



# **PARTICIPANT SECTION**

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# Preface



I am often asked what signs of hope I see for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The invitation for White Christians to journey from privilege to partnership is one very hopeful sign. From its beginning in 1988, the ELCA has made a firm commitment to become an increasingly multicultural and an intentionally anti-racist church. Our continual failure to fulfill that commitment raises significant questions regarding the integrity of our witness to God's love in Christ for the whole creation and causes deep concern for our viability in an increasingly and richly diverse context.

Many will be uncomfortable with the phrase "White Christian." We still prefer to identify ourselves with the culture and country of our immigrant ancestors. Even more disturbing is the word "privilege." It is far easier for us to identify what we lack than confront the benefits that come to us by virtue of being White. Yet until we, in a spirit of humility and repentance, are willing to explore the power, privilege, and prejudice that belong to us as White Christians, it may be impossible for us to become the multicultural church I believe most of us sincerely desire to be.

This study is an invitation to explore who we are. Therefore it begins and ends in baptismal waters. Water, together with God's Word of promise, is cleansing and healing as we are bathed in God's grace in Christ. Yet these waters are also troubling, for in them each day the power and privilege to which we have become so accustomed is put to death. We are raised to new life in Christ reconciled to each other. We are set free in faith to work for justice and peace. Therefore let us not be passive, unknowing participants in systems that perpetuate power and privilege. Rather, let us join as partners in the relentless pursuit of a more just world.

The ELCA social statement "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture," is very clear. It says, "Racism, both blatant and subtle, continues to deny the reconciling work of the cross. God's forgiveness frees us from the enslavement of racism. For some, this may mean giving up power or privilege; for others, it may mean giving up anger or prejudice. Let us know this reconciliation in our lives!" (p. 5)

May the journey you begin through this study lead not only to new insights, but also to bold action. We look forward to being transformed by the Spirit from persons of privilege to partners in building not only a more inclusive and multicultural church, but also a more just world.

God's peace be with you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark S. Hanson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Mark S. Hanson, Bishop Emeritus

# Definitions of Racism and White Privilege



The ELCA Social Statement “Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture,” defines racism as “a mix of power, privilege, and prejudice” (p. 4). This complex mix moves racism—and any system of oppression—out of the realm of simple individual feelings and actions into the realm of cultural and institutional systems. It is a definition that addresses the systemic nature of racism within the United States since the arrival of Europeans.

Power is the key that locks the system of racism and any system of oppression in place. Prejudice is a set of negative beliefs generalized about a whole group of people. All people hold prejudices, but only the dominant group has the power to enforce laws, establish institutions and set cultural standards that are used to dominate those who are the subject of their prejudice. For example, only White people had the institutional power to establish separate and unequal schools for White children and children of African American or American Indian heritage. Only White people had the institutional power to establish and enforce past Jim Crow laws and current drug laws that disproportionately target crack cocaine users who are more often people of color over powder cocaine users who are mostly White. White people established standards of beauty and defined the cultural norm of individualism. All White people do not have individual power, but all White people benefit from dominant White cultural and institutional power.

White privilege is the spill over effect of racial prejudice and White institutional power. It means that a White person in the United States has privilege, simply because one is White. It means that as a member of the dominant group a White person has greater access or availability to resources because of being White. It means that White ways of thinking and living are seen as the norm against which all people of color are compared. Life is structured around those norms for the benefit of White people. White privilege is the ability to grow up thinking that race doesn’t matter. It is not having to daily think about skin color and the questions, looks, and hurdles that need to be overcome because of one’s color. White privilege may be less recognizable to some White people because of gender, age, sexual orientation, economic class or physical or mental ability, but it remains a reality simply because of one’s membership in the White dominant group.

# Why a Resource for White Christians on Privilege and Partnership?

The ELCA Social Statement defines racism, with its mix of power, privilege and prejudice, as sin and “a violation of God’s intention for humanity” (p. 4). The church has participated in the sin of racism as it has used its power to intertwine White cultural norms with the stories of the Gospel. The church has perpetuated the definition of “White” as right and pure, and “Black” as sinful and unclean. Pictures of a White Jesus—although born in the Middle East—permeate churches. In essence, White privilege needs to be addressed because as Christians we have “missed the mark” and fallen short of God’s intention for humanity. The church has fallen short of God’s intent for us to be one in Christ (Galatians 3:28), and missed the mark of “loving your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39), particularly neighbors of color who have experienced firsthand time after time the effects of White privilege, the effects of power and control.

The church has perpetuated the definition of “White” as right and pure. . . Pictures of a White Jesus, although born in the Middle East, permeate churches.

This resource addresses the need to examine the sin of racism and its affect on mission and ministry within a multicultural society. It does that by addressing White Christians. The time has come to examine the question of why the ELCA, and other mainline Protestant denominations, remain so White and so exclusive of others. The church cannot become inclusive without first telling the truth about how it consciously and unconsciously operates in exclusive ways.

In this resource, participants will seek to discover what has been lost because of racism and its accompanying White privilege and what needs to be found (Luke 15). Participants will enter the river with Naaman the great Syrian military leader (2 Kings 5) and will explore what needs to be left behind in order to be healed. Participants will work to recognize the truth of who we have been and who we are. The truth needs to be revealed—the truth about the history, legacy, and “present-ness” of racism and White privilege in our society and in our church. The great reformation text is applicable here—“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32).

This church (the ELCA) of the Reformation needs to confront the truth that we remain predominantly White, while society is continually becoming more multicultural.

This resource was developed to confront and discuss openly the truth of our past and present in order to be set free to move from privilege to partnership. It was developed to work toward the vision of “that Rainbow Church, that beloved community” where all are treated as people created in the image of God. Only when we become like the Shepherd and the woman who intently searched after what was lost, or become like Naaman and are willing to enter into



the river of truth, will we be healed and set free to re-form our church so that it looks and acts more like what God desires and intends for the Church universal and for all of creation.

Why address White privilege? Because as White people and as disciples of Christ we need to move from privilege to partnership. We need to know and understand privilege in order to work in new ways toward partnership, in which we intentionally appreciate, respect, learn from, and equally share power with our neighbor whose cultural identity and past is different from ours. The journey requires intentionality in moving out of our safe and secure sanctuaries of home and church and into our local and global neighborhoods to meet, listen and enter into relationship with our neighbors of color — those with whom we have missed the mark of loving as our self.

The ELCA Social Statement “Freed in Christ” states, “Because of sin and indifference, intentional measures are necessary for vision to become reality” (p. 5). This resource is such an intention.

# Entering the Waters

Troubled waters of large rapids can be dangerous to those who have the courage to enter. Those waters need to be negotiated with a skilled and experienced guide and trust in those with whom one journeys. Waters of a whirlpool are purposefully stirred up and troubled in order to provide healing. The troubling waters of this journey will require the courage to enter dialogue that seeks truth. It will require trust in the group of participants and the guidance of the facilitator. And it requires an openness to enter into the process for the purpose of healing from years of racism, unspoken White privilege and separation from people and communities of color.

The African American spiritual “Wade in the Water” repeats the words, “God’s a-goin’-a trouble the water” (*Renewing Worship R159*). The roots of this song can be traced back to a slave song from before the Civil War that served as a coded song with escape instructions. The words have been changed through time, but the reference to God’s help in leading to freedom is still clear.

This yearlong process begins with the premise that White Christians need healing from the effects of racism in order to find new freedom for full multicultural partnership. The journey is based in the same hope and prayer of the song “Wade in the Water,” that God will trouble the waters in a way that provides healing—healing from what has been lost in personal identity in being “White”—healing from fear and separation—healing from attitudes of prejudice and superiority. The process is based in scripture to discern where God is leading and guiding the church.

The journey toward freedom and partnership for White Christians is made more difficult by the invisibility of the chains that hold one captive to cultural systems and institutional structures based on White privilege. Exercises in this resource help to make those realities visible. Activities and discussion lead White Christians to address the specific role White people play in maintaining systems of racism. The resource raises questions of what it means to be White and how greater awareness, understanding, and commitment can lead to development of a new White identity that is consciously aware of systems of racism and actively working for change.

This yearlong journey begins at the baptismal font to remember the lifelong journey of daily dying and rising to new life. Each session begins and ends with a reminder of the healing and cleansing waters of Baptism. The resource is not based on guilt or blame, but rather on the responsibility as Christians to see, know, and understand truth. Participants will examine the history of the United States, the Church, and their own personal history for the legacy of White privilege. Within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), despite a commitment in 1988 to become a church of 10 percent of the people of color or language other than English, the church remains majority White, non-Hispanic. Despite good intentions and past hopes, the journey to be a multicultural church is unfinished. Simply opening the doors and saying, “All are welcome,” is clearly not enough. This process is an intentional journey to enter into addressing hard questions of what needs to die in order for new life to rise.



The commitment to enter into this study should not be made lightly. It will mean re-examining old learnings and seeking after new ways of relating. It may mean giving up some old cultural traditions. It may include pain, tears, and challenge. Entering troubled waters to seek healing requires courage, trust, and a willingness to join with others to seek a church of full partnership. Welcome to the journey.

## Journey Overview

**SEASON OF ADVENT:** A time of new beginning. These sessions engage participants in looking at God's promise and vision and in beginning the journey to examine White privilege.

### **Session 1: Beholding God's Vision**

Genesis 1: The Story of Creation  
Introduction to Study and Group Guidelines  
Rivers and Revelation

### **Session 2: Remembering Stories**

Luke 1 – The Story of the Promise of the Birth of John the Baptist  
Share the Story of My Cultural Journey

### **Session 3: Brokenness and Promise**

Creating the River  
Genesis 3 and 4 — The Vision is Broken  
Create the River of America

**SEASONS OF CHRISTMAS AND EPIPHANY:** A time of new insights and understanding. These seasons provide time and guidance for remembering one's own story and for listening and learning from people of color and for hearing history and stories often untold.

### **Independent Reading, Viewing, and Conversations**

### **Session 4: Listening and Learning**

Share the Epiphany Journey

**SEASON OF LENT:** A time for repentance. Weekly sessions lead participants in Bible study and discussion to examine the legacy of racism and White privilege in the United States, both in the church and in one's own personal history.

### **Session 5: Searching for What is Lost**

Luke 15:1-10 – Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin  
"Whiteness" Exercise

## Journey Overview *(continued)*

### **Session 6: Entering the Story of the United States**

Recall the Early History of North America  
Develop the Timeline of the United States

### **Session 7: Examining Attitudes of Privilege**

Definitions of Social Dominance, Racism and White Privilege  
Matthew 15:21-28 – Jesus and the Canaanite Woman  
Social Dominance and Privilege

### **Session 8: Entering the Story of the Church**

Examine Foundational Attitudes and Beliefs  
Develop the Timeline of the Church

### **Session 9: Examining the Construction of Culture**

Luke 10:25-37 – The Parable of the Good Samaritan  
Examine Culture and the Lutheran Church

### **Session 10: Entering My Story of Privilege**

Chains of White Privilege  
Celebration of Resistance of People of Faith

**SEASON OF EASTER:** A time of new life. Through the story of Naaman, participants will explore the process of healing from the disease of racism and examine the steps to a new White identity and a multicultural church.

### **Session 11: Entering the Healing Waters**

2 Kings 5:1-14 – The Healing of Naaman  
Journey toward Healing from Racism

### **Session 12: Walking the Journey toward New White Identity**

Journey of White Racial Identity Development

### **Session 13: Building toward a Multicultural Church**

Journey from Exclusion to Inclusion for White Congregations  
Explore Steps for Change

P10

**SEASON OF PENTECOST:** A time for action. The story of Peter and Cornelius will guide participants in prayer and vision and in taking steps to live out the vision of an inclusive church.

### **Session 14: Stepping Out in Faith**

Acts 10:1-11:18 – Story of Peter and Cornelius  
Steps to Act on Faith Commitments – Prayer



**Session 15: Beholding God’s New Vision**

Acts 10:1-43 – Story of Peter and Cornelius

Steps to Act on Faith Commitments: – Vision, Giving Up Old Messages, Commitment to Risk Taking, Gathering Community

**Session 16: Taking Steps to Act**

Acts 10:44-48 – Story of Peter and Cornelius

Steps to Act on Faith Commitments—Taking Action, Receiving Hospitality

**Session 17: Reporting Back and Reflecting**

Acts 11:1-17 – Peter and Accompanying Believers Report to Jerusalem

Steps to Act on Faith Commitments – Reporting Back and Reflecting

Meet with Congregation Council and Other Appropriate Groups for Report and Action

**Session 18: Experiencing Change . . . Praising God . . . Continuing the Journey**

Acts 11:18 – Story of Praise and New Beginnings in Jerusalem

Steps to Act on Faith Commitments – Experiencing Change, Celebrating and Praising God, and Continuing the Journey





# A Social Statement on Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture



*Adopted by a more than two-thirds majority vote as a social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by its third Churchwide Assembly on August 31, 1993, in Kansas Cty, Missouri.*

## FACING GOD

### 1. A Time of Vision

For us as members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America there is one God and one Lord, Jesus Christ, “. . . through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1Cor 8:6).

Scripture speaks of one humanity, created by God. It recounts our rebellion and enslavement to sin. Scripture tells of a diverse people reconciled to God through the blood of the cross, a people set free for the work of reconciliation. It heralds a new freedom and future in one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

If the story of Babel is of a people scattered, the story of Pentecost is of a people called and gathered. Christ brings together the scattered children of God (John 11:52). The Holy Spirit breathes the freedom of the Gospel into the Church, where every people under heaven is represented.

A humanity enslaved to sin has been set free; a Church has been gathered in freedom. Cultural differences still matter, but they can be seen for what God intends—blessings rather than means of enslavement.

### 2. A Time of Confession

The Church is built on the confession made by Peter (Mat 16:13-20) and by Martha (John 11:1-27), when they declared Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of God. From age to age the Church proclaims Christ, who was crucified for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Rom 4:25).

The Church confesses Christ, who has broken down the dividing wall (Eph 2:14). Christ, our peace, has put an end to the hostility of race, ethnicity, gender, and economic class. The Church proclaims Christ, confident this good news sets at liberty

those captive behind walls of hostility (cf. Luke 4:18).

The Church looks toward the freedom of the reign of God, announced by and embodied in Jesus. But Christians live between the “now” of the reign of God and the “not yet” of its fulfillment. Trusting the promise of freedom, we can face the fact that each of us is captive, each of us is in bondage to sin (1 John 1:8).

Therefore, we confess our sinfulness. Because we are sinners as well as saints, we rebuild walls broken down by Christ. We fall back into enslaving patterns of injustice. We betray the truth that sets us free. Because we are saints as well as sinners, we reach for the freedom that is ours in Christ.

### 3. A Time of Commitment

We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, with the whole Church, look forward to the time when people will come from east and west, north and south to eat in the reign of God (Luke 13:29). For the Church catholic, diversity of cultures is both a given and a glimpse of the future.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has roots in church bodies with a strong immigrant history. These churches kept the faith once delivered to the saints in ways appropriate to the cultural background of their membership. Besides preserving the faith, they furthered mission and ministry.

The Christ to whom the Church witnesses is the Christ who breaks down walls of cultural exclusivity (Mark 7:24-29; John 4). We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have recognized ourselves to be in mission and ministry in a multicultural society, and have committed ourselves to welcome cultural diversity. Given our history, the commitment was neither quick nor easy.

# Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture *(continued)*



The commitment was made, though, in these and other ways:

- the goal that, within the first ten years of its existence, ten percent of this church's membership would be African American, Asian, Hispanic, or Native American;
- the adoption of an organizational principle providing for the representation of cultural diversity on churchwide staff and on boards and other decision-making bodies; the creation of a Commission for Multicultural Ministries and adoption of a Multicultural Mission Strategy;
- the encouragement of people of African Descent, Asian, Arab and Middle Eastern, Latino, and Native American associations; the recognition of the Slovak Zion Synod and German, Hungarian, Finnish, and Danish special interest conferences; the regard for distinctive cultures, such as the Appalachian culture; the assertion that deafness leads to the creation of a unique language and culture, and a new context for ministry;
- the effort to start and to support ministry in people of African Descent, Asian, Arab and Middle Eastern, Latino, and Native American, or multicultural settings; the effort to recognize and to empower pastoral leaders while honoring their cultures; the effort to provide resources in languages other than English;
- the public policy advocacy at state, federal, and international levels that seeks to eliminate racial or ethnic discrimination; the private sector advocacy that encourages corporate social responsibility for community development;
- the attention to inclusivity by seminaries, colleges, and social ministry organizations of the church; and
- the respect for cultural diversity in the work of global mission.

## 4. A Time of Spiritual Crisis \* [see addendum]

We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America rejoice in our freedom in Christ Jesus. But we know we must persevere in *our commitment* to follow Christ and to serve neighbor, and live up to our specific *commitments*. While we have taken many measures fitting to a church in mission and ministry in a multicultural society, we still falter.

We falter in what we do, or in refusing to carry out what we have promised to do. We falter through ignorance of what we have done or left undone. We falter when we cling to old ideas that prevent us from becoming the people God calls us to be.

With all Christians everywhere, members of this church live in a time of crisis (Rom 2:1 ff.). We are torn between the freedom offered in Christ, the new Adam, and the captivity known by the old Adam. We are torn between becoming the people God calls us to be and remaining the people we are, barricaded behind old walls of hostility.

The social, economic, and political dimensions of the crisis are acute, and indications of it abound. A burning cross reminds us that blatant acts of intimidation, hatred, and violence continue. A critical look reminds us of barriers that are more insidious.

The source of this many-faceted crisis, however, is profoundly spiritual. We will rise to the crisis, not by making a longer list of commitments, but by persisting with repentant hearts.

## FACING OBSTACLES

### 1. A Time to Take Culture Seriously

We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America too often react fearfully or grudgingly to the diversity of cultures. We are to delight in the fact that the people called, gathered, and enlightened have such diversity. We are, as a multicultural church, to minister in a diverse but divided society.

Culture includes music, art, and dance, but is more than that. Culture—the attitudes and patterns of life—plays a part in setting priorities, developing procedures, and choosing expressions of faith.

# Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture *(continued)*



This church has not moved much beyond an “assimilation” approach to culture, where the assimilated are those who adopt the values and behavior of the dominant culture. This keeps us from benefitting from the plurality of cultures already present in our church, and from appreciating the plurality of cultures in society.

This church clearly shares the brokenness of a society that has responded to cultural diversity through fear and efforts at assimilation. Our society has melded many European ethnic groups into mainstream America, but it has included people of other cultural identities only insofar as they have taken on the values and behavior of the dominant culture.

A wall of hostility stands intact. Captive on one side of the wall, people with access to opportunities and institutions are largely unaware either of their own cultural biases or the worth of other cultures. On the other side of the wall, people scarred by slavery and other forms of degradation and suffering have seen their cultures ridiculed and reviled, or destroyed.

## 2. A Time to Confront Racism

All of us sin and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).

Racism — a mix of power, privilege, and prejudice — is sin, a violation of God’s intention for humanity. The resulting racial, ethnic, or cultural barriers deny the truth that all people are God’s creatures and, therefore, persons of dignity. Racism fractures and fragments both church and society.

When we speak of racism as though it were a matter of personal attitudes only, we underestimate it. We have only begun to realize the complexity of the sin, which spreads like an infection through the entire social system. Racism infects and affects everyone, with an impact that varies according to race, ethnicity, or culture, and other factors such as gender or economic situation.

This church has often addressed words on racism to white members. We have done so because our mission and ministry are in a society where white people have been favored and hold unequal

power to implement their prejudices—socially, politically, and economically. What has been the case is still the case: skin color makes a difference and white people benefit from a privileged position.

Racism, however, infects and affects everyone. It deforms relationships between and within racial, ethnic, or cultural groups. It undermines the promise of community and exacerbates prejudice and unhealthy competition among these groups. It robs white people of the possibility of authentic relationships with people of color, and people of color of the possibility of authentic relationships with white people.

Racism also can lead to the rejection of self, as when white people internalize guilt or people of color internalize values associated with white culture. It hinders us from becoming who God calls us to be.

When we rebuild walls of hostility and live behind them—blaming others for the problem and looking to them for solutions—we ignore the role we ourselves play in the problem and also in the solution. When we confront racism and move toward fairness and justice in society, all of us benefit.

## 3. A Time to Be the Church

Vision breaks through brokenness. We are one in Christ. As the body of Christ, we are free to live out our connectedness with each other. Promises are kept when vision is communicated in word and deed, and members are captured by it. For this to happen, we need the leadership of all who have been given responsibility and authority: members of congregations and their pastors; boards and staff of institutions and agencies of the church; synodical bishops; and the bishop of this church.

*We expect our leadership to name the sin of racism and lead us in our repentance of it.* Although racism affects each one of us differently, we must take responsibility for our participation, acknowledge our complicity, repent of our sin, and pray God will bring us to reconciliation.

Racism, both blatant and subtle, continues to deny the reconciling work of the cross. God’s forgiveness frees us from the enslavement of racism. For some, this may mean giving up power or privilege;

# Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture *(continued)*



for others, it may mean giving up anger or prejudice. Let us know this reconciliation in our lives!

*We expect our leadership to persevere in their challenge to us to be in mission and ministry in a multicultural society.* The Church catholic already has diversity of cultures. For the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, catholicity is a given. Members will question, however, why intentional measures have been taken in order for us to be a multicultural church.

Because of sin and indifference, intentional measures a necessary for vision to become reality. We expect our leadership to clarify why measures were taken, and to help members deal with the implications of such measures.

## DOING JUSTICE

### 1. A Time for Public Leadership

Our world is one where racial and ethnic lines are drawn and enforced. Our world is one where hostility festers along those dividing lines, often bursting out in violence. Our world is one where power and prejudice combine in bitter oppression.

But God has not gathered the Church as yet one more example of brokenness. The Church exists to proclaim Jesus the Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection mean freedom for the world. The Church also exists to teach the law of God, announcing that the God who justifies expects all people to do justice.

So, the Church must cry out for justice, and thereby resist the cynicism fueled by visions that failed and dreams that died. The Church must insist on justice, and thereby refuse to blame victimized people for their situations. The Church must insist on justice, and thereby assure participation of all people.

The Church that pursues justice will face and address difficult social, political, and economic problems such as:

- how racism must be confronted in order to build a society where diversity is truly valued;
- how race and ethnicity figure in political

decisions on immigration, crime, and environmental pollution; and

- how economic forces work against people of color in housing, medical care, education, and employment.

In its pursuit of justice, this church must question responses that are quick, easy, and, therefore, probably inadequate.

### 2. A Time for Public Witness

The Church that confesses Christ in public demonstrates its commitment through involvement in public life—globally and locally, nationally and in neighborhoods. Through public events such as elections or town meetings, through public bodies such as legislatures or volunteer groups, church members help to forge political will and consensus.

Participation in public life is essential to doing justice and undoing injustice. Only when people affected by racial and ethnic division speak publicly of painful realities, does there emerge the possibility of justice for everyone.

In places served by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, however, public life is too often in sorry shape, shallow, and fragmented. Increasingly cynical or simply bored, many residents ignore public debate. Many find it difficult to participate fully because of racial or ethnic barriers, or economic hardship.

This church, therefore, will actively promote a public life worthy of the name. We encourage public witness by members, and stand publicly as a church against injustice. We insist on a public forum accessible to everyone, since the interests of everyone are at stake.

### 3. A Time for Public Deliberation

One way that we, the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, will promote a better public life is through example. This church has already committed itself to a moral deliberation that deals openly with conflict and controversy. In fact, such deliberation has helped us to discover new dimensions of mission and new possibilities for ministry.

# Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture *(continued)*



This church will live up to its commitment to deliberation. Specifically, we will:

- model an honest engagement with issues of race, ethnicity and culture, by being a community of mutual conversation, mutual correction, and mutual consolation; model a healthy and healing response to the change that inevitably comes from cultural contact;
- model exchanges in which people of different cultures can find points of agreement while sometimes “agreeing to disagree;”
- encourage and participate in the education of young people, in order that they might be better equipped to live in a multi-cultural society;
- bring together parties in conflict, creating space for deliberation; and
- participate in identifying the demands of justice, and work with others who would have justice for all.

## 4. A Time for Advocacy

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America received from its predecessor church bodies a solid foundation upon which to build advocacy for justice and opposition to racial and ethnic discrimination. We will listen to our advocates as we examine our own institutional life, and will model that for which we call.

Our advocacy will take place in partnership ecumenically, among corporations and local, state, and national governments. We look for positive incentives for change and fair distribution of the social costs of correcting past wrongs. We will work for respect of cultures, for example in mass media and public presentations, in art and advertising, and in other endeavors. We will speak against policy initiatives that discriminate on the basis of language.

This church will support legislation, ordinances, and resolutions that guarantee to all persons equally:

- civil rights, including full protection of the law and redress under the law of discriminatory practices; and to all citizens, the right to vote;
- access to quality education, health care, and nutrition;
- opportunity for employment with fair compensation, and possibilities for job training and education, apprenticeship, promotion, and union membership;
- opportunity for business ownership;
- access to legal, banking, and insurance services;
- the right to rent, buy, and occupy housing in any place; and
- access to public transportation and accommodation.

We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will advocate for just immigration policies, including fairness in visa regulations and in admitting and protecting refugees. We will work for policies that cause neither undue repercussions within immigrant communities nor bias against them.

Our efforts on behalf of local and international community and in opposition to racism will recognize the multicultural nature of the world. We will promote international respect for human rights, and support the international movement to eliminate discrimination.

# Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture *(continued)*



## Addendum

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“Social Statements in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” adopted by the 1989 Churchwide Assembly, states that an addendum shall be added to those statements that elicit significant division in the Churchwide Assembly. The following amendment (at the point indicated in the text) received support at the Churchwide Assembly but not the vote needed for approval.

\*We of the ELCA with all Christians everywhere live in a time of crisis (Rom 2:1ff). We are faced with choices and decisions which mean success or failure, life or death. The Church cannot remain silent while the cross, symbol of Christ’s death to set us free, remains an instrument of racial, ethnic, and cultural hatred and evil. Cross burnings continue as acts of intimidation, hatred, and evil. Groups which espouse racial, ethnic, and cultural purity and which foster acts of racial and cultural annihilation recruit youth as well as adults. Ethnic centrality (racial, ethnic, and cultural purity) and economic instability give rise to worldwide acts of rioting, hatred, and violence. Some U.S. corporations exploit people of color in poorer nations by employing these people at below living wages to work in sweatshop conditions like those long outlawed in the United States, while efforts at economic self-sufficiency by

people of color in the United States are resisted and undermined. Racism also creates identity and self-esteem crises for children of color, particularly those of interracial heritage.

Christ calls upon us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Luke 10:27). Christ does not qualify this mandate. A major part of the crisis is over lack of experience or knowledge of those whose race, ethnicity, and culture differ from our own.

The social, economic, and political dimensions of the crisis are acute. We consider the source of the crisis to be profoundly spiritual. The activist Christ threw the money changers out of the temple. The Church must continue to take an activist role. We must make a choice. Are we going to continue barricaded behind old walls of ignorance and hostility or are we going to be the people God calls us to be?

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# Season of ADVENT Session 1

## Beholding God's Vision

### Purpose

This session provides the purpose and background for the yearlong study and sets the tone for sharing, based on openness, trust, and respect. The foundation of this program will be laid within the framework of Baptism and of God's vision as it is reflected at the beginning of the biblical story in Genesis and at the end in Revelation. We will reflect on the meaning of God's vision as we commit to participate in this yearlong journey of moving from privilege to partnership.

### Discussion 1 – Water Stories

- Share a troubling water story—an experience of a fast-flowing river or other troubled waters. How did you feel as you encountered those waters?
- Share a healing water story—an experience of peace-filled waters or healing river. What feelings does that memory stir in you?

Readings from the book **Enter the River: Healing Steps from White Privilege Toward Racial Reconciliation**, by Jody Miller Shearer

*In a poetic sense, each story in this book is a stream, each stream leads to the river, and the river is a source of healing. We live in a world afflicted with racism. The affliction leaves us wounded. The river runs over our wounds, enters their depth, cleans them, and leads us on to more healing (p.13).*

*In many ways the journey to understand racism is also a journey to the river. It is not a journey across or back again, but a journey to enter in. Only when we enter in as equals will the river heal us. The river is mighty, flowing full of healing, but tinged with the pain of our history. Do not enter lightly or alone.*

*... Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of my own culture and the power I carry on either side of the river comes first. Only then can I hope to enter the river and find healing (p.32).*

*God also created the healing river. I cannot get away from it. The river draws me on, moves me forward, washes over me, washes over us all.*

Quotes from *Enter the River: Healing Steps From White Privilege Toward Racial Reconciliation* by Jody (Tobin) Miller Shearer. 1984 Herald Press: Scottsdale, PA 15683. Used by permission.

*Which river is this? It is the Mississippi and the Jordan. It is the power of love and the necessity of redemption. It is our present, past, and future. It flows through the heart of our nation and the soul of our belief. The river is the hope of racial reconciliation (p.176).*



## **Discussion 2 – Entering the River of this Study**

- What touched you in Shearer’s description of entering the river as a metaphor for this journey from privilege to partnership?
- How do your experiences and feelings of entering troubled and healing waters speak to your feelings of entering the troubled and healing waters of this journey?
- Is there anything you need from this group to help you enter the waters of understanding racism and what it means to be White?

## **Journaling**

Entering this journey is a step into new waters for this gathered community. Each session will provide opportunities for reflection and sharing. Keeping a journal provides an opportunity to record a personal journey of the year. Begin your journal this week as you reflect on your thoughts and feelings related to beginning this journey. What responses did you have to the definitions and comments expressed in the pre-readings? What thoughts, insights, or questions do you have after this session? Throughout the year, use your journal to write down thoughts, insights, or questions after each session. Record your feelings and perceptions throughout the course of this journey. Reflect on any changes you notice in your awareness, understanding, or behavior related to race. This journal is your own private reflection and it may be a source for discovery and growth.

## **Assignment**

During the coming week reflect on the questions on the worksheet “Story of My Cultural Journey.” Take notes as thoughts and memories come forth. There will be time during the next session to draw your cultural journey.

# Story of My Cultural Journey



*Instructions:* Brainstorm answers to each question in the space below. Knowing what you do about your cultural journey, draw it as best you can.

1. As far as you know, who were “your people” before coming to this country? What are the roots of your heritage?

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2. Why and how did your ancestors come to the United States?

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3. Where and how did they live when they arrived here? What realities, experiences, values shaped your people in this country? What were some significant turning points for your family of heritage during their journey?

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4. What were some early events that influenced your identity?

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5. Who were “your people” when you were growing up? How did you become aware of this? What impact did being a part of this group have on you?

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6. Who were the people on the outside of your group? How did you feel toward them? What events influenced your feelings?

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7. What were some significant turning points for you during your journey?

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8. Who are “your people” now — those reference groups with whom you now identify?

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# Season of ADVENT



## Session 2

### Remembering Stories

#### **Purpose**

In this session we will reflect on the challenge laid before Zechariah to fully trust God's promise. We will look at the stories of our own cultural journeys, recalling who and where we came from and reflecting on how that has influenced and shaped our lives.

#### **Discussion on Luke 1:5-25; 57-66**

- Who is Zechariah in this text? What is the vision he sees? How does he respond?
- What meaning do you find in Zechariah's inability to speak and the return of his voice?
- Why do you think fear came over all their neighbors? Of what were they afraid?
- What meaning do you find for yourself in this text as you read it through the lens of White privilege?
- To what new ways of thinking or seeing are you being called?
- What are your hopes or fears for this study being a turning point in your journey?

#### **Small Group Sharing**

Share your drawing and story of your cultural journey.

