

## A Journey for Christians across Race, Culture and Class

“How do I get to know my neighbor?”

“How do I understand and relate within another culture?”

“Can I and my congregation become culturally competent for the 21st century?”

“What if I make a mistake?”

These and other questions lead us into the process of engaging in a meaningful way with our neighbors of another race, culture, or class. Living and working in mutual partnership in a multicultural world means moving beyond paternalism that seeks to “help” people or a misused liberalism that seeks to make decisions for and about people in order to make them more like us. We are often tempted to enter into relationships with persons of other races, cultures, and classes with an expectation that they will see the world and define problems and solutions the same way we do. When a person uses time in a different way, we attach a judgmental label rather than

recognizing that we simply have different values.

“*Meeting My Neighbor Again for the First Time*” may seem like a strange title, but in this section we will look at how we can meet our neighbors in a new way – with a deeper recognition of our cultural biases. It is important to note that recognizing and valuing our neighbor’s culture does not mean denigrating or devaluing our own culture. That is a byproduct of dualism – if one is good, the other is bad. Living as one body with many members means that all are good. God created many, many varieties of plants, animals, and people and said, “It is good.” God didn’t compare. God created diversity and said it is good.

One of the challenges of meeting my neighbor is to honor my own culture and honor my neighbor’s culture. In the next section we will look at the challenges that arise as we live into that reality together. For now, we will look at how we can meet our neighbor again, as if for the first time, listening, watching, and learning in a new way with full appreciation for all the gifts our neighbors can bring us.

### In this section you will find tools to

- Expand awareness of culture and its dynamics in shaping lives and relationships
- Analyze the culture of your congregation at the what, how and why levels
- Begin to glimpse how someone of another culture may see something you take for granted in your own culture
- Strengthen skills for listening and engaging with people across race, culture and class

Continue to Reflection: The Diversity Dance



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*At a young age, I was captivated by dance on film. Shirley Temple's breezy tap dancing...Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers' courtships in motion...Vera Ellen and Danny Kaye in "White Christmas." Not that I ever saw myself being that expressive. In the sixth grade, my classmates and I got some training in social dance...and was that ever awkward!*

*Still, dance was calling out to me, and finally in my 20s I did something about it. I signed up for a class at a local college. It was part of the continuing education program, so no prerequisite was required. It took several classes before I was comfortable enough to trade in my sweat-pants and t-shirt to be leotard-clad as everyone else had been from the start. Wearing such form-fitting clothing was hardly traditional garb for a girl of my culture. I felt very self-conscious. But after a while, it fit.*

*Eventually, I began to study Chinese classical and folk dance. I loved how swirling panels of fiery red silk (which we call "ribbons") could evoke rainbows and ocean waves, and symbolize wishes for wholeness and joy. Eventually I began to explore choreographing Chinese dance movements for liturgical settings.*

Starting out on a journey across cultures is much like being in a "diversity dance class." Feeling awkward comes with the territory. At first, we may even have to be taught how to stand correctly. Often what we thought we knew about posture doesn't serve us well—and certainly not for more complicated balancing and turning.

Beginners can hardly remember a sequence from one second to the next. We can laugh together about how we get tangled up and trip over our own feet. And by the way, no one is ever "all done" with class. Even lifelong dancers still go to classes. Mistakes are also par for the course. How else do we learn? There's no such thing as getting it right all the time. If we do, we're ready to stretch to the next level.

I've seen a seven-year-old with ballet training pick up a sequence quickly, because she's learned to pay attention and coordinate her body to imitate what she sees. That's how we all begin, by imitating, taking a few steps only. In time, we improve and expand on our capabilities, and the teacher might ask us to tutor others.

**In learning to do “God’s Diversity Dance,” every interaction is going to feel awkward at first** Don’t worry. You won’t fall offstage from spinning too much, too fast. This class has the most patient Teacher, who knows what particular challenges each of us faces in Body movement, and demonstrates for us what the Dance is supposed to look like. Our Teacher never tires of explaining the steps again and again. Are we ever fortunate! With God as our Teacher, we learn to deal with stage fright and learn to perform, so that others can see the Dance come alive, and want to join in.

Sometimes there aren’t many on a particular stage doing a dance. It takes commitment to classes and rehearsals, and a troupe will adapt and perform with those who keep showing up. Those solos, duets and small group dances can also be beautiful and meaningful. But ultimately in the Diversity Dance, the goal is to invite as many people as possible to join in. **Won’t you join in on God’s Great Diversity Dance?**

Continue to For Discussion: Map Story—Reading the Signs



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Yikes! This is hard! That’s exactly what I thought en route to my synod convention on the Long Island Railroad (LIRR). Subway riding in the city was second nature to me as a native New Yorker. Traveling on the LIRR to the suburbs was another matter. If I missed a stop on the subway, I could walk back if I didn’t want to wait for the next train. That wasn’t something one could do on the LIRR. Pay attention, I kept telling myself. Pay attention to what stops are coming up....

A transfer was required in Jamaica, Queens. “What track should I take?” I had asked the ticketmaster, who didn’t know. He suggested I ask the conductor. “What track should I take?” I asked the conductor. She said she didn’t know, and didn’t want to steer me wrong. “Listen for the track announcements,” she said.

I tried that at the Jamaica platform, but it could have been a foreign language to me. What was that loudspeaker voice saying? I then noticed an electronic sign that I could read, and continued on. I felt thankful and a bit more mindful of the stress immigrant people go through every day, as they negotiate unfamiliar environments.

Yes, a journey into new territory in a world of diversity can be hard. We prepare as best we can. We set our sights on the destination. Even so, getting there may be a vague, indistinct, nebulous trek. The people you think can direct you don’t always know the answers. You may not be able to discern the spoken cues that exist. Hopefully there are signs around, and you can read them.

Experienced travelers know that venturing into the unknown isn’t always smooth. That comes with the territory, and some of us are more adventuresome about it than others. However, all of us can build on the skills we possess. We can learn where the signs are, and how to read them. We can gain experience and confidence that will serve us well for any future travel across race, culture and class.

- Have you a “travel story” you’re glad not to repeat? What happened, and what did you learn from it?
- Share a story about how you learned to “read a sign” across race, culture or class.
- What challenges have you experienced or are you experiencing in reading signs?
- How could we improve on discerning spoken or unspoken cues and signs in multi-cultural situations?

Meeting Our Neighbors Completed - Continue to Exploring Cultural Depth



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*This reflection and discussion can be used in small groups or within a larger group that breaks off into smaller groups for the discussion questions and then reconvenes for feedback. It provides a context for understanding the importance of cultural formation as the congregation seeks to enter into mutual partnership and relationship with persons from another cultural background. Share the reflection in your own words, adding your own experiences and learnings.*

**Introduction:**

Culture is a complex whole that informs how we see the world and how we act and interact within it. In Part I we as individuals explored our own cultures and the values that were part of our growing up and that gave our lives meaning. As a congregation we walked back through our history to understand the culture and heritage that shaped us.

These steps of exploring culture are critical to the work of building a multicultural church. The process of exploring culture moves it from the unconscious level to the conscious level. When we become conscious of culture, we can become aware of how it guides and directs our lives and can dialogue with others about our values and how we can shape a multicultural reality together.

We become most aware of our own culture when we step outside of it. When I am immersed in my own culture 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, I have little awareness or understanding of it. I simply look at it as life and spend most of my day on “auto-pilot.” I don’t have to think about how I talk, how I interact, how I think, how I am expected to act with the people around me – everything I think, do, and say seems normal.

When I step outside my culture into that of another, however, I can see that what I take as normal is only normal for me. It is only one culture among many, one way of doing things, and one way of seeing the world. It is not the only culture – the defining culture.

In our global society, many people in our congregations have traveled around the world. Many young people are spending semesters abroad. We have a great deal more contact with cultures that take us completely outside our own reality. Recalling those experiences can help us become better attuned to our own culture and see our own cultural differences within a common U.S. culture where we become more easily tempted to overlook differences and want people to be the same – translated, same as us, where that is seen as U.S. White dominant culture.

**Joyce’s story of exploring culture:**

Several years ago I was blessed to spend a six week sabbatical in Kenya and Tanzania. I did not go with a group, but for two weeks I took my sixteen year old son with me. With no U.S. White cultural norms around anywhere, we were deeply immersed in another world. My son wrestled with the poverty he saw for the first time and was overwhelmed with the tremendous hospitality. I had to take him to a tourist hotel a couple times to get a Coke so he wouldn’t completely shut down. I had no conception prior to that of the depth of shock there can be to a person’s entire being to enter into

another culture and have to survive in another way of life.

I spent my remaining four weeks in Tanzania, living for two weeks with a family in their home. I felt connected through a value of church and “Lutheran” culture. I felt only a generation or so removed from the subsistence living of chickens, cows, and crops. While I felt deeply connected within some values, I had to step outside my own world to live in a world of values that differed around issues of time, space, and understanding of community and individuals. In daily living, I needed to be “awake” 24 hours a day as I needed to read the signs, watch for cues for interaction, and seek to understand how things were done.

