

A Journey for Christians across Race, Culture and Class

As you travel, it is important that as many people as possible in your congregation are actively participating. Organize a leadership team to shape the vision, chart the course, and plan for events, activities and study groups to happen. Invite a diversity of persons to be representative of the congregation. The team will need to deeply engage in prayer and study of God's word throughout the journey.

The leadership team may be different from the official elected leadership of the Church Council or other governance group, but it must be appointed and fully supported by the Council. It is helpful to have representatives of the Council on the team. It will be important as soon as possible to address changes in Church Council membership to reflect all of the diversity of the congregation. Intentionality of representation will begin to address issues of power and bring all of the voices of the congregation to the decision-making process.

To build the initial team, look for members who have a sense of vision, are committed to the mission and ministry of the congregation, are respected within the congregation, and touch different groups of members. Be sure to include members of different ages, genders, length of membership, and socioeconomic classes. Include persons who are present in the congregation from different racial and ethnic groups and sexual orientations. If you have more than one worship service, make certain persons are equally represented from those worship services.

Meet regularly as a team to build community and equip team members for leadership.

Be grounded in prayer and worship.

Take time for members to get to know one another at a deep level and establish guidelines for team interaction.

Lift up values such as respect, openness, deep listening, and shared decision-making.

Build an atmosphere of interdependence in which each person is heard and participates equally.

Work to break down old messages of hierarchies and solo leadership. Because the team will be leading the congregation through significant change, the time spent in spiritual growth and developing relationships of trust and care is critical.

Before they can lead the congregation in the journey across race, culture, and class, team members need to examine their own attitudes and assumptions and commit themselves to personal growth and transformation. It will be helpful to share their own cultural journeys, examine their own fears and hesitations, and assess their gifts as the body of Christ. As team members become vulnerable with one another, they will deepen their relationships and begin to model authentic community.

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The leadership team needs to be committed to the vision and able to clearly communicate it to others. They need courage to take risks to walk in new ways and an openness of mind and heart to fully embrace possibilities that cannot be known or planned for. It is essential for leaders to assess their love for the community. Is it love at a distance? Love if you enter the church according to our terms? Love with an internal attitude of superiority? Love with humility to learn from people in the community? The team members need to wrestle together with their readiness and long-term commitment to lead the congregation in new directions.

The leadership team must be prepared for resistance to change, anxiety, and conflict. As the congregation examines its structures and culture and begins to name what needs to be left behind in order to embrace a new future, some members will dig in their heels, some will become angry, and some will leave. The trust, support, and shared vision of the team will be essential to keep the focus on God's vision for the congregation. Not everyone currently in the congregation will be able to embrace the vision and engage in new ways of seeing the world and doing church.

The process of building a leadership team and preparing for the journey is critical for good travels. People may be anxious to get started and want to immediately jump into action. The time spent in solid preparation, however, will enable the team to respond to the many rocks and obstacles that lie in the path ahead.

Continue to Checklist for the Journey



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How would you get ready for a first-time trip overseas?

What would you pack; how would you prepare?

Planning for a journey across cultures, race and class can be similar in a number of ways.

1. Pray. Thank God for this chance to expand your horizons. Ask God to be with you, guide your actions, and reveal new understandings to you. Regularly stop along the way to gather your fellow travelers and pray for God's Spirit to lead and guide you.

2. Plan ahead. Learn something about the culture where you are visiting. Read novels by authors of the culture to hear a voice of the people and begin to sense another worldview. If the language is different from the one you speak, learn key phrases so that you can make an attempt at communicating.

3. Be present in the moment. If your mind is constantly back at home or in the future, you'll miss what's happening right in front of you. Let go of your assumptions and release yourself from trying to make things fit according to your experience and way of viewing the world and how things are done. Open yourself to be present and receive and simply be with the people.

4. Travel light. Carrying lots of baggage will only weigh you down. Let go of old messages and stereotypes and bring the essentials of listening, watching for signs, openness to explore, patience, and a smile. Of course, bring the necessities like your water (of life) and snacks (bread for the journey).

5. Be a good ambassador. It's your visit, but it's their home. "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." Don't expect the people to eat, speak, think or behave as you do back home. Be respectful as well as friendly. Bring small gifts as ways to thank your hosts.

6. Travel with friends or family. Go in pairs as you walk the streets of the neighborhood and begin to meet those around you. Gather several people from your congregation to begin a relationship of mutuality in a new partnership. When you travel together you can be more comfortable in an unfamiliar setting and talk about your experiences together.

7. Expect goodness. Isn't it amazing how often we find what we are looking for?

8. Keep a journal; take some photos. With so much newness to absorb around you, revelations may pass you by or be easily forgotten. Take good notes on what God has shown you on your trip . . . what you've learned about yourself as well as others.

Leadership Readiness Completed Continue to Vision



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