#### **Journaling**

Continue to use your journal to reflect on your feelings and thoughts. As you are able in the coming weeks, invite family members to talk about issues of heritage or memories of stories of inclusion or exclusion in this country. What role did cultural identity play in earlier generations? What experiences or events helped to shape or change that identity through the years?

# Season of ADVENT

## Session 3

### Brokenness and Promise

#### **Purpose**

This session moves from the vision of creation to the brokenness of human community. We will engage in the struggles of issues of dominance and broken relationships told in the Genesis stories of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel. We will work with the image of a river in depicting the intersection of the peoples of the United States.

#### **Reading on The River of America**

Gary Howard, in his book *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*, gives us an image of the river as the river of America. As you listen to this reading, think of the symbolic river of life that you created. How is God's river impacted by the coming of people into that river? Consider what happens to the flow of a river and the impact on the land around it when it is dammed or put into concrete walls or otherwise dominated. What role has dominance played in the river of America?

Gary Howard writes of his journey down the Colorado River and through the Grand Canyon with his son Benj as guide:

*On my first journey into the Canyon, I learned that the Colorado is not merely one river. Along the 276-mile stretch between Glen Canyon Dam and Lake Mead, many streams and tributaries join the Colorado. Each stream flows down a unique and separate side canyon, bringing water and silt from miles away, far beyond the rim of the Canyon. The color of the river changes constantly as fresh deposits enter the main channel. And the colors of the many tributaries themselves are in continuous flux, depending on the level and distribution of rainfall in their particular drainage systems.*

*On a recent journey down the Colorado, the river was flowing clear and blue when we put in at Lee's Ferry. Soon, the Paria River brought a silt of whitish clay into the main channel, and the water took on a cloudy appearance. Later, the Little Colorado was flowing at high volume and added its thick and red-dish-brown water to the Colorado, leaving it a rich and creamy ochre-brown. At the Havasu River we encountered a water of crystal-clear turquoise, the namesake of the Havasupai Indians who live in a small village in the side canyon, "the People of the blue-green water." Throughout the eight days of our journey, as we passed each new side canyon and observed each subtle shift in the texture and hue of the river, I thought of our rich cultural diversity as a nation.*

*At its original source, the river of America was formed by the Native People of the continent. With their many languages, cultures, and traditional land bases, they were, and are still today, a richly varied stream. Then came the people of Europe, from different lands and cultures, and changed the river of America considerably upon their arrival. To this mixture came the people of Africa, who came locked in chains in the cargo bays of slave ships, not as willing immigrants. In spite of the pain and tragedy surrounding their arrival, Americans of African descent have added their rich and ancient cultural traditions to the river of America. Hispanic people were present as well, many of them mestizo, a mixture of Indian and European blood, a new people formed by the confluence of different streams that have contributed to the larger river. And*

The places where we meet across our differences as human beings can provide stimulating and adventurous opportunities for new learning.

*the people of Asia came from their many cultures and homelands, adding even more currents of uniqueness to the larger river.*

*The river of America, like the Colorado, never stops changing. New streams are continually forming, bringing diverse religions,*

*languages, cultures, tastes, styles, and traditions into the composite channel. As a nation, we are constantly influenced by both internal and external currents of change. Cultural groups within our borders evolve, adapt, migrate, intermarry with other groups, and transform themselves over generations and decades of change and flow. External events in Southeast Asia, Central America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa stimulate the flow of more people and cultures into the larger river. As is true for the side canyons of the Colorado, those of us already on the river below cannot see all the historical and cultural terrain these new arrivals have traversed in their journey to join us in the river of America. We cannot know all that they have experienced in their homelands, yet they touch our lives, change us, and make us deeper and richer as a nation because of what they bring to the river.*

*I realize that this vision of the river of diversity may appear considerably idealized. In actual experience there has been much pain and struggle in these waters, particularly in those places where various cultural streams have met, in both the United States and other nations of the West. In fact, I have learned from my son that the wildest rapids along the Colorado are created in the confluences, those places where tributaries join the main river. Over eons of time, large floods in the side canyons have occasionally washed huge boulders into the main channel, sometimes completely stopping its flow. The river would build up tremendous pressure behind these temporary dams, and when it finally broke through, a major rapid would be left as a memory of the tumultuous event. These places of turmoil are the most exciting for white-water rafters, but they are also the most dangerous. The same is true for the confluence of cultures. The places where we meet across our differences as human beings can provide stimulating and adventurous opportunities for new learning, but they have also been places of pain, conflict, and loss. . . .*

# Season of ADVENT

## Session 3 (continued)

*River guides say that the most dangerous places along the Colorado are the “hydraulics.” These are deep holes of powerful recirculating current created on the downriver side of large boulders in the main channel. River guides know that the larger hydraulics can endanger even their 40-foot power rafts, holding them captive in the middle of the current or capsizing their passengers at the whim of the river. A guide must be familiar with the nature and location of these holes and respect their power. On the river of diversity, the holes are a metaphor for the dynamics of White dominance, which have been recirculating for centuries in our institutional practices and cultural assumptions and have always endangered our journey toward unity and social justice (pp 66-68).*

*Reprinted by permission of the publisher from Howard, Gary, We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools (New York: Teachers College Press, © 1999 by Teachers College, Columbia University. All rights reserved.), pp. 62, 65-68.*

### **Creating the River of America**

- You will receive a roll of crepe paper representing a group of people in the United States.
- Talk about the gifts people of this heritage brought to America.
- Discuss where and how to place a tributary of the group on the wall.
- Consider the placement, flow, size, etc., of the tributary so that it can depict the flow of the people relative to the other groups and to its view of its place in the river.
- At the “head waters” of the tributary, write several gifts that the people of this heritage bring to the river.

### **ELCA Social Statement – “Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture”**

- Take turns reading “A Time to Confront Racism” on page 16, section #2.
- Paragraph 1 defines racism as a mix of power, privilege, and prejudice. How does the river manifest that definition?
- Paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 talk about the various ways racism affects the lives of both White people and people of color. How does the river portray those effects?
- How has your life in the river of America been affected by racism?
- What meaning or insights do the stories of Genesis 3 and 4 bring to an understanding of racism and what it means to be White in America?

### **Christmas and Epiphany Assignment**

The seasons of Christmas and Epiphany will be seasons for going out to listen and to discern the gifts that are received from people of other cultures and races.

As you talk with others and read and listen during these next weeks, be alert to the gifts that people of other races and cultures bring to the whole human community. Write down those gifts on the slips of paper you've been given and bring them back for the first session in Lent. Those gifts will be added to the tributaries.

Spend time noticing people you interact with in your daily life, especially noting the people of color that you have contact with. Be alert to the person or people that you may have been reluctant to approach or who you have wanted to get to know better. Pray about the person and consider approaching him or her to have a conversation. Be careful not to be dominating or demanding. Be honest and authentic in truly wanting to get to



know this person. Be willing to step outside your comfort zone. If the response is “no,” accept it graciously. Work at building a relationship. Share your journey in engaging in this study and your commitment to learning more about who you are as a White person and what that identity means in relationship to other people and your place in the world. Ask the person if they would be willing to share some of the story of their heritage if you share some of yours. You may want to begin with a sharing of Christmas, Kwanzaa, Three Kings or other festivals.

As you engage in conversation, notice if you want to jump in and give an explanation about how you see what the person is talking about, or if you want to defend someone or some system. Simply listen. Try not to respond, interpret, defend, or explain away what the person may be feeling or trying to share with you. Listen with an open and receiving heart and mind. Hear, listen, and take in the stories of others as a very precious gift.

If you are not able to engage in direct conversation with someone, read or view at least three resources on the list of books and videos.

### **Journaling**

Continue to write in your journal. Note your feelings and thoughts as you relate to people who are new to you, or as you discover new information and learn more of the journey of other people in this country.

# Season of EPIPHANY

## Session 4

### Listening and Learning

#### **Purpose**

During the group session, we will share our learnings and insights from conversations with people of color, readings or viewing. We will work to continue to stretch our comfort zones and to hear new voices in the remaining weeks.

#### **Suggested Reading**

Explore the many books, fiction and nonfiction, that are written by people of color. Browse the bookshelves of your local library or bookstore. Find works that appeal to you and may bring you a different perspective. Listen to the voices of James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Amy Tan, Lalita Tademy, and many, many others. Also, read adolescent literature such as Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.

The following books focus on history, sociology, and implications of race in the United States:

Anderson, Margaret L., and Patricia Hill Collins, eds. *Race, Class and Gender*. 4th ed. Belmont: Wadsworth Thompson Learning, 2001.

Bell, Derrick. *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Bennett Jr., Lerone. *Before The Mayflower*. New York: Penguin Books. Fifth revised edition, 1984.

Brown, Dee. *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971.

Castuera, Ignacio, ed. *Dreams on Fire, Embers of Hope*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1992.

Coleman, Jonathan. *Long Way to Go: Black & White in America*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997.

DuBois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Bantam Books, 1989.

Giddings, Paula. *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. New York: Bantam Books, 1984.

Hacker, Andrew. *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1995.

hooks, bell. *Sisters of the Yam*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1993.

Isasi-Diaz, Ada Maria and Yolanda Tarango. *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.



Moraga, Cherrie and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back*. New York: Kitchen Table Press/Women of Color. Second edition, 1984.

Neihardt, John G. *Black Elk Speaks*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1959.

Sondoval, Moisés. *On the Move, A History of the Hispanic Church in the USA*. Orbis Books, 1990.

Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror*. Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1994.

Takaki, Ronald. *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*. Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1989.

Weatherford, Jack. *Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1988.

West, Cornel. *Race Matters*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Wyer, Thomas. *Hispanic USA, Breaking the Melting Pot*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.

Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1995.

### **Suggested Viewing**

*Antwone Fisher* (2002), directed by Denzel Washington.

*Bamboozled* (2002) and *Get On the Bus* (1996), directed by Spike Lee.

*La Familia Pérez* (1995), directed by Mira Nair.

*Once Upon a Time. . .When We Were Colored* (1996), directed by Tim Reid.

*Selena* (1997), directed by Gregory Nava.

*Soul Food* (1997), directed by George Tillman Jr.

# Season of LENT

## Session 5

### Searching for What is Lost

#### **Purpose**

In this session we will explore the loss for White people living in a racist society. We will engage in the stories of the lost sheep and the lost coin from Luke 15 and will explore the meaning of the texts through the lens of racism. We will examine the concept of individualism as a White cultural value and will explore the resulting loss of human community.

#### **Reading from The Hidden Wound by Wendell Berry**

*“ . . . I have been unwilling until now to open in myself what I have known all along to be a wound—a historical wound, prepared centuries ago to come alive in me at my birth like a hereditary disease, and to be augmented and deepened by my life. If I had thought it was only the black people who have suffered from the years of slavery and racism, then I could have dealt fully with the matter long ago: I could have filled myself with pity for them, and would no doubt have enjoyed it a great deal and thought highly of myself. But I am sure it is not so simple as that. If white people have suffered less obviously from racism than black people, they have nevertheless suffered greatly; the cost has been greater perhaps than we can yet know. If the white man has inflicted the wound of racism upon black men, the cost has been that he would receive the mirror image of that wound into himself. As the master, or as a member of the dominant race, he has felt little compulsion to acknowledge it or speak of it; the more painful it has grown the more deeply he has hidden it within himself. But the wound is there, and it is a profound disorder, as great a damage in his mind as it is in his society.*

*This wound is in me, as complex and deep in my flesh as blood and nerves. I have borne it all my life, with varying degrees of consciousness, but always carefully, always with the most delicate consideration for the pain I would feel if I were somehow forced to acknowledge it. But now I am increasingly aware of the opposite compulsion. I want to know, as fully and exactly as I can, what the wound is and how much I am suffering from it. And I want to be cured; I want to be free of the wound myself, and I do not want to pass it on to my children.*

*Excerpt from The Hidden Wound, by Wendell Berry. Copyright © 1989 by Wendell Berry. Reprinted by permission of North Point Press, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux. LLC.*



### **Discussion on Luke 15:1-10 Parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin**

- How did you experience and feel the sense of loss in these parables?
- With whom or what have you normally identified in this text? Did you identify any differently in this reading today?
- Who do you see as being lost from the larger community and at what consequence to the community?
- What would it mean to you if White people are the ones who are lost?
- The “Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture” Social Statement identifies effects—and losses—on White people because of racism. What have you lost because of racism?
- In the parables, and in life, what does it take for discovery and restoration to occur?

### **Discussion on Whiteness Exercise**

- What was it like to be asked the question, “When are you White?” Was it easy or difficult to respond? What feelings did you have?
- What did you notice or learn?

### **Reflection on Being White**

Most of us have spent little time thinking of ourselves as being White. As Robert Terry has said, “Being White in America is never having to think about it.” For the most part, we grow up in the United States surrounded by images of Whiteness, reading about history from a White perspective, reading White authors, dealing with White people as the people in authority, and functioning with cultural norms that are based in western, European heritage. Our life is seen as normal and we generally do not wake up everyday looking at the color of our skin and having to prepare ourselves for how we will be treated because of our skin color. Peggy McIntosh speaks of our ability to be oblivious to our skin color—and all of the other advantages we receive—as White privilege. She talks about an invisible knapsack that we walk around with constantly. We did not ask for and we may not want it, but we have it. It is unearned and is simply given to us at birth. We may have other factors that work against us by virtue of gender, economic class, age, physical ability, or sexual orientation, but in our daily lives, the institutional systems that govern our lives are led by White people and are set up with White people in mind.

We tend, as White people, to see ourselves as individuals, rather than as members of a group. We describe ourselves as members of the human race, rather than as members of the White race. We see others as racial beings, and describe them as such, but we do not see ourselves or describe ourselves as White racial beings. We tend to group people of American Indian and Alaskan Native, African, Asian, Latin and Arab/Middle Eastern heritages as “multicultural,” but do not include ourselves as White people as one equal part of that multicultural mix. Our temptation is to define others and assign group characteristics, but to see and define ourselves as individuals.

# Season of LENT

## Session 5 *(continued)*

### **Discussion on White Racial Identity**

- Reflect again on the question, “When are you White?”
- How important was identification of yourself as a part of a race of people in your growing up?
- Is race a usual part of your self-identification and introduction to others? Why or why not?
- Share your feelings about being identified as a part of “White people.”

### **Journaling**

As you write in your journal this week, reflect on what it means to be part of a White group and the loss you experience because of being White.

### **Assignment**

Read and reflect on the article “White Spaces” by Tobin Miller Shearer before the next session.

# White Spaces

By Tobin Miller Shearer



*“If we would build a beloved community across racial lines, we must confront the ways that racism shapes and wounds not only persons of color, but also those who are white.”*

For most of my adult life, I have been involved in work to overcome racism. For me as a white male, this has meant confronting not only the effects of racism on people of color, but also the ways racism and white privilege have shaped my own life and spirituality.

As I consider racism’s effect on my life, I often think of the unnamed scribe in Mark’s Gospel who asks Jesus which commandment is the greatest.

White people are the privileged ones in a stratified society that oppresses the poor and defines many as unclean.

Jesus surprises the scribe with a twofold response: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.* After the scribe affirms Jesus by adding that love of God and neighbor is “much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices,” Jesus tells him: “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (12:28-34).

These words of Jesus ring in my ears, for I think that this scribe’s situation parallels the identity of white people who struggle with racism today. Like the scribes of Jesus’ time, we are the beneficiaries, the privileged ones in a stratified society that oppresses the poor and defines many as unclean. We are the ones who get “greeted with respect in the marketplace” and have “the best seats in synagogues and places of honor at banquets.” By the virtue of our skin color, we end up profiting at the expense of the poor and oppressed.

It is difficult to honestly acknowledge the power and privilege we receive because of our whiteness. Once we do, we may wonder if that is not enough: “Are we really that far from the kingdom?” we ask. “Is something keeping us from entering in?”