The family I lived with had no electricity or indoor plumbing, but they had a watertank that was filled from a pipe that brought water to their home so they didn’t need to daily travel miles to find water. One evening when I returned to the home, I saw that they had had to go to find water, and I asked why. I was told that their water comes from a water source at the tourist hotel some small distance away. People there complained that the water pump was making too much noise, so it was shut off. I stood there confronted by the reality of two worlds and the possibility that I could have been one of those tourists.

Walking up Ilboru Road in Arusha, Tanzania, one day, I had an “aha” moment of seeing and understanding a few of the different places we stood in seeing and understanding the world. I saw the contrast between formal and informal approaches to learning and life; between structured time and time as fluid and based in relationships; between individualism and individuals within community; between an emphasis on written communication and a grounding in oral communication; between a society based on rational thought and linear movement and a society based on relational approaches and flexible and circular movement.

I came to see more clearly that my way of thinking and seeing the world was based on a historical reality, and my particular ways of life were based on generational teachings and the shaping influences of my family and community. The family I lived with, standing in another worldview, had a way of thinking and seeing based in another historical reality, with particularities also based on generational teachings and shaping influences of family and community. My way was not “better” or “more civilized.” It was simply one way, one culture with gifts to give to other cultures, and gifts to receive from other cultures.

Stepping back into my U.S. White culture was another shock as I attended my younger son’s soccer game the morning after I returned. I got there by car – surrounded by cars moving quickly toward scheduled destinations on fast-moving paved freeways. I stood on the soccer field sidelines viewing a series of carefully groomed green fields teeming with an abundance of uniformed children. Paid referees kept the rules and parents had leisure time to support their children in their efforts to develop skills of competition and individual excellence. It was challenging at that moment to stand between two worlds. I had seen and experienced a small bit of the complexity of the differences. I had been blessed with a glimpse of second sight into the depth of exploring culture and its meaning.

#### Transition:

Cultural differences can be seen and experienced at the global level, but they also happen in daily life as we experience different families and their traditions, relate to persons at work who see and experience life differently from us, as we interact with people at our children’s or grandchildren’s schools. Our lives are filled with opportunities to notice and explore the complexity of cultural differences, of learning to dance a new dance or to dance with a new partner with a different step, tempo, and rhythm.

Questions for small group discussion:

- Share your own experiences of a time you needed to interact within another culture or were aware that people were seeing and relating in ways different from yourself.
  - What did you notice?
  - How did you feel?
  - How did you react?
- Describe an event in your day or week. Explore that event for the cultural meaning that lies inside of it.
  - What does it say about how time is viewed; how people see and relate to one another; how people understand and relate to authority?
  - What does that event say about what people value?
- What feelings of awkwardness, discomfort, or uncertainty do you feel as you contemplate entering “the diversity dance” with a new partner?

Feedback:

- What insights or new meaning did you find in your sharing
- What does it take to cross cultures and glimpse life from another cultural reality?

Continue to Presentation and Discussion: Layers of Culture



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### LAYERS OF CULTURE

#### WHAT

Language  
Symbols  
Artifacts

What we see, hear and experience of culture language, signs, popular sayings, jokes, stories, folklore, art forms, heroes, dances, rituals, games, holidays, history (family, national, and global)

#### HOW

Customs, Practices, Interactional Patterns

How we live in relationship

How we celebrate, interact, communicate, express, view social roles and authority verbal and nonverbal communication patterns, family behaviors, governmental and social institutions, conversational styles, friendship patterns community roles, gender roles, expression of emotion, practices of child rearing and health care

#### WHY

Shared Values, Beliefs, Norms, and Expectations

Why we live out and manifest culture in particular ways Values, beliefs, attitudes that drive people and groups attitudes, cultural values, religious and spiritual beliefs, fears, laws, standards, norms, levels of political participation, expectations.

Walk through the explanation of the layers by drawing the layers on a board or newsprint, and/or make copies of the model for participants. [See image below]

Collectively examine the meaning of culture within the life of the congregation. You may want to use examples from “Another Cultural View” as illustrations of differences in culture and the misunderstandings that arise when acting solely from within one’s own cultural perspective.

To better understand the invisible, shaping influence of culture, we will examine it in its different dimensions and unpack it in its complexity. We will look at its layers to see how deeply it informs how we do church, and how it can serve as a barrier to welcoming people and doing church in new ways that embrace an authentic multicultural reality.

**The layers of culture are frequently described through the metaphor of an iceberg.** What we see on top is only a small fraction of the values, norms, and standards of culture that lie beneath the surface. In looking at it as a pyramid, the structure takes on greater strength. An iceberg can melt; a pyramid has been carefully constructed through the labor of thousands of people and stands strong through all the winds and sands of time.

**The pyramid diagram is a model of the layers of culture that shape and inform our lives together within a congregation, a community, and the larger society.** The layer we most often focus on is the layer of the “What” of culture. When we attend school, community, or church ethnic festivals this is the layer we most often experience. We watch dances, listen to music, buy art

or jewelry, and listen to the stories, myths, and folklore of the culture. The “What” layer also distinguishes one culture from another in terms of language, history, rituals and holidays. We can be tempted to think that we know a culture when we have experienced and shared in culture at this level. Food, music, and art are not culture. They are manifestations within a culture.

**We come to know a culture in greater depth when we look at the “How” level.**

Here we begin to understand how people interact and go about the living of their days. At the “How” level we understand and can participate in conversations that follow the rituals of the culture in greeting one another, in determining the form and substance of a conversation, in using nonverbal language, in speaking with children, parents, friends, work colleagues, and authority figures. At this level we learn our gender roles

and how we view children and the elderly. We learn how to run meetings, how to express emotions, and how to view and use time. We learn how to structure our lives together in political structures, community and social institutions, schools, and churches. When we enter a culture that is unfamiliar to us, we need to pay close attention to this level in order to negotiate life and enter into relationships with persons of that culture. We need to be alert to signs and cues that help us negotiate within the culture.

**We become more fully bicultural or multicultural when we understand and appreciate the “Why” level and when we can act out of those values.** Reaching this level in a culture in which we have not been formed and shaped is a lifelong journey. We enter this level with deep honor and respect and a deep desire to know what gives a culture its life and meaning. This is the level at which we define the values that shape the how and what of life. Our values, individual and social expectations, norms and standards of behavior, and belief system form the foundation on which the higher levels of the pyramid are built. When crossing cultures, it is critical to be aware of this layer and be able to listen without judgment to the “Why” layer of another culture.

**Cultural dominance is perpetuated when one culture establishes its values and norms as “right” and as the determiner for judging other cultures.** When White Americans don’t think of themselves as having culture, they have a tendency to simply think of themselves as the norm against which others are seen as “multicultural.” In the U.S., White cultural dominance has been perpetuated at all levels – in the telling of U.S. history from a Eurocentric viewpoint, in developing and affirming European-based images of Jesus, in defining formal structures and patterns for learning, in valuing the mind, the individual, and time as money.

**In seeking to work across cultures, we need to recognize the cultural values, norms, and beliefs that we hold are one set of values, norms, and beliefs.** The challenge for a genuine multicultural society and church is to see and understand that not all cultures hold the same values and not to judge or rate cultures based on our own value system.

**As we become intentional in incorporating other cultural symbols in worship, we need to recognize that the “What” layers are attached to the “Why” layers.** When we change music to include other cultural traditions or we hang images of Jesus from other cultures, the reaction may be intense because it is reaching down and touching a particular value or norm. Dialogue needs to happen at the “Why” level in order to shift understanding and embrace change.

### **Discussion on Layers of Culture**

Small groups can be formed around the three layers with each group looking at the questions formed around that layer and keeping notes for large group feedback and continuing discussion. The large group can focus together on the last question.

**Spend time looking at the layers of culture, addressing the following questions.**

- **Share examples of the “What” of culture in your congregation** – What food is served at congregation meals? What music and styles of worship are used? What art work hangs on the walls, or is reflected in images and symbols? What holiday are celebrated? Whose histories and stories are told? What is the length of time for worship?
  - What meaning do those symbols of culture have for you? Why?
- **Share examples of the “How” of culture in your congregation** – How are congregation rules and patterns of behavior developed and put in place? Who makes decisions and allocates resources? How are decisions made? How do people

communicate and relate to one another? How is time viewed and used? How are thoughts and emotions expressed?

- Which practices and patterns are most important to you? Why? What would it mean to you to incorporate other practices and patterns into the life of the congregation?
- **Share examples of the “Why” of culture in your congregation** – What values are important to your life together? What norms and standards guide life in your place?
  - What values would you be unwilling to change? Why? What would it mean to incorporate other values?
  - What will it take to move beyond assimilation and truly welcome other cultural norms and values and ways of doing things as part of the congregation?

Exploring Cultural Depth Completed - Continue to My Neighbor's World



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Are you living in one world while your neighborhood lives in another?

What is your level of awareness of the customs, traditions, and values of people in the neighborhood?

How regularly do members of the congregation interact with people of the neighborhood?

Through what lens do you look at your neighbors?

Is it a lens of your own cultural making – a lens that looks with judgment according to your own cultural values?

The tools of assessment in Part I helped you gather a clearer statistical question of who you are as a congregation and who the people of the neighborhood are. You have examined the complexity of culture and raised to awareness the cultural customs, practices, and norms of your congregation. The exercises in Assessment and Moving On will guide you in walking, talking, and getting to know your neighbors. Entering the world of your neighbor needs to begin with solid preparation.

