culture and class. If you later discover that you are invited to share, lead or teach about your experience, you will already have the journal full of notes to excerpt from!

Resource material and exercises in this section will help the congregation unpack and examine some of the questions and deeper levels of resistance that may be arising. Take time with the questions, fears, and hesitations. Moving too far ahead of the congregation too fast can leave leaders alone and isolated on the journey. Eventually not everyone will be able to make the entire journey, but for now don’t rush. Ask the hard questions and invite people to wrestle with the “Yikes!” This is hard. But you as a congregation may experience an amazing transformation.

Engage the questions and involve people in the ongoing discussion. Build a climate of openness in which people feel that they can name their hesitancy and anxiety. Fear can lose its power when it is repeatedly brought in the open and people can find their joint strength and courage.

Use the exercises as opening reflections with all groups that gather in the congregation. Find ways to raise and address the questions in sermons. Use additional resources of Troubling the Waters or Breaking the Bonds. Invite members to participate in local anti-racism training events. Keep talking and keep growing in deeper self awareness as a congregation.

Continue to: For Discussion: Why do we need to talk about Differences?



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ONE BODY MANY MEMBERS

Part 1: One Body, Similar Members

History and Culture

For Discussion: Why do we need to talk about Differences?

Pat Parker (1944-1989) was a black lesbian poet and activist who died from breast cancer. She has a quote that now hangs as a plaque in a friend's home:

"For the white person who wants to be my friend.

The first thing you must do is to forget that I'm black.

Second, you must never forget that I'm black."

For Discussion: Why do we need to talk about Differences?

The sign expresses the complexity of race and how it is wrapped up within our identity. We know that race is a social construction and has no biological basis, but because of its social construction over time, it has a great deal of social meaning and has had a major impact in determining life opportunities for individuals and groups.

Race was constructed by Europeans in the 1700s to explain differences among the world's peoples.

Carolus Linnaeus, a Swedish naturalist, moved from his classification of plants and animals, to the classification of humans as *Homo sapiens*, to the classification of people in four racial groups. His student, Friedrich Blumenbach, a German naturalist, later classified humans in five categories and moved from a geographical categorization to a hierarchical one. Because he thought the people who lived near Mount Caucasus were the ideal in physical beauty, he created the term Caucasians and placed peoples identified by that term at the top of the racial hierarchy. His work, published in 1776, provided a "scientific" basis for the belief of Europeans during the Enlightenment that they were superior to all other groups (Pang, 2005: 88-89, 268-270).

While race is not real, racism is. The belief in the superiority and inferiority of groups of people; the social and institutional power to uphold the rights and privileges of the dominant group; the ability of the dominant group to make decisions for and about subordinate groups; the historical legacy of dominance and oppression; the daily small discriminations experienced by people of color; the invisibility of race and privilege for those who are White – all these and many more attest to the continuing power of racism. Only people who are White in America have the privilege of not noticing race. The discomfort of White people in talking about race speaks to the strength of racism and its affect on life together in the U.S. Talking about race is an act of liberation.

The reality of life in America is that we aren't all the same. Our lives have been shaped within a system of cultural and institutional racism that has benefited White people over Persons of Color. Class and gender are interwoven with race to create a complex fabric that looks nice to those who view it from the top, but is filled with knots, loose strings and great messiness for those who view it from the underside.

And yet, in the midst of the history and ongoing reality of racism, we know that we are all the same. We are all baptized children of God – created in beauty and fully equal as God's children. Because of our connection as sisters and brothers in God's family, we can talk about the pain and guilt, the anger and apathy, the divisions and separations, and we can work toward wholeness.

While we both look different and are the same, and look the same but are different, we can't gloss over our differences. We can't forget the history that unites us. We can't let one another down in working for justice. We can't pretend we are colorblind in a

(continued)

society based on color. Before we look at sameness, we have to honor and respect our differences.

We need to see one another within our identities of race, age, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, and other factors that shape our lives. I am a woman of European American heritage and that has made a profound difference in my life. I have missed advantages in life because I am female, and I have had privileges and advantages granted to me because I am White. Not noticing my race and gender and other identifications misses part of who I am. I am not without gender and race. My gender, race, and other identifications do not in and of themselves define me, but they are part of who I am and have played a part in shaping my reality.

Persons in the privileged position in any category of identity – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age, physical/mental ability – have a tendency to overlook the importance of that category because daily life does not call attention to it. It is seen as the “norm” of existence. Persons in a non-dominant position in any identity category are often reminded daily of their identity in relationship to the dominant society. To overlook that reality and “not see” someone’s race is to not fully see the person. Seeing race, culture, class, and other identifications allows us to see and celebrate the wonderful diversity of God’s creation. Someone at a workshop once commented, “If I don’t see color, how can I see a rainbow?”

Have we moved past the time when race no longer plays a role in our lives? No. We have daily reminders in all areas of life that race matters. Do we need to notice race? Yes. Can we notice race, talk about it honestly and openly, and live fully together as God’s children? Most definitely yes. God created us as a diverse people – one body, with many members.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- In what ways do you describe and identify yourself? Why do you choose those identifications? What meaning or impact do those identities have on your life?
- What categories would others use to describe or identify you? Why? How do the ways others categorize you affect your life?
- What meaning or impact has your racial identity had on your life?
- What impact would talking openly about race and culture have on your life together as a congregation as you seek to grow in mission or partnership with persons of other races or cultures?

Pang, V. O. (2005). Multicultural education: A caring-centered reflective approach. (2nd ed). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Continue to For Discussion: Why do Something Different?



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ONE BODY MANY MEMBERS

Part 1: One Body, Similar Members History and Culture

For Discussion: Why do Something Different?

With all the anxiety and discomfort and disagreement that comes with change, why change at all?

Why try to go beyond “one body, similar members”?

What does a journey of diversity offer a community of faith?

What does a journey toward greater diversity say about your church and your faith?

Reflect on the questions above, and as a group, brainstorm on why it is important for you as a congregation to do something different. How will this journey enhance your life as God’s people in this place?

List on a board or newsprint as many possibilities as you can to conclude the phrase: “Doing something different now would”

Review the Bible studies and your prior discussions and reflect on why we are called to change.

Compile responses from the different groups in the congregation. Continually revisit the responses. Lift them up in various ways to ease anxieties and reluctance.

Continue to: For Discussion: What are we Afraid of Losing?



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What might we be afraid of losing by embarking on a multicultural journey?

- Individually, or as a group, list your fears of loss on paper, in your journal, or on newsprint.
- Examine and talk about what you are afraid of losing.

Did your responses include any of these? Identity, traditions, momentum, time, energy, comfort zones? What would it mean to give up your fears, or to balance your fears of what you will lose with the anticipation of what you will gain?

Yes, we are hesitant about going on the journey. “It’s up to you,” Jesus says, “But you’ve got to come! This trip won’t be the same without you.” What assurance do you think Jesus is offering about what we fear to lose?

Brainstorm and reflect on your responses: “I think Jesus might be telling me...”

Continue to Re-examining Identity and Vision



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