We would do well to listen to Jesus’ words to

the scribe. Even though this exchange is mostly positive—in fact it’s the only place in Mark’s Gospel where Jesus’ interactions with a scribe are not entirely negative—Jesus still does not invite the scribe into the kingdom. He is near, but he is not yet in.

Jesus knows what holds us back from the kingdom. He invites us to enter in.

To be healthy, all of us need to know who we are. For white people, part of that knowledge comes from recognizing how our whiteness hurts us, how it holds us back. In considering how we might enter the kingdom, I believe there are four “white spaces” we must confront.

The first of these spaces is *isolation*. Most white people have a difficult time understanding themselves as part of a group. Our first—almost instinctual—response is to think of ourselves as individuals. While this heightened sense of individualism is true of all members of Western society, I believe this impulse tends to be amplified and warped among white people. Many of us have lost any sense of our group identity as white persons.

As I consider the way this dynamic shapes my own life, I see that I sometimes isolate myself from other whites by conveying the impression that I am a well-read, irreproachable antiracist expert. I rationalize that the amount of energy I’ve devoted to antiracism efforts has earned me the right to no longer acknowledge the effects and reality of racism in my life. I function as if my efforts have somehow separated me from any collective white identity.

Having recognized this tendency, I’ve begun to try to identify more with the resistance I sometimes experience from other whites in discussions of racism. When I say, “Racism makes all white people into racists,” I try to put myself in the place of someone who might be hearing those words for the first time. I remember the resistance I felt when I first heard those words.

It is the same resistance I feel when a colleague of color challenges me about something

# White Spaces *(continued)*



I have said. It is the same resistance I feel when I realize that I respond differently to the young Latino man who walks past me than I did to the young white man who passed me on the same sidewalk a block earlier.

Long-time antiracism organizer and author Dody Matthias once reminded me, “We have to remember the pain and discomfort we all go through as white people when we first become aware of racism’s effects on us. It is like remembering the pain of coming out of the birth canal to look around at a new world.”

When I am able to connect with how difficult it is for all of us who are white to name our racism, how difficult it is for each of us to come through that birth canal, I am better able to respond to the resistance I might encounter in a workshop or conversation. I am better able to talk without shame about working against racism in my majority white congregation. And I am ready to stop protecting white people—including myself—from the pain of facing our complicity in this racist system.

In the space of isolation, the task for us is connecting. We who are white are not autonomous individuals. We must learn to understand together that we are a group of people who have all been shaped into being white.

A second white space is *control*. For many of us, this may be the most difficult space to visit. We do not want to acknowledge how accustomed we are to being in control. Even when dealing with racism, we want to define the problem and then find the solution, the correct response, to this social evil. We are reluctant to acknowledge the spiritual effects of racism on our lives and our inability to free ourselves completely from its influence.

In institutional settings, the desire for control sometimes takes the form of maintaining and promoting programs that benefit white people at the expense of people of color. Many of the short-term service ventures prevalent in church mission agencies are a prime example of the unspoken desire of white-led institutions to remain in control.

Typically, such programs take privileged and resourced people (most of them white) into improv-

erished settings for short-term service. In the September 1995 issue of *A Common Place*, James Logan spoke of his experience as a young African American recipient of such short-term service: “I call them ‘get-to-know-the-ghetto tours.’” Logan points out that such projects contribute to the community’s destabilization, rather than increasing its health. “Short-term service is, I think, very much like crack cocaine and alcoholism; it gives a false sense of security. But it does not build a coherent, intergenerational community that empowers its members.”

Even in the face of such concerns, short-term service endeavors remain popular. While the effects of such projects are admittedly complex and amorphous, the vast amounts of funding and

## Antiracism work can quickly become warped if it involves white people who fundamentally do not love themselves.

participation that allow such programs to continue with such vigor seem to indicate that something else is going on. The fact that such service continues to be so prevalent, when that service may in fact be harmful, speaks powerfully of the need for the sponsoring institutions to set the agenda, rather than taking their lead from those in the communities that they seek to serve.

The principal task I’ve identified in this white space of control is that of letting go. One concrete expression of this is an emphasis on accountability to communities of color. Such accountability can put us in a place of not being able to rely on white privilege.

In our work as an antiracism training team, my colleagues and I try to ensure that people of color get veto power. For example, if one of our workshops includes an uncooperative participant, and we cannot agree whether to confront this person directly or let the behavior go for the time being, we give the people of color the final say. In disagreements over training in potentially volatile settings, again the final word goes to people of color.

I resist strongly being put in situations where I

# White Spaces *(continued)*



cannot depend on my white control and privilege. Yet I know how powerfully God can act when I allow myself to be grounded in the space of letting go.

Racism also situates whites in a place of loss. Yet we who are white seldom recognize what we have lost because of racism, nor are we given permission to grieve this loss.

In the process of becoming white, European Americans lost much of their culture and history. We disowned an intimate understanding of where we came from and how we came to be. We lost our own stories. Just as the people of the Hebrew Scriptures had to remind themselves again and again how they came to be the children of Israel, so do we as white people need to recover our own stories of foundation.

As we begin to confront our own racism, we may be tempted to keep our exploration of these issues on an intellectual level. Confronting issues of race on an emotional and spiritual level can be painful. But if we are open to grieving, we may be able to hear what we have previously ignored.

Author Lillian Roybal Rose has pointed out the need for whites to move beyond a purely intellectual struggling with racism. Yet she recognizes

When the process is emotional as well as cognitive, the state of being an ally becomes a matter of reclaiming one's own humanity.

how difficult it will be for most of us: "The movement to a global, ethnic point of view requires tremendous grieving. I encourage white people not to shrink from the emotional content of this process. . . . When the process is emotional as well as cognitive, the state of being an ally becomes a matter of reclaiming one's own humanity."

I suspect that beneath much of our hesitancy to grieve is an emotional response that begs to be expressed—perhaps at first in anger or denial, possibly even in weeping. All these are expres-

sions of grieving the loss of critical, life-giving parts of our humanity. Such grieving takes great courage and commitment. And the importance of a caring and nurturing community to surround us as we grieve cannot be overstated.

I once witnessed a video of a worldwide gathering of Christian indigenous people. It was filled with images of worship, but it was worship unlike any I had ever experienced. Group after group sang, danced, walked, chanted, and moved in their indigenous dress, language, and style of worship. I saw Maori, Choctaw, Filipino, Finn, and Zulu worship styles explode with Christ-centered jubilation.

In one scene a middle-aged Indonesian man danced slowly across the screen with a power and grace I have rarely witnessed. As I watched him act out a battle with Satan, his face filled with dignity and strength, I began to cry.

I cried for joy that this fully human, profoundly fleshy experience of worship was still with us. But I also cried out of grief that somewhere in the history of becoming white my own indigenous roots and identity had been left behind. I cried that my mother had been taught that dancing was profound sin. I cried that in my own church congregation we seem to barely register that we even have bodies. And I cried because I knew that as we have called ourselves white and declared ourselves superior, we have also become poorer.

If we are willing to be honest with our grief, to confront what we have lost, we can move forward into reclaiming who we are. We can begin to confront our own personal journeys in "becoming white," as well as our family and collective histories. When these tasks of reclamation are undertaken with full knowledge of how the dominant society tries constantly to shape white people into racists, the journey of reclamation can be joyful and life-giving. It can also become a profound act of resistance to racism.

Finally, one of the most curious spaces that racism creates for white people is a space of *loathing*: both a self-loathing and an active distaste for and mistrust of other white people. I have known some ardently antiracist whites who seem unable to sit down and simply enjoy the company of other white

# White Spaces *(continued)*



people. It does us no good if, in the midst of working to dismantle racism, we end up hating one another.

Sometimes white people who work to end racism try to express their deep commitment to this cause by lashing out at other white people—or even at themselves. Such attacks are not healthy for us, nor do they help to confront racism. This final white space of loathing must be countered with the difficult task of learning to love ourselves and others.

I was confronted with the difficulty of this at a family reunion one summer. Two of my relatives presented a skit that was introduced as an encounter between a pastor and a “colored” man. The skit proceeded to show a racist stereotype of a confused, illiterate “colored man,” complete with Southern drawl.

After getting over our initial shock, my wife Cheryl and I left the room. Amid tears and embarrassment, we talked about how we should respond. We decided that we had to return and say something. Although it was a moment of utter dread and sheer terror, we both felt we could not live with integrity if we did not speak up.

So we went back into that gathering of about one hundred relatives, and spoke about the pain the skit had caused us. I told them how much I want to be proud of my family and described how disappointed and hurt I’d been by our collective silence in the face of the skit. I spoke about how saddened I was by the messages this skit might have taught my young sons. Yet I felt glad that my sons were there to see at least one small way in which we were trying to love each other in spite of this racism.

After we spoke, all I wanted to do was leave. Yet several relatives came up and told me how much they appreciated what Cheryl and I had done. Their presence and support gave me the courage to stay in the room and to continue to be with folks whom I didn’t even want to see in those moments.

It may seem strange to conclude a systemic analysis of the effects of racism on whites by focusing on the interpersonal principle of loving one

another. Yet the systemic and the personal are not, in fact, contradictory.

The work of dismantling systemic racism and building new institutions that are not based on white power and privilege needs to be infused with a deep love for and among all of us who are working together. Antiracism work can quickly become warped if it involves white people who fundamentally do not love themselves.

Underlying each of these white spaces — isolation, control, loss, and loathing — is the pattern of internalized superiority that racism has taught all white persons. We have believed that we have the answers. It can shake our very foundations to discover that these lessons of superiority and our ensuing dependence on privilege may inhibit our complete and unlimited entrance to the kingdom.

I believe that our inability to confront and pass through these four white spaces may keep us from completely entering the kingdom. It is my hope that a deeper focus on connection, grounding, reclaiming, and loving might help remove those barriers to living out God’s reign that are particular struggles for white people.

Jesus words to the unnamed scribe serve as both a caution and an invitation. “You are not there yet,” he seems to say to us, “but keep working together, so that one day you might all enter the kingdom rejoicing.”

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# Season of LENT



## Session 6

### Entering the Story of the United States

#### **Purpose**

In this session we will explore the timeline of United States history, noting the dates and events that manifest systemic racism. We will work together to shape the timeline to deepen our awareness and understanding of White dominance.

#### **Group Reflection Questions on the River / Timeline**

- Notice the stream of the red crepe paper. When does it come into the river? How much do you know of the story of the indigenous people of this stream? Collectively recall the early history of North America prior to 1492. Address questions, such as: When did people first move into this land? Who were the people who lived here? What languages did they speak? How did their cultural traditions vary across the land from east to west? Who were the leaders of the people? What role did spirituality play in their lives? What were their forms of government? What were their forms of agriculture and commerce? How did those vary across the land from ocean to ocean? What knowledge and gifts did they have as a people?
- Talk about the ability or inability to answer those questions. Compare the ability to answer those questions about North America to the ability to answer those same questions about Europe prior to 1492. What does it mean that we know more of the stories of peoples of Europe than of the peoples of the land in which we live?
- Look at the tributaries of black, yellow, brown and orange on your river. Collectively share the stories and histories of Africans, Asians, Latinos, and Arab/Middle Easterners. How much have you learned of their stories? What was the story of the lands from which they came? When did they come to this land? How did they come? Why did they come?
- Noting the five streams of people coming into this land after 1492, whose history do you know best? Why?
- What is the meaning of being an “American” and not knowing the history of this land and its indigenous people?
- What does it mean to be “American” for people of American Indian/Alaskan Native, African, Latino, Asian, and Arab/Middle Eastern heritages? Whose history and stories are they taught in school?
- What does it mean that “America” was “discovered” in 1492? What meaning does that language convey about the place of White people in history?
- What is told of history in this land from 1492 to 1607? Whose story is told from that point on?

# Season of LENT

## Session 6 (continued)

### Reading from Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*

*When the Pilgrims came to New England they too were coming not to vacant land but to territory inhabited by tribes of Indians. The governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop, created the excuse to take Indian land by declaring the area legally a "vacuum." The Indians, he said, had not "subdued" the land, and therefore had only a "natural" right to it, but not a "civil right." A "natural right" did not have legal standing.*

*The Puritans also appealed to the Bible, Psalm 2:8: "Ask of me, and I shall give thee, the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." And to justify their use of force to take the land, they cited Romans 13:2: "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (pp. 13-14).*

*From A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present, by Howard Zinn, © 1995, 1999, 2003 Howard Zinn. Published by HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. Used by permission of the author.*

### Shaping the United States Timeline

Divide into four small groups:

1. 1607-1787
2. 1788-1864
3. 1865-1920
4. 1921-Present

- Review the preliminary list of dates.
- Brainstorm additional dates and events in your section of time.
- Read the sections from *A People's History of the United States* that apply to your section of years.
- Discuss the relationships of people of American Indian/Alaskan Native, European, African, Asian, Latino, and Arab/Middle Eastern heritages during this period of time.
- Choose one event on the timeline and talk about that event using three questions that are helpful in reading an historical account: 1) Who is telling the story? 2) Who is actor and who is acted upon? 3) How is the story different from other stories about the same event, especially those stories told by people who "lost"?
- Put your dates and events on the timeline or draw a symbol or symbols on the timeline that depict this period of time.

### Discussion on Timeline

- What have you lost in the traditional telling of United States history?
- Where is your own story lost in this telling of United States history?
- What has been the benefit of being White in the United States?
- How does the telling of the story shape and influence your understanding of the world and your place in it?



### **Journaling**

In your journal this week, reflect on the experience of building the timeline. Record your thoughts and feelings as you reflect on the meaning and impact of the timeline in your own life.

### **Assignment**

Read the article “Understanding White Privilege” by Frances E. Kendall before the next session. As you read, record your thoughts, feelings, reactions, and questions. What makes you uncomfortable? On what points would you challenge the author? In what ways does the author challenge you to see things differently? Note the parts of the article you want to talk about at the next session.

# United States Timeline



*Note: The information provided below is general knowledge to the public and may be accessed through history books, census data, or the internet.*

- 1492** Columbus' arrival — Ten million people in North America. The number would ultimately be reduced to less than a million. When Columbus landed, 250,000 people were living in Haiti. In two years, through murder, mutilation, or suicide, half were dead. By the year 1515, 50,000 Indians were left. By 1550, there were only 500. In 1650, a report shows none of the original Arawaks or their descendants were left on the island. (Zinn, pp. 4-5)
- 1607** Colony of Jamestown, Virginia, founded
- 1610** Santa Fe, New Mexico, founded (in Mexico)
- 1619** Twenty Africans arrive in Jamestown and are sold
- 1664** New York and New Jersey recognize legality of slavery
- 1688** Quakers sign first official written protest against slavery in North America
- 1718** San Antonio, Texas, founded (in Mexico)
- 1721** South Carolina limits the vote to free White Christian men
- 1752** Future President George Washington acquires Mount Vernon estate and its 18 slaves. Eventually he owns 200 slaves
- 1763** 170,000 slaves in Virginia—about half the population
- 1787** U.S. Constitution Adopted—by whom and for whom? For purposes of representation, Indians were not counted, and slaves were counted as 3/5 of a person
- 1790** U.S. Census lists number of slaves (17.8 percent of population), number of English, Scotch, Irish, Dutch, French, German, Hebrew and other; number of slave holding and non-slave-holding families; American Indian people are not listed
- 1793** Eli Whitney invents the cotton gin
- 1793-1818** U.S. Capitol built by slave labor—Rotunda paintings of whom?
- 1800** U.S. Census lists people as 1) Free Whites, 2) All Other Free Persons except Indians, and 3) Slaves
- 1803** Louisiana Purchase: U.S. buys vast lands west of Mississippi from Napoleon
- 1804-1806** Lewis and Clark expedition, U.S.
- 1830** Indian Removal Act passes Congress, calling for relocation of eastern Indians to an Indian territory west of the Mississippi River. The Cherokee "Trail of Tears" takes place in 1838-39
- 1835** Texas declares independence from Mexico
- 1853-56** United States acquires 174 million acres of Indian lands through 52 treaties, all of which are subsequently broken by Whites

- 1846** U.S. declares war on Mexico
- 1854** People v. Hall rules that Chinese cannot give testimony in court against Whites
- 1861** Civil War begins
- 1862** Homestead Act opens up Indian land in Kansas and Nebraska to White homesteaders
- 1866** KKK begins Campaign of Terror
- 1869** Completion of first transcontinental railroad —4,000 workers, 2/3 of whom were Chinese had built the transcontinental railroad over the Sierras and into the interior plains
- 1882** Chinese Exclusion Law — Preamble. Whereas, in the opinion of the Government of the United States the coming of Chinese laborers to this country endangers the good order of certain localities within the territory thereof: . . . the coming of Chinese laborers be suspended . . .
- 1876 & 1890** Sioux Indian Wars with the 7th Calvary
- 1887** Congress passes the General Allotment Act (the Dawes Act) in which reservation lands are given to individual Indians in parcels. Indians lose millions of acres of land.
- 1896** U.S. Supreme Court rules “separate but equal” facilities are constitutional
- 1904** Chinese exclusion made indefinite and applicable to U.S. insular possessions
- 1915** D.W. Griffith produces film “Birth of a Nation”
- 1924** Immigration Act denies entry to virtually all Asians
- 1942** Internment of Japanese Americans
- 1945** Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ushering in nuclear age
- 1954** Brown v. Board of Education: U.S. Supreme Court rules that segregation in public schools is unconstitutional
- 1955** Murder in Mississippi of Emmitt Till
- 1964** The Civil Rights Act passed by Congress
- 1992** Los Angeles police accused of beating African-American motorist Rodney King found not guilty
- 1998** Dragging death of James Byrd in Jasper, Texas
- 2001** Patriot Act passes in response to World Trade Center destruction

# Readings on the history of the United States



By Howard Zinn

When the Pilgrims came to New England they too were coming not to vacant land but to territory inhabited by tribes of Indians. The governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop, created the excuse to take Indian land by declaring the area legally a “vacuum.” The Indians, he said, had not “subdued” the land, and therefore had only a “natural” right to it, but not a “civil right.” A “natural right” did not have legal standing.