In traveling to new places across the globe, we prepare by trying to learn some of the language – especially words that will help us when we get stuck. We often read guidebooks and try to learn some cultural traditions. If the congregation has become separated from the neighborhood, or if the congregation is entering into a new partnership with a congregation of another cultural background, it is important to spend the same kind of excited preparation as we would for traveling overseas.

Seek out ways to learn about the people of the neighborhood. What are the values that guide people's lives? What is/are the language(s)? Does the neighborhood include immigrant communities? What customs and practices are part of people's lives?

Note the stereotypes you have about persons in the neighborhood or the group with whom you are beginning a new partnership. Lay the stereotypes aside and begin to take a step in the diversity dance. Find ways to begin to enter the dance by walking out, rather than inviting people in. Take initial steps to immerse yourself in the neighborhood and begin to meet your neighbor again for the first time – listening with new ears, observing with new eyes. Seek to meet your neighbor without prior assumptions. Enter your neighbor's world. Listen and learn.

- **Talk with people you know who can help serve as a guide for you into the neighborhood.** How can they help you prepare? Are there persons they can introduce you to? Do you need a translator to speak more effectively with persons who are newer immigrants?
- **Become involved with those who are working to implement the Ethnic Ministry Strategies** – African descent, American Indian and Alaska Native, Arab and Middle Eastern, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latino. Listen and learn from those who are willing to teach and guide ways to become engaged with people of other racial and cultural backgrounds.

- **Take a friend and walk from the church to a neighborhood store.** What kinds of stores are available? Notice the sights, and sounds. Notice the people outside on the streets and sidewalks. Pay attention to the items sold in the store. If it is a corner grocery, how do prices compare to those where you regularly shop? What do you notice about similarity and differences in items? Listen to the people as they shop and go about their daily lives. What do you notice about them?
- **Attend a meeting at a school in the neighborhood or a local neighborhood association meeting.** Listen to the concerns being raised. Introduce yourself to a few people.
- **Acquaint yourself with other nonprofit groups in the neighboring community,** including youth serving organizations. Visit their sites, introduce yourself, ask for an opportunity to talk with someone about their organization, notice who is participating in programs or services. What do you notice about the culture of the place? Are neighborhood people actively involved in the programs or simply recipient of services? As you observe and talk with people, what can you learn about the neighborhood? Who are persons identified as neighborhood leaders
- **Attend a neighborhood event** in a park or a block party happening within the neighborhood. Who do you observe as neighborhood leaders? Introduce yourself to people, participate, and have fun.
- **Read.** Find books on suggested bibliographies found in the Additional Resources. Go to the library and check out books written by authors of the racial/cultural/ethnic groups in the neighborhood. Both fiction and nonfiction works can help transport you into another culture and way of viewing and living in the world.
- **Explore websites** that provide information about the history and story of racial and ethnic groups. Use the resources and activities available on websites such as Southern Poverty Law Center’s [www.splcenter.org](http://www.splcenter.org); and PBS’s [www.pbs.org/race/000\\_General/000\\_00-Home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm).
- **Use films and videos** to both educate and stimulate community-based discussions. Go to websites such as [www.viewingrace.org](http://www.viewingrace.org) or its related classroom site of [www.facinghistorycampus.org](http://www.facinghistorycampus.org) for an array of film resources, articles, essays, stories, and activities, including “After 9-11” film essays on “Middle Eastern, Muslim and South Asian Communities in the U.S.” and “Not in Our Town” – the story of a Montana community that banded together to fight hate crimes
- Enjoy this opportunity to meet your neighbor again for the first time. Share your observations as a leadership team. What are you learning? What are you noticing about yourself and your comfort level?

My Neighbor’s World Completed - Continue to Communication



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When you're on the road, enroute to a place you've never been, good clear print directions—and enough lighting to see them—will get you there with time to spare.

Directions may point out landmarks to look for. Better directions will tell you when you've gone too far, so you don't have to backtrack much. And better yet, the latest news on radio can tell you what roadblocks to avoid.

This list points out “road blocks” to avoid while communicating across differences. Thankfully, on any trip we take, God provides the light!

## Blocks to Listening

These roadblocks keep us from listening well and block understanding and communication. We each have our favorite. By becoming aware of which ones we use for what occasions and which people, we can find it easier to stop

1. **Comparing:** Who is better, smarter, funnier, etc.?
2. **Mindreading:** Pay little attention to words and imagine meaning.
3. **Rehearsing:** Your attention is on what you will say next.
4. **Filtering:** Listen to some things and not others.
5. **Judging:** You prejudge before you hear what they have to say.
6. **Dreaming:** You half-listen and drift into your own thoughts.
7. **Identifying:** You relate everything back to your own experience.
8. **Advising:** You hear only a few sentences and then give advice.
9. **Sparring:** You argue and debate every point.
10. **Being Right:** You will go to any length to avoid being wrong.
11. **Derailing:** You suddenly change the subject.
12. **Placating:** You want to be liked so agree with everything.

From Celebrating the Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence 2001-2010, A Resource Manual, Second Revised Edition, Fall 2000. Produced by the Fellowship of Reconciliation, 521 North Broadway, Nyack, NY 10960. Phone 845-358-4601. Fax 845-358-4924. Email: FOR@forusa.org. www.forusa.org. (This manual was a compilation using many sources, and is not paginated. This page is in their Part II: Understanding our Culture of Violence, 1) Understanding Conflict, d) Readings

Continue to Reflection and Discussion: Examining language of welcome



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Language is a powerful tool for interaction among people. When someone speaks our language, we've got immediate rapport. There's a sense that we "come from the same place" and can understand one another. We are likely to feel that the weather's good for smooth sailing.

Conversely, how comfortable are we with someone who doesn't speak our language, or doesn't speak it well? Are we willing to endure some awkward moments, for the sake of our Lord? How willing are we to adapt ourselves, so that we can be messengers of welcome? As an Asian pastor in my synod has said, "Each of us is meant to be God's love letter in the world."

What does it mean to adapt? As it is, we may be confounded in knowing what to say in our own race, culture and class. And now God wants us to communicate across cultures? Just as Jesus did by talking with the woman at the well, tax collectors and fisherfolk

Indeed that's what God wants. How do we do it? For starters, we can slow down enough to listen and learn. We can seek to hear God's voice in any intercultural interaction. We can seek out ways to foster dialogue. Communicating across cultures may not be easy. But its reward is helping to open up a space in which God's spirit can work. We may not have erected the barriers of language in the first place. But we can learn to move them.

What is a language of welcome?

Being bilingual or multilingual is a significant skill in a diverse world. That capability opens up a whole world of possible interactions, relationships, understandings, and bridges. Yes, a person who doesn't speak our language may well speak one, two or more languages that we cannot!

For most of us though, speaking the language of welcome is likely to mean practicing biblical hospitality in English. The reason it is needed is that communities can easily become isolated, each speaking in the language of their own cultures (literally or figuratively.) For example, a church community has a culture of its own, that evolves and can change over time. But often the terminology, the way we do things, is just so foreign to people who are unfamiliar with churches that we may think we are being welcoming, while sending messages that don't relate to others.

Across barriers of race and ethnicity, the giftedness of bilingual social workers, community leaders and others is of great value. Supporting these professionals and leaders is a practical way to lend support. But if we leave the crossing of barriers to bilingual or multilingual persons only, we are forsaking the role that we can play. We can all learn to speak a language of welcome, whether in English or another language. This language of welcome enables the crossing of barriers and building of commonality and interaction across cultures.

From inelegance to grace

Differences of appearance across race and culture can lead to inelegant beginnings. At church events I would often meet fellow members who would tell me, "I'm so glad you spoke to me first. I thought you wouldn't speak English, and that it would be awkward talking with you." I was always glad that this would open up conversations on race and culture. But it also saddened and frustrated

me that people of Asian heritage in the United States are so often viewed as foreign, even when we are not. And in the U.S.A., to be foreign is in too many circles considered to be second-class and devalued.

Life in the United States can be tough for people who don't speak English, or don't speak it well. Not only are job opportunities limited; each day carries a steady stream of stresses and confusions. What a great gift of love and inspiration it is, when a church reaches out to befriend immigrant people with language classes and mentoring! English is a tough language to learn. So many words are not pronounced as they are spelled, and some of the sounds may not even exist in an immigrant's language.

Have a conversation with someone who doesn't speak English often. You'll notice him/her speaking, then pausing for thought...maybe shifting their eyes upward as they think hard about what word fits the conversation. It's hard work for them. Small wonder that speaking English gives them a headache. (And if we are adult English speakers learning a "foreign language," we are likely to have a similar experience.)

How truly we can offer grace to one another, through patient listening and mutual learning!

### Speaking largely...as a church

Beyond the personal relationships we may build across cultures, we as the church together are also "speaking" about diversity through our words and deeds. What do people outside our church (whether in its local, synodical, or churchwide expression) perceive that we are saying? (Note: the assessment sections of this resource offer surveys and other methods on finding this out.)

Do people see that we are a place of welcome...  
...because diversity is woven into all aspects of our congregational life?

Are we known as a place that is knowledgeable and caring...  
...so that diverse peoples will find us relevant to their lives?

Are we a house of compassion and justice...  
...where people of various backgrounds can find friends and advocate as they worship God and learn from one another?