The Puritans also appealed to the Bible, Psalms 2:8: “Ask of me, and I shall give thee, the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” And to justify their use of force to take the land, they cited Romans 13:2: “Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.” (Zinn, pp. 13-14)

By 1800, 10 to 15 million blacks had been transported as slaves to the Americas, representing perhaps one-third of those originally seized in Africa. It is roughly estimated that Africa lost 50 million human beings to death and slavery in those centuries we call the beginnings of modern Western civilization, at the hands of slave traders and plantation owners in Western Europe and America, the countries deemed the most advanced in the world.

In the year 1610, a Catholic priest in the Americas named Father Sandoval wrote back to a church functionary in Europe to ask if the capture, transport, and enslavement of African blacks was legal by church doctrine. A letter dated March 12, 1610, from Brother Luis Brandaon to Father Sandoval gives the answer: *Your Reverence writes me that you would like to know whether the Negroes who are sent to your parts have been legally captured. To this I reply that I think your Reverence should have no scruples on this point, because this is a matter which has been questioned by the Board of Conscience in Lisbon, and all its members are learned and conscientious men. Nor did the bishops who were in Sao Thome, Cape Verde, and*

*here in Loando—all learned and virtuous men—find fault with it. We have been here ourselves for forty years and there have been among us very learned Fathers . . . never did they consider the trade as illicit. Therefore we and the Fathers of Brazil buy these slaves for our service without any scruple. . . .* (Zinn, p. 29)

Slavery grew as the plantation system grew. The reason is easily traceable to something other than natural racial repugnance: the number of arriving whites, whether free or indentured servants (under four to seven years contract), was not enough to meet the need of the plantations. By 1700, in Virginia, there were 6,000 slaves, one-twelfth of the population. By 1763, there were 170,000 slaves, about half of the population. (Zinn, p. 32)

In the Carolinas, however, whites were outnumbered by black slaves and nearby Indian tribes; in the 1750s, 25,000 whites faced 40,000 black slaves, with 60,000 Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw Indians in the area. Gary Nash writes: “Indian uprisings that punctuated the colonial period and a succession of slave uprisings and insurrectionary plots that were nipped in the bud kept South Carolinians sickeningly aware that only through the greatest vigilance and through policies designed to keep their enemies divided could they hope to remain in control of the situation.”

The white rulers of the Carolinas seemed to be conscious of the need for a policy, as one of them put it, “to make Indians & Negroes a cheque upon each other lest by their Vastly Superior Numbers we should be crushed by one or the other.” And so laws were passed prohibiting free blacks from traveling in Indian country. Treaties with Indian tribes contained clauses requiring the return of fugitive slaves. Governor Lyttletown of South Carolina wrote in 1738: “It has always been the policy of this government to create an aversion in them [Indians] to Negroes.” (Zinn, pp. 54-55)

# Readings on the history of the United States *(continued)*



In the 1720s, with fear of slave rebellion growing, white servants were allowed in Virginia to join the militia as substitutes for white freemen. At the same time, slave patrols were established in Virginia to deal with the “great dangers that may . . . happen by the insurrections of negroes. . . .” Poor white men would make up the rank and file of these patrols, and get the monetary reward.

Racism was becoming more and more practical. Edmund Morgan, on the basis of his careful study of slavery in Virginia, sees racism not as “natural” to black-white difference, but something com-

It is roughly estimated that Africa lost 50 million human beings to death and slavery in those centuries we call the beginnings of modern Western civilization.

ing out of class scorn, a realistic device for control. “If freemen with disappointed hopes should make common cause with slaves of desperate hope, the results might be worse than anything Bacon had done. The answer to the problem, obvious if unspoken and only gradually recognized, was racism, to separate dangerous free whites from dangerous black slaves by a screen of racial contempt.”

There was still another control which became handy as the colonies grew, and which had crucial consequences for the continue rule of the elite throughout American history. Along with the very rich and very poor, there developed a white middle class of small planters, independent farmers, city artisans, who, given small rewards for joining forces with merchants and planters, would be a solid buffer against black slaves, frontier Indians, and very poor whites. (Zinn, pp. 56-57)

Some Cherokees had apparently given up on nonviolence: three chiefs who signed the Removal Treaty were found dead. But the seventeen thousand Cherokees were soon rounded up and crowded into stockades. On October 1,

1838, the first detachment set out in what was to be known as the Trail of Tears. As they moved westward, they began to die — of sickness, of drought, of the heat, of exposure. There were 645 wagons, and people marching alongside. Survivors, years later, told of halting at the edge of the Mississippi in the middle of winter, the river running full of ice, “hundreds of sick and dying penned up in wagons or stretched upon the ground.” Grant Foreman, the leading authority on Indian removal, estimates that during confinement in the stockade or on the march westward four thousand Cherokees died.

In December 1838, President Van Buren spoke to Congress:

“It affords sincere pleasure to apprise the Congress of the entire removal of the Cherokee Nation of Indians to their new homes west of the Mississippi. The measures authorized by Congress at its last session have had the happiest effects.” (Zinn, p. 146)

After agitation, and aid from the United States, Texas broke off from Mexico in 1836 and declared itself the “Lone Star Republic.” In 1845, the U.S. Congress brought it into the Union as a state.

In the White House now was James Polk, a Democrat, an expansionist, who, on the night of his inauguration, confided to his Secretary of the Navy that one of his main objectives was the acquisition of California. . . .

The *Washington Union*, a newspaper expressing the position of President Polk and the Democratic party, had spoken early in 1845 on the meaning of Texas annexation:

“Let the great measure of annexation be accomplished, and with it the questions of boundary and claims. For who can arrest the torrent that will pour onward to the West? The road to California will be open to us. Who will stay the march of our western people?”

They could have meant a peaceful march westward, except for other words, in the same newspa-

# Readings on the history of the United States *(continued)*



per: “A corps of properly organized volunteers . . . would invade, overrun, and occupy Mexico. They would enable us not only to take California, but to keep it.” It was shortly after that, in the summer of 1845, that John O’Sullivan, editor of the *Democratic Review*, used the phrase that became famous, saying it was “Our manifest destiny to overspread

By 1700, in Virginia, there were 6,000 slaves, one-twelfth of the population. By 1763, there were 170,000 slaves, about half of the population.

the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.” Yes, manifest destiny. . . .

Accompanying all this aggressiveness was the idea that the United States would be giving the blessings of liberty and democracy to more people. This was intermingled with ideas of racial superiority, longings for the beautiful lands of New Mexico and California, and thoughts of commercial enterprise across the Pacific.

The *American Review* talked of Mexicans yielding to “a superior population, insensibly oozing into her territories, changing her customs, and out-living, out-trading, exterminating her weaker blood. . . .” *The New York Herald* was saying, by 1847:

“The universal Yankee nation can regenerate and disenthral the people of Mexico in a few years; and we believe it is a part of our destiny to civilize that beautiful country.”

A letter appeared in the *New York Journal of Commerce* introducing God into the situation: “The supreme Ruler of the universe seems to interpose, and aid the energy of man towards benefiting mankind. His interposition . . . seems to me to be identified with the success of our arms. . . . That the redemption of 7,000,000 of souls from all the vices that infest the human race, is the ostensible object . . . appears manifest.”

The *Congressional Globe* of February 11, 1847, reported:

“Mr. Giles, of Maryland — I take it for granted, that we shall gain territory, and must gain territory, before we shut the gates of the temple of Janus. . . . We must march from ocean to ocean. . . . We must march from Texas straight to the Pacific ocean, and be bounded only by its roaring wave. . . . It is the destiny of the white race, it is the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race. . . .” (Zinn, pp. 147-149, 152-153)

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# Understanding White Privilege

By Francis E. Kendall



*We need to be clear that there is no such thing as giving up one's privilege to be "outside" the system. One is always in the system. The only question is whether one is part of the system in a way that challenges or strengthens the status quo. Privilege is not something I take and which I therefore have the option of not taking. It is something that society gives me, and unless I change the institutions which give it to me, they will continue to give it, and I will continue to have it, however noble and egalitarian my intentions.*

*Harry Brod, "Work Clothes and Leisure Suits: The Class Basis and Bias of the Men's Movement," in Men's Lives, ed. Michael S. Kimmel and Michael Messner (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 280.*

## What Is White Privilege?

Privilege, particularly white or male privilege, is hard to see for those of us who were born with access to power and resources. It is very visible for those to whom privilege was not granted. Furthermore, the subject is extremely difficult to talk about because many white people don't feel powerful or as if they have privileges that others do not. It is sort of like asking fish to notice water or birds to discuss air. For those who have privileges based on race or gender or class or physical ability or sexual orientation or age, it just is — it's normal. The Random House Dictionary (1993) defines privilege as "a right, immunity, or benefit enjoyed only by a person beyond the advantages of most." In her article, "White Privilege and Male Privilege," Peggy McIntosh (1995) reminds us that those of us who are white usually believe that privileges are "conditions of daily experience... [that are] universally available to everybody." Further, she says that what we are really talking about is "unearned power conferred systematically" (pp. 82-83).

For those of us who are white, one of our privileges is that we see ourselves as individuals, "just people," part of the human race. Most of us are clear, however, that people whose skin is not white are members of a race. The surprising thing for us is that, even though we don't see ourselves as part of a racial group, people of color generally do see us that way.

So, given that we want to work to create a better world in which all of us can live, what can we do? The first step, of course, is to become clear about the basics of white privilege, what it is and how it works. The second step is to explore ways in which we can work against the racism of which white privilege is a cornerstone.

White privilege is an institutional (rather than personal) set of benefits granted to those of us who, by race, resemble the people who dominate the powerful positions in our institutions. One of the primary privileges is that of having greater access to power and resources than people of color do; in other words, purely on the basis of our skin color doors are open to us that are not open to other people. For example, given the exact same financial history, white people in the United States are two to ten times more likely to get a housing loan than people of color — access to resources. Those of us who are white can count on the fact that the nation's history books will reflect our experience of history. American Indian parents, on the other hand, know that their children will not learn in school

White privilege has nothing to do with whether or not we are "good" people.

about the contributions of their people.

All of us who are white, by race, have white privileges, although the extent to which we have them varies depending on our gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, physical ability, size and weight, and so on. For example, looking at race and gender, we find that white men have greater access to power and resources than white women do. The statistics from the 1995 Glass Ceiling Commission show that while white men constitute about 43% of the work force, they hold 95% of senior management positions in American industry. Looking purely at white privilege, white women hold

# Understanding White Privilege *(continued)*



about 40% of the middle management positions, while Black women hold 5% and Black men hold 4%. Unless we believe that white women or African American men and women are inherently less capable, we have to acknowledge that our systems are treating us unequally.

White privilege has nothing to do with whether or not we are “good” people. We who are white can be absolute jerks and still have white privileges; people of color can be the most wonderful individuals in the world and not have them. Privileges are bestowed on us by the institutions with which we interact solely because of our race, not because we are deserving as individuals. While each of us is always a member of a race or races, we are sometimes granted opportunities because we, as individuals, deserve them; often we are granted them because we, as individuals, belong to one or more of the more favored groups in our society. At some colleges and universities, for example, sons and daughters of alumnae and alumni might have lower grades and test scores than other applicants; they are accepted, however, because their parents graduated from the institution. That is a privilege that the sons and daughters did nothing to earn; they were put ahead of other possible applicants who may well have had higher test scores and grades because of where their parents had gone to school.

## **The Purposeful Construction of White Privilege: A Brief History**

Often it is not our intent, as individual white people, to make use of the unearned benefits we have received on the basis of our skin color. Most of us go through our days unaware that we are white or that it matters. On the other hand, the creation of a system in which race plays a central part — one that codifies the superiority of the white race over all others — has been in no way accidental or haphazard. Throughout American history white power-holders, acting on behalf of our entire race, have made decisions that have affected white people as a group very differently than groups of people of

color. History is filled with examples of the purposeful construction of a systemic structure that grants privileges to white people and withholds them from others.

- The writing of the U.S. constitution which, in ten articles, very intentionally confirmed the holding of Black people as slaves, as property.
- White people’s believing that our destiny was to “own” the land on which we all currently live, even though that required forcibly removing the native people who had lived here for centuries.
- Our breaking apart of Black families during slavery, sending mothers one place, fathers another, and babies and children yet another.
- Choosing to withhold from African Americans the ability to read so that they could not reproduce any of their culture or function well enough in our literate society to change their status.
- The removing of American Indian children from their homes, taking them as far as possible from anything they knew, and punishing them if they tried to speak in their own languages.
- The passing of laws that were created to maintain the legal separation and inequality of whites and African Americans (*Plessy v. Ferguson*).
- The making of “politically expedient” decisions by many (if not most) white suffragists to align themselves with white Southern men, reassuring them that by giving the vote to women (read “white women” since at that time about 90% of the Black women lived in the South and were not, by law, able to hold property and thus to vote) the continuation of white supremacy was insured.
- The manipulating of immigration laws so that people of color, particularly Chinese and Mexican as well as European Jews, were less free to immigrate to the U.S. than Western and Eastern Europeans.

# Understanding White Privilege *(continued)*



- The removing of American citizens of Japanese ancestry from their homes and taking their land and their businesses as our own during World War II.
- The using of affirmative action to promote opportunities for white women rather than for people of color.

It is important to know and remember this side of American history, even though it makes us extremely uncomfortable. For me, the confusion and pain of this knowledge is somewhat eased by reminding myself that this system is not based on each individual white person's intention to harm but on our racial group's determination to preserve what we believe is rightly ours. This distinction is, on one hand, important, and, on the other hand, not important at all because, regardless of our

While white men constitute about 43% of the work force, they hold 95% of senior management positions in American industry.

personal intent, the impact is the same.