### Discussion Questions:

- What do you think it means to speak "a language of welcome"? Give an example. And what might it mean to adapt our language, for the sake of the gospel?
- With whom in your life are you being called to "speak first"? With whom can you impart a word or deed of encouragement, compassion, or justice?
- What group does your congregation have opportunity to speak to first, across race, culture or class? And from whom can you ask advice in planning to reach them?
- Name an example of "inelegance" in crossing a language barrier. What are some barriers to communicating? What helps to dispel inelegance/awkwardness and create more grace in communications?
- Is there a language that you would like to learn more of? Find a systematic way to begin. Take a beginner class. Volunteer to help a refugee/immigrant friend/newcomer who wants to learn American English and culture. In the process, you can learn more about their language and culture too. Keep a notebook and jot down basic phrases.

Communication Completed - Continue to Bible Study #1: Who is a Canaanite?



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# ONE BODY MANY MEMBERS

## Part 2: Meeting Our Neighbors Again for the First Time Bible Studies Bible Study #1: Who is a Canaanite?

### Please discuss the following questions in your groups (15 minutes):

1. Does your congregation reflect the racial ethnic/cultural/ economic make-up of your city/town? Is your neighborhood an enclave of exclusivism or inclusivism? Who are the Canaanites in your communities? Is there any way for your congregation to mingle regularly with other racial/ethnic/cultural/economic class groups in your city/town? What are or would be the obstacles? How comfortable would you and the congregation be in crossing racial/ethnic/cultural/economic lines and mingling with those who are different than you in significant sharing faith-based events?

Looking at yourself and your family, both your ancestors who preceded you and your children and grandchildren who will continue after you: are you/they of a pure race/ethnic/culture/economic class or are you/they of mixed blood/class?

What is your mix? What is the mix of the young ones in your family? How many young people and children do you know who are "mixed?"

What will happen with all our "mixed" children?

Where will they feel comfortable? Where will they find home? Could they find themselves at home in your congregation?

3. Are you of Jewish ancestry as Jesus and the first disciples, or did the Christian faith come to you because Jesus' disciples obeyed Jesus' mandate given to them (and to us!) at the end of Matthew's gospel (Matt. 28:19): "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit?" How ready are the disciples in your congregation, including yourself, to go befriend people of another race/ethnicity/

*(continued)*

Read Matthew 15: 21-28

(a volunteer reads; all follow along in their own Bibles).

Leader asks for a few short "gut reactions" from the reading. All listen to the variety of reactions without comments or evaluations (5 minutes).

Leader divides the group into smaller groups of five to six members, and distributes the following reflection. The reflection is to be read aloud by a volunteer in each group while the rest of the group follows along on their individual reflection handouts.

Reflection by an ELCA member  
(5 minutes to read):

This text elicits some reactions from many who read it. As an ELCA member and as a person of color, this text causes some reactions in me too. I, first of all, feel for the Canaanite woman in the text. It was not easy for her to get Jesus' attention. She "keeps shouting" after Jesus' disciples until they are annoyed at her. She physically makes her way in front of Jesus, kneels down in front of him, and moreover, asks him with a faith that Jesus himself recognizes, for a miracle of healing for her daughter. It was not easy . . . even Jesus had not welcomed her initially. Only her persistent faith carried her through her struggle to be included.

A "Canaanite"-- what is that? In Jesus' time the Canaanites were not liked by the Jews. They had been the inhabitants of the land that the Jews called home. The Canaanites were then the foreigners, the "others" that the Jews avoided. Anybody can be seen and treated and ignored today just like a Canaanite depending on the context. In other words, being or not being a Canaanite is relative to each context. I'll share with you my own story. I am Cuban-born. I lived in Cuba for the first fifteen years of my life. I was born and grew up in an upper middle class family who taught me both implicitly and explicitly that I was "white." In my veins, I was taught, ran only white European (Spanish) blood. My blood was not mixed with any other "color" blood. Those in my middle class community, church, school, called others "personas de color," literally: "people of color." We were white, they were not. They, the people of color, were the Canaanites for me and for my middle class community in Cuba. A funny thing happened, though. Due to political reasons, my family crossed the ninety miles of the Florida Strait on a boat

*(continued)*

culture/economic class and share faith stories with them, listening to theirs as well as telling your own?

***Leader will have each group briefly share their collective or individual answers to one of the questions (5 minutes).***

and landed in Key West in 1965. All of a sudden, I and my white Cuban family instantaneously became “people of color” on October 21, 1965. Still to this day some elders in my family cannot stand to be called “persons of color.” You see, the persons of color in Cuba were the “others,” the ones that were not as good and perfect as we were in Cuba with our white skin and our nice material means. They, the people of color in Cuba, were poorer, were less educated, they had more children, they didn’t look so nicely groomed as we were, their houses were not as nice, and they spent a lot of time socializing in public. We whites in Cuba saw them everywhere, but had our own private schools, our own neighborhoods, even our own better looking churches. No wonder the older generation in my family refuses to accept their new designation “of color” in this country! You see, the racial/economic class group that my family belonged to had named the Canaanites in Cuba, we knew who they were, and they were not us. And now ninety miles to the north, other “white” people designate us as the “persons of color.” We had decided who were the Canaanites for us in Cuba . . . and yes, it is hard to have others decide that we are now the Canaanites who are not included. We are not excluded by

law (not after the Civil Rights movement), but we are as a fact still excluded from many places. Aside from a few exceptions, many of the communities and institutions in the U.S., including and especially our churches, are still separated through economic, and racial lines. In the U.S., as well as in Cuba when I was there, as in other countries, the so called “people of color” are the Canaanites of our text. Being “of color,” being considered a Canaanite, is completely relative to the context. It’s completely relative to the power dynamics in each context. You change contexts, as happened to my family and me, you can find yourself being designated either “white” or “of color;” you may find yourself in the dominant economic/cultural class or lumped in with the Canaanites. Our church, the ELCA, is predominantly white in the U.S.

Continue to: Bible Study #2: Why Change?



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# ONE BODY MANY MEMBERS

## Part 2: Meeting Our Neighbors Again for the First Time Bible Studies Bible Study #2: Why Change?

### Please respond to the following questions (15 minutes):

1. Why are you a Lutheran Christian? What would you tell other Christians about your faith as a Lutheran?

Do you think our specific theological emphasis in the Lutheran church is worth sharing with other people of Christian faith? If you think it is worth it, why is it? 2. Can you think of some ways in which your congregation might be ignoring or neglecting your neighbors of other races/ethnicities/cultures/economic classes, a.k.a. the Canaanites in your city/town? What are some first thoughts you might have about changes that could be done and first step that could be taken in order to become a more diverse congregation in terms of race/ethnicity/culture/economic class? Who do you think could help your congregation build bridges with other racial/ethnic/cultural/economic class groups? Has anyone in your Bible study group ever been in a situation where a new structure for sharing power was called for in a group, and was it or was it not successful?

3. What do you think Jesus' disciples thought when Jesus finally accepted the Canaanite woman and granted her request? Do you think they felt that Jesus was really throwing the children's food to the dogs? Or do you think that they rejoiced in considering themselves and the Gentile woman as brothers and sisters under the same Lord? Do you anticipate some feelings of discomfort in your congregation as efforts to create new multicultural worship

*(continued)*

*Leader has small groups (5 to 6 persons) read Matthew 15:21-28 again, and distributes the following reflection. A volunteer in each group reads it aloud, while others follow on their reflection handouts (10 minutes).*

### Reflection

Jesus did not welcome the Canaanite woman--three times! First, he did not answer her. Then, he said to his disciples that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And then, even after she knelt in front of him and directly asked him for help, he still told her that it was not fair to throw to the dogs the children's food, implying that she was not one of his children. Only after Jesus recognized a great faith in her, only after recognizing that she indeed counted herself as one who had faith in him, did he grant her her request, and healed her daughter.

This Canaanite woman changed Jesus' mind with her persistent cries for inclusivity. "I am worth your attention, Jesus," she seemed to demand. "I believe in you, and because of that, I can persist in addressing you and asking for help, because I know whom I am addressing," she could have been thinking. Most people of color, the Canaanites in this country, are people of faith. Their deep faith has come to them from multiple generations, and for very many of them, Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior. Their faith is a great faith. But many persons of color and of faith are unchurched for a myriad of reasons. Certainly, many persons of color and of faith have not heard the liberating emphasis on grace, and not on works, of the Lutheran church. We Lutheran Christians in the ELCA are called to share that liberating and healing message with all peoples in the United States. I, a person of color and of faith, am a Lutheran Christian because I am a sinner and I rejoice in the particular emphasis of the Lutheran church that reassures me, that believes with me, that God's grace through faith is my salvation. I am Lutheran because even if I keep messing up, the sheer love of God saves me from my sins. I am Lutheran because Jesus Christ's death on the cross freed me from my enslavement to sin. I am Lutheran because I can freely respond to God's love in Jesus Christ. The ELCA persists in calling for the inclusion of more people of color in our congregations because that

*(continued)*

traditions begin and new dynamics occur in the power structure of the congregation? If you were in the position of having the responsibility to respond to congregational members that were afraid of change, what would you start by telling them about why the congregation is called to change?

*Leader asks for brief comments on one question from each of the groups (5 minutes).*

Lutheran message is worth sharing with all people, with “all nations.”

To cry for inclusion is to cry for change. Jesus’ reversal with the Canaanite woman may inspire us to change. Our congregations will have some changes to make so as to include many who are not included now, to welcome many that do not feel at home in the cultural/economic environment of the majority of ELCA congregations. Our congregations as a rule feel very “homey” to the ethnic groups that set them up in this country, but not so homey for others, especially new immigrant groups; Latinos and Asian Americans (newly arrived or with roots in U.S. land for generations); African Americans and others who have been here for a long, long time; and those not belonging to the same middle class or upper middle class of which most of our congregations are composed.

If the food of the gospel with its Lutheran emphasis on liberating and healing grace is going to be shared with more children in the U.S., we will need to pray and work

towards finding local, contextual ways of including all in our flocks. It will be hard, as it was for the Canaanite woman. It will require change, as with Jesus’ own reversal, to step out of the mission to particular Northern European ethnic groups and to a particular economic class and to struggle with diverse ways of doing things. It will require the courage to let go of the dominant position that makes us so sure that our way is the good way for all peoples, and all that others have to do is to accept our invitation to come join us and our ways. It will require wisdom and humility to listen, to learn to listen to others, and not think that we would know what they all need, and how they need it. It will require immense sacrifice on each of our parts to share smaller doses of our precious worship traditions with others’ precious worship traditions—to give as well as to receive the blessings passed on by faith ancestors of all of our diverse cultural groups. Most of all, however, it will require persistence, like that of the Canaanite woman, to keep trying different ways of stepping out and meeting and getting to know our diverse neighbors’ circumstances, histories, struggles, and hopes.

Continue to: Bible Study #3: Let us Pray



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Leader asks each small group to write a short prayer to share with the whole large group as closure for the Bible study series on Matthew 15: 21-28 (15 minutes for writing and sharing each of the groups' prayers). Suggestion: the prayers may also be made part of the Prayers of the People on Sunday mornings.

***Leader reads Matt. 15: 21-28 aloud and asks participants to briefly share with the group:***

1. times in their lives when their faith have sustained their hopes
2. their hopes for their congregation's future.

Again, the purpose is to listen to one another, not to correct anyone (10 minutes).

***Leader divides the participants again in small groups and distributes the following reflection (5 minutes to read).***

#### **Reflection**

Faith seems to have made all the difference for the Canaanite woman. She steps out of the comfort zone of her own people and runs after a Jewish Rabbi, whom she calls "Lord, Son of David," and kneeling faithfully in front of him asks him for help. She talks to him again when he tells her that it is not fair to give her the children's food. She reaffirms her faith by telling Jesus that Canaanites (the dogs) can eat the same food of the master at the same time as the Jews (the children). Jesus listens. Jesus agrees. Jesus heals her daughter.

Faith empowered the Canaanite woman to approach the one whom she recognized as her Lord, the one in front of whom she knelt, the one on whom she laid her heart—a mother's heart—and her hopes for the healing of her daughter. When we lay our hopes on our Lord, and when we prayerfully approach our God in prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, our prayers will be heard. Even if we are Canaanites who cannot heal ourselves and our children, God will hear our prayers. As we hope to change our congregational culture, as we hope to see a multicultural congregation eating together our Lord's healing food, we may easily realize that the change is going to be difficult and will require much persistence. Let us ask God through Jesus Christ to sustain our hopes through the difficulties we will face again and again as we begin our efforts toward increased inclusivity in our church. Sometimes the difficulties will come from ourselves, individually and communally. Sometimes we will encounter the difficulties in our attempts to establish dialogue with others. Sometimes we will be ignored, discouraged, or plain rejected, as the Canaanite woman was. Old wounds, old suspicions, old prejudices may threaten our efforts again and again from within and from without. Even while conquering the inner obstacles, the concrete tasks of bridge building may seem overwhelming at times. The time to build bridges and cross them back and forth will be

long and we will need to keep our faithful focus and energy. As we dream and plan for a church that is for all people we will need to persistently ask God for help. Our healing, and the healing of our neighbors of different races/ethnicities/cultures/economic classes, is the miracle we may ask for from our Lord.

Bible Studies Completed - Continue to Going Deeper



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In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois (1994) named the “problem of the twentieth century [as] the problem of the color-line” (p. 1). He noted the veil that shut African-Americans out from the White world and the gift of second sight that resulted from living behind that veil. “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p. 5).

Both the dominant U.S. society and the ELCA as a mainline Protestant denomination are based on White cultural norms and standards. Those norms and values, customs and practices, and language, symbols, and artifacts have shaped the veil that shut African Americans, Latinos, American Indian and Alaska Natives, Asian and Pacific Islanders, and Arabs and Middle Easterners out, and shut European Americans in. Living inside the veil, White U.S. Americans have looked out at and measured others, but have not consistently looked within to examine life as lived and dictated by the established dominant culture. White U.S. Americans have primarily lived within a single consciousness of the world. The challenge of living in a diverse world is to develop a double-consciousness in order to both see oneself and to understand others.

In engaging in the deep process of examination of U.S. American White dominant culture – and mainline Protestant culture – as exclusionary, it is important not to engage in guilt, blame, or condemnation, but rather to experience the process as liberating and transforming. Examining White Western Christian culture is not to condemn it or judge it but rather to recognize it and name it. It can then take its place alongside other cultures. It is also important to note that individuals vary greatly within any given culture and are informed by their sub-cultures. Becoming aware of the thick veil of culture gives new possibilities for entering into life-giving relationships that enlarge the body of Christ.

Meeting my neighbor again for the first time with full mutuality and respect is a challenging process as it calls for stepping out from behind whatever veil may shut us within our own reality. It calls us to see our neighbors from within their own reality, rather than through our own veil. It calls us to walk new paths that will inevitably transform us. When I can come to see my neighbor as a hand or an eye or a leg, rather than an ear like me, I will become a significant part of a more whole and complete body.

The journey here is one that may take us over rough and uncomfortable terrain that suddenly leads us to a spot of incredible beauty. On one of my canoe trips with youth in the boundary waters of Canada, we had an especially long and hard day with difficult, rocky, hilly portages. As we were coming to the end of the day, coming over a last particularly difficult portage, we were overcome with awe as we stepped over the last hill to see spread out before us a lake of incredible beauty shimmering in the late afternoon sun. Our spirits became larger and even the young person who had complained the most spoke with joy at having endured the day to be a part of this scene.

The journey across race, culture, and class will include hard and challenging moments as you step out into a neighborhood or into a partner relationship where you haven’t gone before. You may experience hesitancy and sincere questions as to why you are interested now. You will have rocks threatening to trip you up and hills that may seem to take more energy than you think you have to give, but the trip is worth it. The joy of

transformation – the wonder of seeing new relationships – the joy of feeling our spirits filled as we become more whole – will lead us at the end to wonder why we put off the trip so long or why we hesitated and resisted so strongly.

And the journey then will not be over. There will be more hills to climb, more portages to cross, more lakes to paddle – and new vistas of relationships that take our breath away.

Use the readings and exercises in this section to understand and work through the places where it becomes challenging and difficult. Continue to encourage one another on the journey.

Continue to Presentation and Discussion: Levels of Oppression



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# ONE BODY MANY MEMBERS

## Part 2: Meeting Our Neighbors Again for the First Time Going Deeper

### Presentation and Discussion: Levels of Oppression

#### EXPLORING AND TRANSFORMING THE LEVELS OF OPPRESSION

##### INSTITUTIONAL

Transportation  
Employment  
Government  
Education  
Religion  
Business  
Housing  
Media  
Legal system  
Health services  
(physical and psychological)  
Economics  
Policies  
Practices  
Procedures

##### CULTURAL

Values, norms  
Recreation  
Music, art  
Holidays  
Standards of beauty  
Stories, fables  
Images, symbols  
Ways of thinking, seeing  
Societal expectations (sex roles, etc.)

##### INDIVIDUAL

Attitudes  
Behaviors  
Interpersonal interactions  
Individual behaviors

Our daily lives and interactions operate at three levels of institutional, cultural, and individual. As we look at who we are and who we strive to become as a multicultural church, we need to examine our attitudes and actions at each of the three levels. The intersecting circles reflect the complex weaving of each of these levels in our everyday lives.

Look at the individual circle and examine your own attitudes, behaviors, and interactions. These have been formed and shaped over time. What we learned at home, what was taught at school and church, what we saw in cartoons and on TV, what we heard from friends—all played a role.

- What attitudes do you have about people in the neighborhood outside the congregation?
- Where and how did you develop particular attitudes or stereotypes?
- Can you name attitudes and behaviors within the congregation that may have kept people out?
- How might your behaviors as a congregation be seen by people outside?
- What attitudes and behaviors of hospitality have been important in breaking down barriers and creating a place of welcome for all?

The institutional level is the place of structures and systems that impact daily life. Our ability to be heard within institutions, to receive care or service, to be treated with respect and in a timely manner, to see persons like us represented in leadership positions and in a positive light, to have decisions made that frequently are to our benefit, to have a sense of access to resources if we try hard enough, to expect to be treated as an individual, to be evaluated on our merit – all these and many more are examples of institutional privilege for persons who are White in the U.S. Other aspects of our identity may impact the degree of institutional access, but White skin provides one key that makes access easier, and even invisible. Because access to institutions (despite the oc-

casional roadblocks and frustrations) is taken as a normal part of life, White people in the U.S. often overlook or discount the barriers that prevent People of Color or language other than English from having the ability to be seen, heard, and respected in the ways named above.