Here are a couple of examples. For many years, it was illegal in Texas for Spanish-speaking children to speak Spanish at school. This meant that every individual teacher and principal was required by law to send any child home for speaking her or his own language whether the teachers and/or principals believed in the law or not. Based on the belief that people who live in the United States should speak English, mixed with racial bigotry against Mexicans, the law was passed by a group of individual white legislators who had the institutional power to codify their and their constituents' viewpoints. Once a particular perspective is built into the law, it becomes part of "the way things are." Rather than actively refusing to comply with the law, as individuals we usually go along, particularly if we think the law doesn't

affect us personally. We participate, intentionally or not, in the purposeful construction of a system that deflates the value of one people's culture while inflating the value of another's. More recently, this same kind of thing occurred in a county in Georgia that was experiencing a large influx of Mexican immigrants. By saying that firefighters might not speak Spanish and would therefore not be able to find the grocery store that was on fire if the sign outside said "Tienda de Comida," the county officials made it illegal to have store names in languages other than English. However, the bakery, Au Bon Pain, was not asked to change its sign. Presumably, the firefighters speak French better than they speak Spanish.

As we see from these two examples, the patterns set in history are continued today. Not only in the on-going pervasive and systematic discrimination against people of color in housing, health care, education, and the judicial systems, but also in the less obvious ways in which people of color are excluded from many white people's day-to-day consciousness. Think, for example, of how regularly you see a positive story about an American Indian or a Latina/o on the front page of the newspaper you read. How long would it take you to name ten white heroes? Could you name ten women of color, other than people in sports and music, who have made major contributions to our society? The freedom not to notice our lack of knowledge about people of color is another privilege that is afforded only to white people. All of us, including students of color, study the history of white, Western Europeans every day in our schools unless we take an ethnic studies course or a course consciously designed to present the many other threads of the "American experience."

## **Privilege from Conception**

White people's privileges are bestowed parentally. We can't not get them and we cannot give them away, no matter how much we do not want them. For example, if I walk into any drug store in the country that carries hair products, I can be sure

# Understanding White Privilege *(continued)*



that I will find something that was designed for my hair. Black hair products are much harder to find; often African Americans have to drive for miles to buy what they need. Further, I know that when a Band-Aids box says “flesh color,” it means my skin color, not those of my Asian or Latina friends. If, in an attempt to “give back” my privileges, I said to the drug store clerk, “I don’t want the privilege of always being able to get shampoo for my hair when my Black friend can’t,” the clerk would think I was nuts. Even if he agreed with me, it wouldn’t change the availability of Black hair products. What we can and must do is work daily to combat our privilege by bringing to consciousness, others’ and our own, the system in which we are living.

## White People: Taking Racism Seriously

Far too many of us who are white erroneously believe that we do not have to take the issues of racism seriously. While people of color understand the necessity of being able to read the white system, those of us who are white are able to live out our lives knowing very little of the experiences of people of color. Understanding racism or whiteness is often an intellectual exercise for us, something we can work at for a period of time and then move on, rather than its being central to our survival. Further, we have the luxury of not having to have the tools to deal with racial situations without looking incompetent.

I was working with a college at which senior administrators were trying to decide how to move forward with a diversity initiative. One of the vice presidents said, “There are many people who want diversity to fail.” The conversation seemed theoretical and removed to me. What an odd thing to say: “There are so many people who want diversity to fail,” with the attitude of, “Well, we tried, it was an interesting experiment, now let’s send all of ‘them’ back to the countries they came from. Too bad — it was an exciting thought.” If, instead, someone had said, “There are so many people who want this university to fail. I’m afraid we won’t succeed,” an action plan would be drawn up in a heartbeat and

monitored daily to get the school back on track. Or would that be the response? Is there a sense that, at the root, “We don’t need to worry; we will always be here?”

I think the underlying sense is there: for some eliminating racism is life and death, a question of survival, being seen as opposed to being invisible. For others, this is an interesting intellectual exercise from which we can be basically removed.

## Making Decisions for Everyone

White privilege is the ability to make decisions that affect everyone without taking others into account. This occurs at every level, from international to individual. The following story could look simply like an oversight: “Oops, I forgot to ask other people what they thought.” However, it is typical behavior for white women who want women of color to join them in their endeavors.

During a visit with an out-of-town friend — another white woman and a librarian — we began to plan a conference for librarians on racism that we named “Librarians as Colleagues: Working Together Across Racial Lines.” We talked and talked, making

White women hold about 40% of the middle management positions, Black women 5% and Black men 4%.

notes of good exercises to include, videos to use, materials that might prove helpful. It was absolutely clear that we needed a diverse committee to work with me, the facilitator, and we created one that would include all voices: two white women (one Jewish), a Latina, a Chinese American woman, straight women and lesbians, and several African Americans. By the end of our conversation, I was extremely excited and couldn’t wait to contact the women on the “planning committee.”

At the first meeting with these women, during the introductions, I talked about my twenty-five year history of working on issues of racism and

# Understanding White Privilege *(continued)*



particularly my own work on what it means to be white and Southern. Then I presented what my friend and I had thought up as the plan for the conference and all of us talked about the particulars. (In other words, I presented my credentials as a “good white person” and then proceeded to create a conference that was exactly what my friend and I had planned without any input from people of color.) A couple of weeks later, at our second meeting, the women of color pointed out that I had fallen into the classic trap of white women: the come-be-part-of-what-we’re-doing syndrome. “If you truly want us to work with you to create a conference, we will. But it means starting over and building a plan together. If you want us to enter the planning process in the middle and add our ideas to yours, we’re not interested.”

## White People Don’t Have to Listen

Being white enables me to decide whether I am going to listen to others, to hear them, or neither. As one of those in what Lisa Delpit calls “the culture of power,” I also silence others without intending to or even being aware of it. For example, a colleague of mine, an African American woman, attended a conference on the process of dialogue. Of the forty-five people there, she was one of four who were not white. The whites were of the intellectual elite: highly educated, bright, and, for the most part, liberal people. As the meeting unfolded, it became

White people’s privileges are bestowed parentally.

increasingly clear that, if the women of color didn’t mention race, no one would.

The white people were not conscious enough of the fact that race — their race — was an integral aspect of every conversation they were having. When the women of color did insert the issue into the dialogue, the white people felt accused of being “racist.” In this instance, “silencing” took place when the planners were not clear that race was present at the conference even if no people of color attended;

the white participants didn’t include the reality of others in their plan; and, when the issue was raised by my colleague, she was made to feel that she was the one who was “causing trouble.”

In her article “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children” (*Harvard Education Review*, Vol. 58, Number 3, August 1988), Delpit includes the profoundly disturbing comments of an African American teacher that illustrate how we silence dialogue without being aware of doing it or meaning to.

When you’re talking to White people they still want it to be their way. You can try to talk to them and give them examples, but they’re so headstrong, they think they know what’s best for everybody, for everybody’s children. They won’t listen. White folks are going to do what they want to do anyway.

It’s really hard. They just don’t listen well. No, they listen, but they don’t hear — you know how your mama used to say you listen to the radio, but you hear your mother? Well, they don’t hear me.

So I just try to shut them out so I can hold my temper. You can only beat your head against a brick wall for so long before you draw blood. If I try to stop arguing with them I can’t help myself from getting angry. Then I end up walking around praying all day “Please Lord, remove the bile I feel for these people so I can sleep tonight.” It’s funny, but it can become a cancer, a sore. (pp. 280-281)

As Delpit says, these are not the sentiments of one isolated person who teaches in a particularly racist school. The feelings are representative of a vast number of people of color as they interact with white people on a daily basis.

The saddest element is that the individuals that the Black and American Indian educators speak of . . . are seldom aware that the dialogue has been silenced. Most likely the white educators believe that their colleagues of color did, in

# Understanding White Privilege *(continued)*



the end, agree with their logic. After all, they stopped disagreeing, didn't they? (p. 281)

White privilege allows us not to see race in ourselves and to be angry at those who do. I was asked to address a meeting of white women and women of color called together to create strategies for addressing social justice issues. Each of the women had been working for years in her own community on a range of issues from health care to school reform. As I spoke about the work that is required for white women and women of color to collaborate authentically, the white women became nervous and then resistant. Why was race always such an issue for women of color? What did I mean when I said it was essential for white women to be conscious of how being of their race affects every hour of their lives, just as women of color are? They were all professionals, some said, why did it matter what color they were? The silencing of dialogue here occurred because the white women didn't see the race of the women in the room as an issue. It did not occur to them that their daily experience was different from that of the African Americans, Latinas, and Asian Americans in the room. Had I not been asked to raise the issue, the responsibility of doing so would have been left to the women of color, as it usually is.

Believing that race is "N.M.I." — Not My Issue" — and being members of one or more groups that also experience systemic discrimination, we use the privilege of emotionally and psychologically removing ourselves from the "white" group, which we see as composed either of demonically racist people who spout epithets and wear Ku Klux Klan robes or of white, straight, healthy males. For those of us who are white, and are also disabled, gay, lesbian or straight women, our experience of being excluded from the mainstream hides from us the fact that we still benefit from our skin color. By seeing ourselves as removed in some way from the privileged group, we may be all the more deaf to our silencing of people of color.

## Discounting People of Color

As white people, we have the privilege and ability to discount the worth of an individual of color, her or his comments and behavior, and to alter her or his future, based on our assessments. One of the most frightening aspects of this privilege is that we are able to do enormous damage with a glib or off-hand comment such as "I just don't think she's a good fit for our organization." Promotions have been denied on the basis of such comments. There are many ways in which our comments are given inflated worth because of the privilege we hold. For example:

- Seeing those most affected by racism as wounded or victims and somehow, then, as defective. Identifying a member of an oppressed group as wounded is patronizing, particularly when done by someone with privilege
- "Mis-hearing" the comments of people of color so that their words are less important, not understood or fully appreciated, and thereby heightening our sense of superiority
- Rephrasing or translating for others, as if they cannot speak for themselves, without appearing rude to others like us
- Being allowed, by others like us, to take up most of the airtime without saying much of substance
- Suggesting that people of color need to "lighten up," not to take things so seriously
- Saying or implying that, as a woman (or a gay person or a working class person, and so on), you know what the person of color is going through. "I know just how you feel. When the children in the playground made fun of me because I was fat..." (I am not suggesting that race is the only cause of pain and discrimination. I am pointing out one of the ways in which white people suggest that someone else's experience can't be any worse than that we ourselves have experienced or can understand)
- Asking why people of color always focus on the negative, as if life can't be that bad. A

# Understanding White Privilege *(continued)*



similar way of discounting someone's experience is to say, "You always focus on race. I remember at two meetings last year. . ."

- Commenting, "I know we have a way to go, but things have gotten better." (Read, "Stop whining. What do you want from me, anyway? Didn't we fix everything in the 60s?" Or "I know what your reality is better than you do.")
- Seeing and keeping ourselves central, never marginal. For some years now, writers of color have been discussing the experience of living in the margins while white people are living in the center. In one of her early books, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), bell hooks defines it:

To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. . . . Living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. (p. ix)

## Seeing White as "Normal"

Another element of this privilege is the ability to see white people as normal and all others as different-from-normal. In describing heterosexuals' privilege, Allan G. Johnson also identifies a white privilege.

They have the privilege of being able to assume acceptance as "normal" members of society. . . living in a world full of cultural images that confer a sense of legitimacy and social desirability. . . . (*The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997, p. 149.)

White people express this privilege in many ways:

- We use ourselves and our experiences as the referent for everyone. "I'm not followed around in the store by a guard. What

makes you think you are?"

- We reinsert ourselves into the conversation if we feel it has drifted to focus on a person of color or an issue of others' race. "I don't really think the issue is race as much as it is class."
- We bring a critical mass with us wherever we go. Even if I am the only white person in a room of university administrators of color, I know that most of the other administrators in the nation's schools look, relatively speaking, like me.
- We believe that we have an automatic right to be heard when we speak because most leaders in most organizations look like us. (Obviously, this privilege in particular is significantly altered, though not eliminated, by the intersections of socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, and so on.)
- We have, as a racial group, the privilege not to have to think before we speak. If what we say is upsetting to others, our thoughtlessness, rudeness, anger, and so on, are attributed to us as individuals rather than as members of our race, as is the case for others. "I can't believe Bill was such a jerk in the meeting today" as opposed to "Latinos are so passionate; they just don't think before they speak."
- We use the pain and experience of being deprived in our lives to keep us central and lessen our responsibility for the privileges we receive as white people. The pain and sense of being less-than, often based on reality, may emanate both from our personal life experiences — my father died when I was four — and our membership in groups from which privileges are systematically withheld — being poor or Jewish or gay or deaf. In our minds, this sense of struggling somehow lessens or removes our responsibility for our receiving or colluding in systemic white privilege. For example, I often hear, "I don't have white privilege because I'm working class." White working class people do not have the same socio-

# Understanding White Privilege *(continued)*



economic privileges as white upper-middle class people. But, while class privileges are being withheld from them, they are given the same skin color privileges.

- We shift the focus back to us, even when the conversation is not about us. A classic example of this is white women crying during conversations about racism and women of color having to put their pain aside to help the white women who are crying. (African Americans and gays and lesbians, in particular, are expected to take responsibility for other people's responses to and discomfort with them.)
- We use our white privilege to define the parameters of "appropriate" conversation and communication, keeping our culture, manners, and language central. We do this by:
  - Requesting a "safe" place to talk about race and racism. This is often translated as being "safe" from hearing the anger and pain of people of color as well as being able to say "racist" things without being held accountable for them.
  - Establishing the rules for "standard" English and holding others to our rules.
  - Setting up informal rules for communicating in the organization and then failing to share those rules with people who are different from us.
  - Creating institutions that run by our culture's rules but acting as if the rules are universally held, such as what time meetings start, how people address one another, the "appropriate" language to use.

## If History is White

The privilege of writing and teaching history only from the perspective of the colonizer has such profound implications that they are difficult to fathom. As white people we carry the stories we were

taught as if they are truths, often failing to question those truths and discrediting those who do. There are many embedded privileges here:

- We are able to live in the absence of historical context. It is as if we are not forgetting our history, but acting as if it never happened. Or, if it did, it has nothing to do with us today. For most of us who are white, our picture of the United States, both past and present, is sanitized to leave out or downplay any atrocities we might have committed. Our Disneyland version of history is that our white ancestors came here, had a hard time traveling west finally conquered those terrible savages and settled our country, just as we were supposed to do — Manifest Destiny.
- We are taught that we are the only ones in the picture. If there were others, they obviously weren't worth mentioning. An example of this is the white crosses at the Little Bighorn Battlefield indicating where white men died, as if no indigenous people had been killed there.
- We are able to grow up without our racial supremacy's being questioned. It is so taken for granted, such a foundation of all that we know, that we are able to be unconscious of it even though it permeates every aspect of our lives. Charles W. Mills describes this phenomenon in his book *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997): . . . *white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race* are. . . psychically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement. And these phenomena are in no way accidental, but prescribed by the terms of the Racial Contract, which requires a certain schedule of structured blindnesses and opacities in order to establish and maintain the white polity. (p. 19, italics his)
- While we are deprived of the skills of critical thinking by being given such a

# Understanding White Privilege *(continued)*



rudimentary view of our heritage, our ignorance is not held against us. We are taught little complicated history to have to sort through, think about, question, and so we have few opportunities to learn to grapple with complexities. We end up with simplistic sentiments like “America — love it or leave it” because we have only been taught fragments of information. We’re told that George Washington couldn’t tell a lie, but we aren’t told that he owned African people who were enslaved or that he most likely has descendents by those slaves. We don’t often have to wrestle with the fact that one of the biggest fights in framing the Constitution was over maintaining slavery.

- We have the privilege of determining how and if historical characters and events will be remembered. From the Alamo to the Filipino-American War to the Japanese internment to Viet Nam to training the assassins at Fort Benning, GA, who killed nuns and priests in El Salvador: we retain an extremely tight hold on what is and is

White people are deluded into thinking that people of all colors come to the table having been dealt the same hand of cards.

not admitted and how information is presented. We do this as a culture and we do it as individuals.