Institutional systems have been constructed within a framework of historical oppression. The history of the U.S. is founded on the superiority of White people, with only White people originally counted as full persons for the purposes of taxes. The vote was expanded from landed, White, males to include all White males as a means to provide greater distance around race among the lower classes. Slavery, the removal of American Indians from their lands, the concept of Manifest Destiny, the conquest of the Mexican lands of the Southwest, the Chinese Exclusion Act, the internment of Japanese Americans – all are examples of the historical legacy of oppression. Within that framework, institutions and the decision-makers of those institutions were White and their decisions have more often provided benefit for those who are White.

Institutions continue to be constructed with White people in mind – basing medical models on White, western health practices; educational systems on individualistic approaches; transportation systems on localized access to particular neighborhoods; elections on gerrymandered districts.

The church at large and individual congregations have been formed and shaped within the larger historical reality, and intentionally or unintentionally, perpetuate similar patterns of privilege and oppression. Worship and building surveys and prior discussions on culture highlight the White cultural norms and standards that shape the institutional church.

Examine institutional structures within your congregation:

- What policies, practices and procedures are in place within the congregation that may include some groups of people and exclude others?
- Who makes decisions and for whom are decisions made?
- How are resources used and allocated?
- Who are the persons invited to positions of leadership?
- What expectations are held for those who would be leaders?
- What changes are being made to ensure that all voices and opinions are equally heard and respected and that all persons are represented throughout the congregation's life?

The process of examining the congregation's life at all levels – individual, cultural, and institutional – is ongoing. All three levels intersect to speak a language of welcome or of exclusion. The leadership team needs to be equipped to interrupt and speak to individual attitudes and behaviors – for growth, not for blame; to begin to shift the culture of the congregation to include signs and symbols and ways of interacting and behaving that are inclusive of all the cultures represented in the congregation and neighborhood; and to continually analyze the systems and structures of power that shape the congregation's institutional life.

Continue to Presentation and Discussion: Definition of Racism



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### **ELCA Social Statement**

The ELCA Social Statement “Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture” defines racism:

#### **Prejudice + Power + Privilege**

This definition, with different group focus of prejudice and subsequent privilege, is a common definition for each group-directed oppression. Specifically for racism the definition reads:

#### **Racial prejudice + institutional or social power + White skin privilege = Racism**

It is important to note that the common link in the definition of any system of oppression – sexism, classism, heterosexism, ageism – is the central element of institutional or social power.

All persons as individuals hold prejudices. The media, families, friends, schools, even churches help to shape and form our prejudices, and we will strive throughout our lifetimes to recognize and release our prejudices.

As individuals we receive privilege simply because we belong to the group with the social power to make decisions and to shape and run institutions. Whether or not we can identify with those who hold the power, we receive a spillover effect – in varying degrees – simply from being a member of the group, whether that be White (racism), male (sexism), high middle to upper class (classism), straight (heterosexism), or between the ages of approximately 25 and 55 (ageism).

Seeing the larger perspective of the institutional and cultural levels of oppression that lie in institutional and social power can help us move from the defensive position of denying racism in ourselves as individuals, to seeing and understanding larger systemic structures that impact the lives of all people in the U.S. Despite individual attempts to counter prejudice and individual acts of racism, each person in the U.S. gets swept up within larger systems that perpetuate racism and other oppressions.

Members of the social group that holds power will find that the calendar reflects their religious holidays, standards of beauty are based on their cultural norms, history is written from the perspective of their people, literature and the arts are based on their traditions, ways of setting agendas, running meetings, and making decisions is based on their standards, and even band-aids reflect their skin color. The advantages for members of the social group in power are numerous and daily.

Reflect on the meaning of social power and the privileges it gives or does not give to persons within your congregation and the larger church.

- If you are White, what benefits do you receive because you are White within the Lutheran church?

- If you are a Person of Color, how have you internalized the oppression of the White structured church? What would you like to never see done or hear spoken again?
- How has your congregation used its power to exclude or to keep persons of a racial/cultural group different from the dominant congregation on the fringes?
- What issues of power need to be addressed and changed?

Continue to Presentation and Discussion: Stretching our Worldview



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### **Understanding Race, Ethnicity, Culture, and Class – Stretching Our Worldview**

**Race:** As discussed in “Why do We Need to Talk about Race?” – race is a socially constructed concept used to set groups of people apart because of obvious physical differences. The “obvious” was as seen and described by Europeans as racial categories were created in the 18th century. The physical differences that were chosen to differentiate people were also defined by Europeans. The social definitions of race have been fluid and changing over time. Persons designated as White has changed and expanded through the years with persons of Irish heritage and southern or eastern European heritages gradually being re-classified as White in the U.S. Persons classified in the U.S. census as Hispanic can be persons of any race

**Ethnicity:** Ethnic groups are seen as distinct based on their national origin or cultural patterns. Members of a particular ethnic group generally share a common language, family patterns, food habits, etc. Cultural traits of ethnic groups often have a long history based in their original homeland.

**Culture:** Culture is the shared pattern of life, learned through relationships and often passed down through generations, that guides our behavior and helps us interpret our experiences. Culture is often associated with race or ethnicity, but extends beyond those categories to many groups that share a pattern of life, including families, organizations, churches, deaf persons, men, women, youth, gays, lesbians, rural life, etc. While being socialized into a larger society or community culture, individuals are also part of various subcultures.

**Class:** Max Weber defined class as a social ranking of people who share a similar level of wealth and income. Class differences have historically been discounted within the U.S., with the U.S. described as a “class-less” society. Class has, however, been intricately interwoven with race and ethnicity, and class continues to play a significant role in U.S. society. Class differences play a visible role in chronic health conditions, access to medical care, vulnerability to acts of crime, access to education, etc. Race has been used to obscure class, giving lower-class White Americans the illusion of being able to overcome class and to discourage class solidarity. Class has been used to obscure race by lifting up examples of Persons of Color who have moved up the socioeconomic scale and thereby discounting the continuing discrimination by race or ethnicity.

Journeying Across Race, Culture, and Class requires awareness of the different worldviews that people hold based on their race, ethnicity, and/or class.

### **Racial and Ethnic Differences in Worldview**

While there are many individual differences and a vast number of significant differences among and between communities of color, the following are differing ways of seeing the world at a meta-level between European Americans and Communities of Color – African American, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islanders, American Indian and Alaskan Natives, and Arab and Middle Easterners:

	European Americans	Communities of Color
Guiding Beliefs	Independence Individual rights Egalitarianism Control and dominance	Interdependence Honor and family protection Authoritarianism Harmony and deference
Nature and Environment	Master over nature and environment  Human beings as superior to physical environment and entitled to use world's resources for own benefit	Living in harmony with nature and environment  Human beings as part of natural order; live respectfully with nature
Time Orientation	Compartmentalized and incremental; being on time; efficient	Time as infinite continuum; time connected with relationships
People Relations	Individual social focus; actions to actualize self	Collective social focus; do things to contribute to survival and betterment of family and community

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

- Where and how do you see these differences reflected in yourself and others
- What impact do different ways of seeing the world have on your congregation and how it does ministry and how it reaches out to persons of other backgrounds?

### Class Differences in Worldview

Because class has been discounted within U.S. society, outreach across class can often be more challenging. It is seen as invisible and a non-factor until we need to negotiate our way in a setting and among people of another class. The hidden rules of class can be confusing and overwhelming when we are called to interact outside the class norms we instinctively know.

Historically in the U.S., Lutheran congregations have been shaped within a middle-class worldview. While both rural and urban congregations may have had a mix of persons within the pews, the prevailing worldview has been a middle-class perspective of being able to make it if one tries hard enough; of looking to education and hard work as factors for success; of having access to emotional and physical support systems.

Dr. Ruby Payne has done extensive research on the mindsets of different economic classes. Her descriptions of “Hidden Rules Among Classes” is reprinted by permission. Again, generalities do not speak for all individuals and all situations.

	Poverty	Middle Class	Wealth
Possessions	People	Things	One-of-a-kind object, legacies, pedigrees
Money	To be used, spent	To be managed	To be conserved, invested
Social Emphasis	Social inclusion of people he/she likes	Emphasis is on self-governance and self-sufficiency	Emphasis is on social exclusion
Food	Key question: Did you have enough? Quantity important.	Key question: Did you have enough? Quantity important.	Key question: Was it presented well? Presentation important.
Time	Present most important; decisions made for moment and based on feelings or survival	Future most important; decisions made against future ramifications	Traditions and history most important; decisions made partially on basis of tradition and decorum.
Education	Valued and revered as abstract but not as reality	Crucial for climbing success ladder and making money	Necessary tradition for making and maintaining connections
Family Structure	Tends to be matriarchal	Tends to be patriarchal	Depends on who has money
Worldview	Sees world in terms of local setting	Sees world in terms of national setting	Sees world in terms of international view
Driving Forces	Sees world in terms of international view	Work, achievement	Financial, political and social connections

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

- What class did you grow up in?
- What strengths and limitations came out of your class background?
- How has your class background affected your relationships with people of the same and different classes?
- What are key elements of your class culture today?
- What would you like to ask people who grew up in completely different class backgrounds?
- How do class dynamics show up in your life? Your work? Your community? Your congregation?

(continued)

- What are steps you can take to overcome class barriers in your life personally and in your congregation?

The journey across race, culture, and class will present continuing challenges as we stumble over our own preconceived ideas of how people see the world. When I have been formed and shaped to see the world through a particular lens, my “default” is to see the world from that lens and expect that others see it in the same way.

Recognize that the descriptions listed do not speak for all people and all situations, but hold the awareness that people of racial/ethnic and class backgrounds different from you may see the world in a different way. Meeting my neighbor again for the first time requires deep and care-filled listening to hear those differences and to see the world with double vision.

Going Deeper Completed - Continue to Table of Welcome



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# ONE BODY MANY MEMBERS

## Part 2: Meeting Our Neighbors Again for the First Time Table of Welcome Reflection and Discussion: Setting a Table of Welcome

The image of the table – the altar table with bread and wine – the table with abundant food that satisfies the tastes of all people – the table is a symbol of invitation and welcome.

Jesus invited his disciples to sit at table with him to eat the last supper. He created a “table” of abundant food as he took loaves and fishes to feed over 5000 people. He told the parable of the banquet feast to which the poor, crippled, blind, lame, and all who would come were invited until the house would be full (Luke 15:1-24).

In I Corinthians Paul spoke repeatedly to the early Christians about their lack of welcome and their offense to one another in eating and drinking. Rather than a table of unity, the Lord’s Supper had become a place of division and a place to show off one’s food and drink at the expense of others (I Corinthians 11:17-22). Paul admonished the early Christians for their lack of hospitality and commanded them to “Examine yourselves and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (I Corinthians 11:28). He encouraged them to care for one another, to suffer together and rejoice together, as one body with many members.

**The table – then and now** – is a symbol of our unity in Christ, and yet often stands as a sign of our divisions. Who eats at table with you in your congregation – who is missing? Who are those who haven’t been invited? Is the table complete if our neighbor in need is not at the table?

**The table of community gathering** – then and now – is a table of sharing food and story and building up the body of Christ, and yet also stands as a place of separation and exclusion.

As a human community moments of our greatest joys are often celebrated around food and company. Moments of celebration in our congregations generally include food and time for sharing. We connect with one another and strengthen our relationships as we eat together.

**Meeting our neighbor – inviting and welcoming our neighbor** – means welcoming our neighbor to the table of our gathered fellowship. Taking time to sit and eat together and to hear the stories of our invited guests around food is an invitation of great meaning. God asks us to invite in a way that people feel and know that the invitation is genuine; that our invitation is not to make it easy for us, but to make it easy for those we invite. We invite people to sit and eat with us in our homes and congregations with the intent to honor them with our serving.

**Consider the meaning of food and invitation within the life of your congregation:**

- What foods have nourished people in the congregation through the years? Describe the foods and the feelings of nourishment.
- Who are those regularly invited to the fellowship table of the congregation?
- Who does Jesus invite to that table?
- If the image of your congregation were the image of a table, what foods would be set on it; how would it be set: how inviting would it be and to whom?
- How are you being called to stretch in presenting your congregation as a table of welcome?

(continued)

- As you invite new people to the table, how do they “taste and see that the Lord is good” at the table you offer?

As you invite people of the community, members of a partner congregation, members of a congregation with whom you share a building – take turns in extending hospitality; work to offer hospitality together – share each other’s foods – rejoice in one another’s company. The act of receiving hospitality is an important act of mutuality and acknowledgment that we have much to receive even as we offer ourselves in giving.

**As food is shared, encourage people to talk about their experiences of food with all the connected people and feelings.**

- Share stories of holiday and family meals.
  - o Who got together for those special meals?
  - o What were your favorite foods?
  - o What did “Grandma” make?
  - o Who passed on the favorite family recipes?
- What is precious about eating and drinking together?

In Acts 10, after Peter preached the Good News to the Gentiles and baptized all those who heard the word, Cornelius and his household invited Peter and those who came with him to stay with them. Peter and the six accompanying believers stayed with them for several days. Jews and Gentiles sat and ate together. Coming together in the word led to a coming together in eating. And eating together led to a new and changed reality.

Continue to Reflection and Discussion: Making Mistakes-Saints & Sinners



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My faith tradition teaches us that we can have both love for ourselves and others and realistic expectations at the same time. We teach that all of us are capable of hurting each other all the time. Even our best qualities can, without our intent or knowing, become a source of pain for other people. My faith tradition also teaches that we are simultaneously “saints and sinners”—not either/or, but both. This means that we are beloved children of God in both our “saintly” moments and in our times of discord. Consciously accepting that we are capable of both good and bad, we are not surprised when there is conflict or hurt in a church

—which, after all, is made up of people.

- How can a “best quality” become a source of pain for another person?
- Share some of the experiences of hurt or conflict that have come up during this time of transition. How have those moments reflected both saint and sinner?
- What are some ways in which a faith community can guard against doing damage?
- What does it take to learn to accept the failings and foibles of others?

This teaching reminds us to be on the lookout for the ways our behavior in the faith community is doing damage, additionally reminding us that we can expect to be hurt sometimes, too. The absence of hurtful things is not what marks a genuine faith community; it is marked by what we do after hurtful things happen...

To be a part of a faith community is to accept that none of us gets it right. In learning to accept the failings and foibles of our brothers and sisters in the community, we can begin to accept our own.

And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. (Lord’s Prayer)

—by the Rev. Terry Kylo, *Being Human: The Image of A Serving God*, Cold Tree Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 2004, pages 15-16.

Table of Welcome Completed - Continue to Action Steps



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“There is so much to learn. I’m always afraid I will make a mistake.”

“I’m not sure I can do this. I don’t think I know enough.”

“How do I keep trying when I don’t receive a response?”

Meeting our neighbors again in a new way is not an easy journey. There is always more to learn, and we will always make mistakes. If we wait until we think we know enough, we will never get started. Jesus sent his disciples out in twos with an openness to receive from those to whom they were sent. They went with expectation, and sometimes they were rejected. Jesus never promised an easy road, he simply said, **“Go. Go and tell. Go and do likewise.”**

And so we go – with an openness in our hearts and minds to hear and receive. With knowledge and confidence in our own gifts, we go out to meet our neighbors to receive their gifts. It is important to look at our neighbors in order to see their gifts, not to see their deficits or failures. As we listen to people in order to form new friendships, we listen for what we have in common and we work to build on that. Listen for the similarities as you meet your neighbors. What are their cares and concerns in life? What worries do they have about their children and grandchildren? What are their hopes? Listen always with an openness to receive what is offered and be open to wonderful new surprises.

As you welcome new people into the life of your congregation, you will be transformed. Remember to regularly celebrate together as you continue on the journey. Your celebrations will probably become more festive and joy-filled as the community of your congregation expands.

**Use these tools as needed to help you in your walk of meeting your neighbors and assessing your next steps for growth.**

Continue to Leader Tips and Action Steps – Neighborhood Walk



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**Once you have listened to community members and/or neighborhood leaders, become familiar with the neighborhood's history, celebrated your congregation's story, examined your congregation's culture, and reflected on your challenges, you need to take specific action**

The next step is to prepare to go out into the community to learn as much as you can about it. You will need to know who and what is in the neighborhood and how best you can fit it. Rather than going out to get people to join the congregation, take a look at what needs to happen so the congregation can join the neighborhood.

### **A program in process**

Know that when you go out, you will not only enter another world, but also a program already in process. The script for this program has already been written without you. Your jumping in will require improvisation on all parts and eventually rewriting of the script. You cannot just jump in with your little script in hand, convince everybody that your script is better than theirs, and get them all to go along with you. No, you are joining their program. They couldn't wait. They had to start without you, while you were busy inside your comfort zone. Keeping this in mind will enable others to trust you as you go beyond your walls.

Ask yourselves, "Do they even want us here?" If your congregation has not been a contributing, integral part of the community, perhaps the answer is no. If all you have done is keep a tax exempt piece of realty from becoming blighted, perhaps not. If your building and grounds have been exclusively your domain and look like a country club next to the rest of the neighborhood, perhaps not. If you have been quickly driving in and out of the neighborhood for years, perhaps not.

On the other hand, perhaps they would welcome you with open arms. Some will say, "It's about time. Welcome to the community." Others may be angry and resent your late entry. And there will be everything in between. I bet you can't wait to find out

Reprinted from Miguel de Jesús, *Beyond Our Comfort Zone: Developing Social Ministry Programs in Multiethnic Settings*, Augsburg Fortress, 2002, page 15.

In taking those steps out of the building and into the neighborhood, Miguel suggests a number of important points to keep in mind. These are significant whether you are entering a neighborhood around you whose background has changed from that of the congregation or whether you are entering a community of people who have recently settled within the larger community.

### **Preparation**

Walking humbly – If the congregation has not been actively involved in the community, walk gently and humbly. Despite the needs you may see, people in the community have been living their daily lives in ways that have also made use of their internal strengths and resources. What you may see on the surface through your eyes may look quite different from someone else's perspective. Keep in mind the realities of culture. Be careful – over and over again – to check your judgments. You are stepping

out to see, hear, and experience the community through the eyes, ears, and realities of those who live within the community.