- We control what others know about their own histories by presenting only parts of a story. Because we all go to the same schools, if you will, everyone, regardless of color, is told the “white” story. Japanese Americans are told that their families’ internment was purely a safety precaution, just as white children are. American Indian students see Walt Disney’s “Davy Crockett” alongside their white schoolmates, learning that their great grandmothers were

“squaws,” that their ancestors were “savages.” We all learn the “tomahawk chop” during baseball season. None of us sees a whole picture of our nation that includes the vast contributions of those who are not white. All of us are given a skewed picture of reality. This is part of what Charles Mills is writing about in *The Racial Contract*.

- We are able, almost always, to forget that everything that happens in our lives occurs in the context of the supremacy of whiteness. We are admitted to college, hired for jobs, given or denied loans, cared for by the medical profession, and we walk down the street as white people, always in the context of white dominance. In other words, part of the reason that doors open for us is our unearned racial privilege. But we act and often believe that we have earned everything we get. We then generalize from our perceived experience of deserving the opportunities we receive to thinking that, if a person of color doesn’t get a job or a loan, it’s because she or he didn’t earn it.
- We are able to delude ourselves into thinking that people of all colors come to the table having been dealt the same hand of cards. We act as if there are no remnants of slavery that affect African Americans today, that the Japanese didn’t have to give up their land, their homes and businesses, or that the Latinos weren’t brought back into what had been their country to do stoop labor.
- We can disconnect ourselves from any reality of people of color that makes us uncomfortable, because our privilege allows us to believe that people basically get what they deserve or we feel helpless to do anything about another group’s pain. So we have kind, good people who, because of race and class privilege, are so removed that they don’t have to see or experience others. Without that personal experience, they have no understanding of or motivation to address others’ lives.

# Understanding White Privilege *(continued)*



## Inclusion and Collateral

We have the privilege of being able to determine inclusion or exclusion (of ourselves and others) in a group.

- We can include or exclude at our whim. “She would be great here, but her research doesn’t focus enough on Latin America even though she’s a Latina.” And, moments later, “She would add a lot to our department, but she is just so . . . Chicana!”
- I have the ability as a white woman to move back into my gender and commiserate with other women about men if I don’t want to be aligned with other whites.
- We are able to slip in and out of conversations about race without being questioned about our loyalty or called an Oreo or a Banana or a Coconut.
- We can speak up about racism without being seen as self-serving. In fact, we can even see ourselves as good at standing up for others and mentally pat ourselves on the back.
- We expect and often receive appreciation for showing up at “their” functions — the Multicultural Fair, the NAACP annual fundraising event, the Asian Women Warriors awards celebration — as if they don’t really pertain to us. If we aren’t thanked profusely by people of color, we give up because we feel unappreciated.

We have the privilege of having our race serve as a financial asset for us. We are the beneficiaries of a system that was set up by people like us for people like us so that we can control the critical financial aspects of our lives more than people of color are able to. There is much research that shows that race, when isolated as a variable, overrides the variables of class and gender in impacting institution’s financial decisions. I am able to count on my race as a financial asset, if I have nothing else to offer as collateral. For example, as a white person I am far more likely to have access to expensive medical procedures, particularly pertaining

to heart disease, than people of color. Statistically, the likelihood is that I will pay less for a new car than a Black woman will. Examples of this element of white privilege are plentiful. For a more in-depth discussion of whiteness as financial collateral, see Cheryl I. Harris’s article. “Whiteness as Property” in the *Harvard Law Review*, 1993, Vol. 106.

## On-going Excavation

We cannot allow our fear of anger to deflect us nor seduce us into settling for anything less than the hard work of excavating honesty. . . .

Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press. 1984. p. 128.

For those of us who are deeply committed to social justice work, the purposeful crafting of systemic supremacy of whiteness is one of the most difficult and painful realities to hold. It would be more comfortable to believe that racism somehow magically sprang full-blown without our having had anything to do with it. We would rather remain unconscious of decisions that reinforce white privilege that are made by a few on behalf of all white people.

However, if we are truly to understand the racial context of the twenty-first century, we have to grapple with our dogged unwillingness to understand the patterns of discrimination for what they are. We must ask how we participate in not seeing the experiences of people of color that are so very different from white people’s. We should question our resoluteness to identify class rather than race as the primary determinant of opportunity and experience, particularly when there is so much evidence to the contrary. In short, white people can continue to use unearned privilege to remain ignorant, or we can determine to put aside our opacities in order to see clearly and live differently. As Harvey Cox said in *The Secular City*, “Not to decide is to decide.”

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# Season of LENT



## Session 7

# Examining Attitudes of Privilege

### **Purpose**

It is difficult to deal with issues of White privilege and to change deeply socialized attitudes and ways of being. In this session we will examine Jesus' own struggles with issues of privilege and will explore our place within a privileged system.

### **Discussion on Assigned Role in Matthew 15:21-28**

Talk about your experience within the story from a first person perspective:

- How do you see yourself?
- How do you see yourself in relationship to the others in the story?
- What feelings and reactions do you have to what is happening?

### **Commentary on Matthew 15**

Read and reflect on this commentary written by the Rev. Paul Benz, during the coming week.

*When one looks at this text through the lens of White privilege, what an amazing revelation this is! It has much to say about Jesus and his humanity, his attitude toward this Gentile woman, the courage and intentionality of this woman, and the implications this has upon our church in dealing (or not dealing) with our own privilege (personally and institutionally). This text has much to say about privilege, the application of it, and how it was challenged—all of which from the first century is applicable to us in the 21st century. It goes without saying that the Jews of Jesus' day had a definite underlying belief that they were a privileged people, e.g., God's chosen people, and that belief had an affect on their relationships with other races. As we enter this text we get the sense that Jesus would really rather not deal with this Gentile woman. First, he does not respond to her. Second, he reiterates that his mission is primarily to the "house of Israel," and third, he makes a clear racial preference for the Jews versus the Gentiles, or "the other" (children and dogs, vs.26).*

*I am not saying that the main point of this text is that Jesus "had not gotten it" about his own privilege and that after this brief exchange with the woman from Syrophoenicia he all of a sudden got it about the shortfalls of his own privilege. I am saying that this exchange between Jesus and the Gentile woman is an example and opportunity that Scripture provides for us as the ELCA to be open, to be vulnerable, to be challenged, and to be willing to look at and discuss White privilege and its daily operation in our lives, in our church, and in our society. I do believe that Matthew's main point to his intended readers, the newly forming Christian community of the latter part of the first century, is that the Gentiles—of whatever race, country, or culture—were to be a part of this new community of believers.*

*Christendom confesses Jesus as fully God and fully human. As to the human part the Church confesses that Jesus was fully human, but without sin. It is not a new theological thought to say that Jesus as he lived his life out on earth was to some degree coming to a clearer understanding of who he was—from his*

# Season of LENT

## Session 7 (continued)

first Passover visit to Jerusalem with Joseph and Mary to his going to the cross. Just as Jesus did not want to deal with this Gentile woman, so too, we as the dominant racial group in the ELCA and in society do not want to deal with the voice(s) calling us and challenging us to look at why we are still 97.1% White in a society that is less than 70% White. The voice(s) are calling us and challenging us to seriously look at what White privilege is, how it affects us as White people, and affects our relationship to communities of color in our local communities and society. It was the persistent voice of this courageous Gentile woman that called to Jesus saying that “the other people” (the dogs, vs.26) belong to the masters and should be able to receive food from their table. Though we may not have “the other people” kneeling in front of us, I believe in many instances we do have people knocking on our church doors asking for assistance, or speaking in our local communities calling for justice, calling for allies to work for justice. We are called in this text to consider what has been and is our response to these voices/knocks at the door. How do our privilege and our stereotypes of “the other” affect the way we respond? Are we open, vulnerable, and willing to listen? Or, do we respond like the disciples—send them away to someone else (vs.23)? Or, are we resistant and wanting to avoid and not interact as Jesus did (vss.23 & 24)?

The Jews of Jesus’ day believed that they were a privileged people — God’s chosen people.

One of the key lessons from the text for members of the ELCA and other predominantly White denominations is that Jesus was in the end willing to sit down “eyeball to eyeball, heart to heart” with his neighbor who was different from him in culture, country, and religion. When we do that in our settings we begin to listen to the story of others, their version of history, their version of how things happened in this country, why events happened the way they did, and who benefited from all that and who continues to benefit. Our goal for this church is that we (as the White people in it) be as courageous and intentional in being open to looking at and dealing with our privilege and its affects as this Syrophoenician woman was in calling Jesus to see her for who she was a fellow child of God and not a member of “those other people.”

Reading from Gary Howard We Can’t Teach What We Don’t Know about the privilege that comes to us as a result of our collective identity of being White:

Many privileges have come to Whites simply because we are members of the dominant group: the privilege of having our voices heard, of not having to explain or defend our legitimate citizenship or identity, of seeing our images projected in a positive light, of remaining insulated from other people’s realities, of being represented in positions of power, and of being able to tell our own stories. These privileges are usually not earned and often not consciously acknowledged. That our privileged dominance often threatens the physical and cultural well being of other groups is a reality that Whites, for the most part, have chosen to ignore. The fact that we can choose to ignore such realities is perhaps our most insidious privilege (p. 62).

Reading from Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race by Beverly Daniel Tatum. Used by permission of Basic Books, a member of Perseus Books, L.L.C.

The view of oneself as an individual is very compatible with the dominant ideology of rugged individualism and the American myth of meritocracy. Understanding racism as a system of advantage that structurally benefits Whites and disadvantages people of color on the basis of group membership threatens not only beliefs about society but also beliefs about one’s own life accomplishments. . . . If viewing oneself as a group member threatens one’s self-definition, making the paradigm shift from individual to group member will be painful (p. 103).



### **Discussion on White Privilege**

- How do you see yourself within a collective White identity? What is hard about seeing yourself as part of a White group?
- Name privileges you experience every day because you are White.
- In what ways have you tried to distance yourself or see yourself as separate from other White people?
- What does it mean to you to own an identity of yourself as a member of the White collective?
- How would you explain the reality of White privilege to someone outside this group?

### **Journaling**

During this week journal on your thoughts and feelings related to who you are as a White person and your place of privilege within a system of White racism.

### **Assignment**

Read and reflect on the readings by the Rev. Clemonce Sabourin, Vine Deloria, Jr., and José Miguel de Jesús on their view of the church as it relates to issues of race. These pieces were written at different times and reflect a small part of the history of the Lutheran church. Note how the writers see White attitudes and values expressed in the church. Include journal reflections on the readings and note the questions, concerns or thoughts you would like to raise about the readings at the next session.

# Excerpts from Let the Righteous Speak

By Clemonce Sabourin



*Let the Righteous Speak is a book of Travel Memoirs by Clemonce Sabourin. The Rev. Clem Sabourin served faithfully as a pastor of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod throughout his life. In this small but powerful book, written in 1957, he recorded his memoirs of a trip through the South. In a brief foreword to the book, Pastor Sabourin wrote, “This is the raw material of sociology, the human sore to which the balm of the Word — preached and practiced — must be applied.” These excerpts from his book give a brief glimpse into a part of the still recent history of race relations in this country and of the role of the church in supporting racism.*

*From Let the Righteous Speak, by Clemonce Sabourin, 2nd Edition. (Valparaiso, IN: Lutheran Human Relations Association of America, 1962). Used by permission.*

**W**e got the impression that the South is our new frontier — an industrial frontier. Everywhere we found cities and towns bursting at the seams, local industries expanding, and Northern industries seeking broad acres and cheap labor.

There is feverish religious activity also. There are new churches, old churches, big churches, little churches, churches that are khaki-colored tents by the side of the road. In old towns and cities, modernistic buildings stood like country cousins in their Sunday best, and not far away there was always the traditional church, standing with the grace and dignity that comes with age.

The churches advertise. In places the signs were so close together they looked like Burma Shave slogans. The farther South you go the thicker they get: “Jesus Saves,” “Christ is the Answer,” “Go to Church.”

With all of these evidences of godliness about us, we felt like saying, “Surely this is the house of God; this is the gate to heaven.”

We had just run a gauntlet of Gospel signs and crossed the city limits. This was Athens. The radio was low, but the voice was clear and distinct. In substance, it said this: “The Georgia Board of Education announced today that any teacher, Negro or white, found holding membership in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or otherwise supporting this organization, will be penalized. And any teacher, Negro or white, found teaching an integrated class will lose his license forever.”

Ruby quickly added, “. . . and ever. Amen.” (p. 12)

**T**he only white person in church that day was the young unmarried pastor. But that could hardly be considered an evidence of integration, because white pastors have served Negro congregations from the very beginning. Often white pastors have entered Negro work against the opposition of their friends and the tears of their mothers. Usually the opposition died away, the tears evaporated, and the friends and relatives began thinking of the white pastors in Negro congregations as foreign missionaries, sacrificing their lives for the propagation of the faith. However, I have still to meet a white pastor worthy of his salt who accepted this mantle of martyrdom conferred upon him by family and friends . . .

No, the presence of the white pastor did not mean integration. In fact, the organized Christian Church seems to be the body that is least concerned about integration. Resolutions are passed. Statements are prepared and published. But there is very little day-by-day effort to bring the various racial groups together around a common pulpit or before a common communion rail.

This in itself would be bad enough. But it indicates something deeper. Men and women and children who refuse to worship together are certainly not inclined to study together in the same schools, eat together in the same restaurants, live together in the same communities, and work together as equals on the same jobs. Thus, these people must of necessity strengthen the social and economic system that brings suffering and death to Negro Americans, disgrace to the name of Christ, and weakness to the country they profess to love . . .

# Let the Righteous Speak *(continued)*



A year or so ago I read a book called *Race and Religion*. The author argued that Jesus was not a Jew but an Aryan. Christianity, therefore, is an Aryan religion and only Aryans are naturally susceptible to the Christian faith. As proof of this, he pointed out that after two thousand years of missionary work, there are comparatively few non-Aryan converts. I don't know what brought it to mind, but I was thinking about this after service at my old home church.

Let me say that I don't agree with the author of *Race and Religion*. Yet there are white people who act as though Christianity is an Aryan religion, at least, their conception of Christianity. Their trouble is, I believe, that they have not accepted the whole Word of God. They act as though they got stuck at the sentence: "All things are yours." And that is the word by which they live.

And the Negroes — what about them? Do they accept the whole Word of God, or do they too get stuck at a certain passage? If so, what is it — "All things will work together for good," or "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord?" . . . What would happen in the South, I wondered — in the whole country, for that matter — if the people who profess faith in Christ would really accept Christianity as a way of life? . . . (pp. 52-53)

**S**taying the night in a "Negro motel" in Nashville, Pastor Sabourin had a conversation in the lobby with another guest, a resident of Alabama. The conversation began on the effects of traveling on African Americans in searching for places to stop to eat or drink or rest, and moved to the topic of integration:

I tried to butt in, but there was no stopping him. "Now wait. . . . With the older children, those in high school, it's going to be a lot more difficult. You'll have the same situation you have with the little ones, but they will have an additional curse to bear. They have lived — I should say endured — longer than the little ones. They have been conditioned. They are so torn and twisted by insult and humiliation that they walk in a fog of anxiety and uncertainty. Man, it will take a whole army of

psychiatrists to straighten these poor kids out. And . . . as far as you and I are concerned, we're hopeless. After all these years of inhuman treatment, we'll never be able to respond to human situations like human beings. Poor dogs of the earth, our guts will burn and our food will stick in our throats until the day we die. . . . You see, integration will work in our schools, but it is going to require teachers with patience, a genuine love for children, and an iron-bound will to do the thing that is right."