Listen – “You are going from merely being there in the neighborhood in a semi-invisible state, to going out and engaging others in conversation and eventually a long-term relationship. It cannot be said enough that no one of us, no group of us, has all the answers” (de Jesús, p. 25). As you walk, listen carefully with ears, but also your eyes and heart. This requires being fully present in the moment and being aware of and listening beyond your filters. Some people will live up to your worst expectations and stereotypes, but most will not. Be open to discovery.

Be yourself – If you have not regularly walked in the community, people will likely notice that you are different and your body language may convey your discomfort. Be genuine and be yourself. Walk as you would in entering the home of a friend and receiving hospitality. Begin your walk with prayer and be open to receive.

The team – Prepare together as a team, being aware of your fears and challenges and be prepared for surprises. Be comfortable with the two or three you walk with. You may want to plan a time when members of your team can go out in twos or threes, walking in different directions within a two to three block radius. Don't make your group or groups so big that it looks like a tour.

Information gathering – Before you go, identify information or resources that you will be looking for. Notice signs of investment and disinvestment in the community. Notice the types and condition of housing, schools, businesses, organizations, banking, transportation, community and professional services. Be alert to the gifts and resources of the community.

Find a neighborhood guide – From the information gathered in the assessment of congregation and community, identify persons who could serve as guides for your walk. A guide who knows the community can help interpret and advise you as you walk and is also a person who brings street smarts, recognition, and hopefully, respect as you walk together.

### **The Walk**

Walk the neighborhood to experience what is there. Walk during daylight hours and be aware of what you need to know regarding safety. Your neighborhood guide can help you more fully engage with the community.

See this as home – “Walk in the shoes of the people who live in the neighborhood. See with new eyes. See this as a place where people are born, fall in love, raise their children, play outside, do their shopping and their laundry, feel safe walking the streets, are afraid to walk the streets, attend worship, visit with neighbors, live out a history, die, and do everything that you do in your life. Visualize yourself as a resident of this neighborhood.

“Be aware of the way you look at people in the neighborhood. What are your inner thoughts about them? What do you believe about them? What do you think you know about them? What if these things are not true? What if they are misinformation and stereotypes? Examine your attitudes, assumptions, and behaviors. Be honest and pray” (de Jesús, p. 29).

Listen with all your senses – Be alert to notice the information or resources that you had noted earlier. If you can't find a resource you had listed, ask someone. Enter into conversations with people as opportunities present themselves. Notice the sights, sounds, smells.

Go into public places – Make a mental shopping list of things you regularly buy. What can you buy in the community and at what price? What are the choices and variety? What things are not available? What kinds of foods are available in the local grocery store? Look for real estate or rental offices and ask about available housing. Note the lowest and highest rent available in the community. Notice the financial institutions and transportation available to people in the neighborhood.

Be alert to the important people and institutions in the neighborhood. What is the role of schools, churches, neighborhood organizations, youth agencies? Is there a park, corner, or spot where people gather? Ask your guide about the significance of these gathering spots. Notice what is going on before you talk with people in these gathering areas so you don't walk into a drug deal or other situation in which you would not be welcome.

### **After the Walk**

Debrief and share information – “Once you have gathered enough information on your walk, go back to the church building and share your observations. Talk about and record what you have seen, how it makes you feel, and what you think about it. Compile and share anything you have learned or insights you might have. What did you discover about your attitudes, assumptions, and behavior toward the people in the neighborhood? Be honest. Make a list of the resources you found. Pray together” (de Jesús, p. 31).

Celebrate and prepare for the next steps – Celebrate all you have done and all you have learned. Communicate your learning and your excitement with the congregation. The process of deepening your self-understanding as a congregation will be ongoing, but it is now time to walk with both feet – with one planted in the congregation and its gifts, history, and culture, and one planted in the community and its gifts, history, and culture.

Continue to Interviews & Discussion: Does the neighborhood know your church?



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- Are you as a local church integral to your community?
- Would you be missed if you were not there?
- How are you doing on meeting needs?
- What are your challenges for growth as a congregation to fully be one body with many members?

The answers to these questions will tell you how you are perceived in your neighborhood. The responses will also point out where communication needs to be improved. And with better communication, your congregation can become a brighter light to the world!

Here's a simple tool. Survey the neighborhood by conversing with shopkeepers and others with whom you are normally in contact. Ask them:

- How long have you been in \_\_\_\_\_?
- Do you know of the church on \_\_\_\_\_?
- What kind of programs do they have that you are aware of?
- If there was one thing that this church could provide for you and your family or organization, what would it be?

After you have completed interviews, share your information in light of the opening questions.

As you develop relationships with persons in the community and after you have attended events at other places in the community, invite people to your congregation. Offer community based Bible studies. Discern needs for spiritual growth. Invite participation in shaping ministries that you and members of the community can offer together.

Adapted from Pastor Albert Triolo, Ascension Lutheran Church, Deer Park, NY.

Action Steps Completed - Continue to Self Reflection



Many congregations involved in community or congregation-based organizing are actively involved in a one-on-one listening process in their congregations and communities. It is a structured process that seeks to build relationships and discover concerns, interests, commitments and resources. You can learn more about the ELCA's congregation-based organizing at its website <http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Congregation-based-Community-Organizing>.

The act of listening that is part of any organizing activity is an act that is central to all human relationships. Whether the hoped for outcome is one of political strength and voice in the community; of collective action to address a community concern; of identifying community resources; or to build relationships that are key to a strong congregation and community – the process of listening with care and intent stands at the center.

As you begin to get to know people in the community – possibly people who participate in programs or ministries of the congregation or who begin to attend worship or parents or grandparents of children who participate in programs at the church – ask to have an opportunity to visit with them. Use the time to listen and build a relationship.

As a congregation seeks to meet its neighbors again for the first time, the act of listening is essential. Too often we listen to our neighbors (even our families and friends) with our minds already fixed on what we think they will say or want or need. Too often we listen with preconceived ideas based on stereotypes or past patterns, or listening only partly while we are really thinking about what we want to say. Listening again for the first time means sitting down with our neighbor to really hear what our neighbor has to say. It means talking less and listening more.

As we enter the world of our neighbor and seek to listen, we listen at a deeper level to all of the layers of life. We listen past our own cultural and class biases to step into the place where our neighbor lives and experiences life. We enter into a place where we can come to know one another as human beings – to build a relationship based on trust and genuineness. The act of listening is an ongoing process – not a one-time event. To truly enter the world of our neighbor means we commit ourselves to our own process of transformation even as we commit ourselves to listen to our neighbor. When I have truly heard my neighbor's story, it becomes part of my story, and I am forever changed.

**Guidelines for listening:**

- Set a time and place where you can be free from interruptions
- Focus on listening – not on talking
- Ask about the person's family, activities, interests
- Take the direction of the conversation from the person you are listening to
- Listen for feelings and concerns and ask further questions that can clarify points and move beyond surface conversation
- Ask about visions and concerns for the community and for the congregation

- Thank the person for his/her time and continue to stay in touch and build the relationship

It is helpful to take notes after the conversation. As members of the leadership team use your collective notes to more clearly discern the needs and concerns expressed and to hear where God may be leading you as a congregation.

Continue to For Discussion: Reflections on Steps in the Journey



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You have been moving around the circle of learning – asking questions, searching for answers, acting on your thoughts and learning, and now it is time again for the fourth step in the learning circle – reflecting on your actions and learning in order to ask new questions. And then begin the process again in our lifelong journey of living as one body with many members.

As a leadership team, reflect on your growth and the transformation that you are seeing in the congregation. Engage in reflective discussion with one another and the congregation.

- How has the vision of the congregation taken life?
- What insights and understanding do you have of the cultural values and norms, customs and practices, and symbols and rituals that are important to your life together as a congregation?
- What are signs that the life of the congregation is expanding to embrace other cultures?
- How has the congregation grown in its spiritual and relational life?
- What are the difficulties and challenges that have been encountered along the way?
- Acknowledge the places of pain and feelings of loss. Re-visit the sections on fears, hesitations, and loss as that is needed. What we are afraid of losing becomes clearer as things change and we miss some things of the past. Lift those feelings in prayer.
- Have you come up against new or unexpected barriers and resistance? If so, how can you address the barriers?
- What old messages are resurfacing that make it hard to continue to trust God and the process of growth and transformation?
- In what ways has it been difficult to cross race, ethnicity, or class? What are the challenges you face within yourselves and the congregation; what are the challenges and frustrations you face as you interact with the community?
- What have you learned from the people in the community?
- What gifts are new people bringing to the congregation? How can those gifts be fully embraced?
- How are you doing on meeting your neighbors? What skills do you need to continue to develop?
- What have you learned about who you are as a congregation within this community? How do you see your place in the community?
- In what ways has the congregation grown as one body with many members?

- Talk about experiences of life-giving spirit, energy, and joy. Celebrate the growth.
- What does it mean now to live into your vision with ministry plans that meet the spiritual, educational, and mission needs of the congregation and the community?
- What are your new areas for growth?

Continue to Part 3: One Body Many Members



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