"You say," I interjected, "that the whole Southern system of segregation is involved. I believe that you

The organized Christian Church seems to be the body that is least concerned about integration.

are right. I believe that the man in the street must be made aware of that—the postman, the police officer, the housewife in her kitchen, the newsboy on the street, the factory worker behind his machine. They must realize that a change must be made. They must be made to see the eternal rightness of dealing with human beings as human beings. Our present system has made democracy a joke and Christianity a laughingstock. Now, if a change is to be made, it must be, first, a change of heart. And at this point, it seems to me, the clergy comes in. I have seen churches by the hundreds here in the South. Catholic priests and Protestant ministers have the Southern white people sitting before them every Sunday morning. Couldn't they help? Couldn't they inspire the people by word and deed to strive for the glory that could be theirs if they really practiced the political and religious creeds that remain unfulfilled, but that they are yet reluctant to let go?"

"Look, friend," the little man said, "don't put your faith in clergymen. If they really wanted to do something, they could. But how many of them want to? Why, I once saw a preacher throw a rock at a Negro boy. With my own ears I heard him call that Negro boy a little black bastard. I heard someone say that the white preachers in the South have both their knees in the black man's belly, and the louder

# Let the Righteous Speak *(continued)*



they pray, the deeper they sink their knees. I believe it came from a book. But that's it! Even the best of them meet in conferences and pass innocuous resolutions; but when they stand in their own pulpits on Sunday morning, they're dumb. They preach sermons about the forgiveness of sins, but they never say that treating Negroes like you would not want to be treated is a sin."

"But," I said, "if white clergymen did point out the evils of segregation, do you think it would help?"

"No!" he shot back, "not unless they were men enough to admit their own sins. . . . Nobody has any respect for the clergy — not as spiritual leaders. Everybody knows that as far as spirituality is concerned, they're just a bunch of sanctimonious hypocrites. Nobody really respects them. They respect them like a person respects the president of the bridge club. The preacher is just the president of the church club. And the church is just another social organization where a certain little group of friends meet for a Sunday morning get-together. Why, in some congregations, they don't even take in all white people. They take in only their kind of white people."

"But still," I insisted, "the man in the pulpit has the ear of his people . . ."

"I know!" he said, "What good does it do? He says what the people want to hear. And even if he did preach against the evils of segregation, do you think it would do any good? I tell you, nobody respects the Church, not even the devout members who attend. Look! Suppose a preacher began hammering away at the evils of segregation. First thing, his members would tell him to preach the Gospel and let the race problem alone. If he didn't stop, they might ride his tail out of town. Does that sound like respect? If he kept it up and stuck to his pulpit, they still wouldn't pay any attention to him. Why? It's because the Church never has been bound by segregation laws. If the Church wanted to, the Church could have integrated its congregations, its schools, its Sunday schools, all the way down the line. That could have been done fifty years ago, a hundred years ago. But the clergy didn't tell the people to do it. Now, when they talk about it, the people say if segregation is an evil today, it was an evil fifty years ago. Why didn't you tell us then? If it

wasn't evil then, why do you talk about it now? . . . And what can the preachers answer? . . . You can't respect that kind of clergy.

"If the Church of the South really wanted to help, it could. But, first, the preachers will have to be humble enough to repent of their previous cowardice, and men enough to tell the people that they were wrong. With that as a starting point, they may be able to gain the respect of their parishioners, and when that is done, the parishioners will listen.

"But watch what I tell you — some of the clergymen of the South are going to capitalize on the prejudices of their people. They are going to remind them that the Supreme Court desegregation decision does not apply to churches and church institutions. The result will be that we are going to have a rash of new church schools in the South. . . . Watch what I tell you."

I made a move to go, but it was no use. The little man was steaming.

"Look!" he said, reaching for another cigarette (now he had a lighter). "In a way, religion is all mixed up in this thing. The only real religion the Southern white man has is purity of race, and on that he is a religious fanatic. And that is not so ridiculous as it seems, for after all, race is a matter of faith. No man knows his race. . . . I don't care who you are, in the final analysis both you and your father have to take your mother's word for it." (pp. 64-67)

When I was pastor of a church in Greensboro, North Carolina, Carl was teaching chemistry at Agricultural and Technical College in the same city. Mary was teaching chemistry in another local school. Carl and Mary and their daughter Doris attended our services and eventually fell in love with our simple liturgy and simple message of sin and grace — the simple story of Calvary's Cross. One day this little family was confirmed. I shall never forget their kneeling at God's altar to pledge undying allegiance to their God . . . and to the Lutheran Church. . . . To say that we were all very happy about it is to put it mildly.

Carl became active in our work with the boys of the parish. Later he was elected treasurer of the congregation. A popular figure in the community, he

# Let the Righteous Speak *(continued)*



was often called upon to serve as speaker at various community affairs. He was the kind of person who would be an asset to any congregation.

Shortly after I accepted a call to New York City, Carl accepted a position as head of the Department of Chemistry at the State College in Nashville, Tennessee. Mary accepted a position, under Carl, in the same department.

After Carl had settled in Nashville, he decided to look up his Church—the Lutheran Church. The only thing he could find, however, was a white Lutheran church. And there he was told that he and his family would be permitted to attend the services, but that they would have to use a rear entrance and sit in a little room off the chancel. From this convenient hiding place they would be able to see the pastor at the altar and hear the services.

As these things came to mind, my melting pot, that had been simmering all the morning, began to boil.

What difference did it make to this Cornell Ph.D. that many of the members of that church were not his social and intellectual equals? . . . He was not seeking fellow scientists with whom to study, but fellow saints with whom to worship. Denied the communion of saints in his own household of faith, Carl and his family joined a Presbyterian church. . . . Thank God for the Presbyterians!

God, don't let me get sick on this trip. . . . Quiet my stomach . . . ease the pain . . . let me hold out until I get back home . . . and, Lord, this . . . this whole sickening mess . . .

Heavenly Father, wilt Thou not speak? . . . How long shall the flaming cross be a thing to dread and Thy blest Name a thing by which men curse? . . . Don't let this last, best hope of men succumb, and earth be damned by a hammer and sickle. . . . Must Thine own salt of this earth be salt that's lost its savor? . . . Must Thine own light of this world be light that failed? . . . Surely, there must be seven thousand in Thy many pulpits who have not bowed their knees to Baal. . . . Hast Thou not placed them there for such a time as this? . . . Must they forever cringe and cry and sob with inward pain: "The good I would, I do not; the evil that I would not, that I do?" .

. . . Must they forever cringe before the howling mob? . . . Must they forever sleep their fitful sleep and hide their eyes from facts of day? . . . Dear God, open up their mouths. . . let Thy Holy Spirit take some pointed word from Thy Holy Book and stab them wide awake. . . . Let the righteous speak! . . . Let the sons of God stand up and be counted! . . . If no courage comes from Thee, dear God, these poor souls are going to stew in their own juice . . . (pp. 84-86)

**A**s we approached Asheville, Clemmie began reading the motel signs: NO VACANCY. . . NO VACANCY. . . NO VACANCY.

Suddenly he said, "Look, Daddy! There's one. The sign says, 'VACANCY!'"

In a voice that bristled with irritation, his mother said, "Clemmie, by now you ought to know that we can't stop there!"

After a moment of silence, Clemmie answered, "I know, Mamma. . . . Come on, Daddy, let's go look for a flea bag . . ."

But it wasn't necessary to look for a flea bag. I knew where I was going — or thought I did. I was driving from memory. After correcting one false turn, we pulled up at THE RABBIT TOURIST COURT.

Two summers ago we had stopped at this place. We had come up to see the famous outdoor drama, called *Unto These Hills*. Clemmie was with us that time, too . . . and Ruby and Elva. When we drew up before the neon rabbit racing across the sign, someone read: RABBIT TOURIST COURT FOR COLORED. Everyone got out of the car but Clemmie. Thinking that he was asleep, I reached in to pick him up and carry him. But his eyes were wide open. There was a look of distress on his face. He whispered, "Daddy . . . is everyone in this car colored?"

Something happened to my heart. . . . "Yes, Clemmie," I said, "we may go in here. . . . We are all colored."

My little boy was wide awake. He could have walked. But I carried him in . . . and held him close . . . and prayed that somehow God would let him understand and . . . without bitterness. . . (p. 87)

# A Violated Covenant

By Vine Deloria Jr.



American Indians are in the situation they are in today because of a total inability of the non-Indian Christian world to understand itself. Educational, economic, social, and legal problems of Indian peoples stem almost directly from Protestant theology and a misapplication of basic biblical ideas in the arena of political thought. Until the non-Indian peoples understand themselves and the religion they profess to confess, the situation of the American Indians will grow continually worse. The time may yet come within our lifetime of a genocidal war against American Indians being waged by these same churchgoing Christians who are now obliterating Vietnam and other parts of southeast Asia.

With such a prospect in the offing is it any wonder that from a variety of sources within the American Indian community have come voices attempting to raise a number of issues? For many Indian people understand all too well the inability of the Christian peoples to realize their religion here on earth as a viable social force. Too many times Indian peoples have seen the humanity of Christianity give way to more abstract forms of oppression by people firmly convinced they are following God's will. And fanatically determined to carry out God's will as they are able to understand it, they have perpetuated massacres and theft unparalleled in the history of mankind.

The most drastic error of Protestant theology as applied to the American Indian peoples has been the total inability of the Christians to understand their own idea of "covenant." Initially, a covenant was a pact between the peoples of two nations whereby the integrity of each nation was pledged to uphold the agreement. A covenant did not give people the right to intrude on the other partner of the agreement. Indeed, it meant that the spiritual faith of the two peoples was pledged so that the agreement called for the best efforts of the two groups to fulfill the terms of agreement.

With the development of Christian theology after the death of Jesus the whole idea of the New Covenant permeated explanations of the meaning of the life and death of the founder of the religion. Declaring that everyone who accepted

the teachings of Jesus, later Paul, and still later Luther, the various Christian denominations found in the idea of a New Covenant a community transcending time and space and bound together by a faith in the uniqueness of history as exemplified in the Christian story.

Where the New Covenant meant a New Community, a gathering of saints, a communion of the saved, to that degree the individuals composing the heavenly city were required to act positively in response to the message they proclaimed to the world and by which they were encouraged to judge the secular world. Thus Christians were told they had been freed from the judgments of the law

Many Indian people understand the inability of the Christian peoples to realize their religion here on earth as a viable social force.

and were freed to live in a state of near-grace. By transcending law and dwelling permanently within a covenantal relationship Christians bound themselves to living a life of creative existence, a life in which they were not judged solely by their transgressions of law but by the vision of life in its totality toward which they marched.

But there was no corresponding understanding by Christians taken as a corporate group that they had a duty to incarnate the covenantal life in their relationships with peoples different from themselves. Law quickly replaced covenant and Christianity bogged down to the conception of a God who laboriously recorded each and every transgression of individuals for use in the afterlife when He would exact vengeance. It was this lower conception of divinity and hence society that Christians believed in when the New World was discovered. And the early colonial governments reflected a scales-and-balances concept of both law and covenant in their dealings with each other and with their own settlers.

Combined with the perversion of covenant was

# A Violated Covenant *(continued)*



a misapplication of the concept of Genesis to go forth and multiply and the placement of man as having dominion over all other species of the creation. According to the Genesis legend when man was given the right to name the animals, he was given dominion over them since by creating their names he had in effect participated in their creation also. As co-creator, one might have argued, man had a corresponding responsibility to care for the nonhuman elements of creation. In tending the Garden of Eden man had a corresponding responsibility to the earth itself to maintain its fruitfulness. All of this, particularly the edict of man's responsibility, was perverted by Christian theologians.

Early in the history of North American exploration the fundamental responsibilities of Genesis became interpreted as man's right, and basically the white man's right, to use whatever he wanted and however he wanted to use it. Thus slavery was justified as God's rightful contribution to the economic well-being of the Americans, God's chosen people. Wholesale destruction of the forests, the game, and

Law replaced covenant and Christianity then conceived of a God who recorded individual transgressions for use in the afterlife when He would exact vengeance.

the original peoples of the continent were justified as part of God's plan to subdue and dominate an untamed wilderness. Nowhere was there any sense of stewardship between diverse elements of the new Christian settlers, either collectively or individually, and the continent as they found it.

Within this context one can trace the tragic story of the American Indian peoples. The United States and the individual colonies signed treaties with the various tribes at which the faith and good will of the United States and its component states was pledged. Missionaries representing the respective denominations attended these treaty-signing

sessions each assuring the tribal leaders that if the government of the United States did not uphold the treaty, his church and his God would guarantee them. Indeed, missionaries promised that God himself wanted the tribes to sign the treaties because of his foreordained plan to create cities, suburbs, and shopping centers on the North American continent.

Within the treaty context, then, total faith and good will of the two parties, the Indian tribe and the United States, were pledged. Treaties were the covenants of the new lands insofar as they affected the relationships of individuals of the two disparate treaty groups. But as soon as the treaties were signed, and often even before the signing was official, large groups of settlers following God's divine command to subjugate the earth went forth into the reserved Indian lands. The tribes were thus pushed further and further backwards into the interior. At no point was there an acknowledgement by the allegedly religious people of the new nation that once having pledged the faith and validity of their religion, there was a corresponding responsibility to uphold the treaty.

The settlement of the continent, therefore, was one in which people, claiming to be divinely inspired members of a New Covenant, refused for a moment to keep their covenantal commitments to people to whom they had given them. Article by article, treaty by treaty, the spiritual faith given by the white Christians was violated in favor of God's other commandment, also misinterpreted, to subjugate the earth. It is, therefore, ridiculous to view Indian tribes as a people who have not and probably cannot understand the requirements of either religion or civilization. Both religion and civilization require, for their fundamental integrity, the premise that one can be taken at his word for what that word spiritually represents. Instead history has shown a marvelous ability of the white Christian to quibble on the meanings of specific words contained in treaties and statutes, finding in tortured interpretations of those words the loophole required when one is breaking faith.

In a corresponding development, responsibility to the earth and its creatures has been studiously avoided. Instead exploitation for the sake of ex-

# A Violated Covenant *(continued)*



exploitation has been the rule. Property rights have taken precedent over any sense of affinity for living creatures and their rights. The buffalo were exterminated to provide grazing lands for cattle, and misuse of these grazing lands resulted in the creation of a Great Dust Bowl followed by farm programs in which land is kept unproductive in order

The justification for taking Indian lands has always been: they are not doing anything with them.

to maintain a false economy for selected landowners while millions throughout the world starve.

The justification for taking Indian lands has always been: they are not doing anything with them. Underlying this complaint has been the idea that the earth itself can have no rest. It also must be exploited and used. There is no responsibility of man not to destroy the world. On the contrary the more the world can be changed, the theology has run, the more concrete poured, the more freeways, apartment buildings, slums, football stadiums, in short, the more confused edifices created, the better God is pleased. God, then, created the earth most ineptly. It was fortunate for God that man was available to recreate the world as it should be.

Now the chickens have come back to roost. The entire Vietnam fiasco revolves around the question of covenant. To what extent are we bound by our promise to protect the South Vietnam republic? And the answer has been that we are bound to the point where it becomes our duty, our God-given duty, to massacre defenseless old men, women, children, and babies — for their own good — and for our good, to defend them. When eighty-three percent of the citizens of this country, this Christian country, think that Lieutenant Calley did right in executing the people at My Lai, then one can see how far from the reality of what they proclaim the arriving Christians have come in four centuries.

Instead of creating the world in a better way than the deity, Christian peoples have only succeeded in creating a situation in which mankind

may well extinguish itself within a generation unless pollution is controlled. And even that statement is not really correct. Unless the white Christians control pollution, all of mankind, Christian and non-Christian, may become extinct. This obvious fact, rather than theological fancies of the past, tells us of the relative truth of the Genesis legend. For if man was given the right to totally subjugate, then no harm would come to him. Such, according to our best scientific minds, is not and has not been the case.

Outside of a massive repentance and a society turned completely around there appears to be no solution to modern problems. Unless mankind takes its responsibilities to the world, and unless Christians take their responsibilities to non-Christians, as serious and critical calls to action, we really have no future. We will have created our own judgment day far in advance of any divine plans for the event.

In the field of human rights there must be a radical change in attitudes. If it has been stated that Indian treaties will be upheld, then it is the responsibility to uphold them. No amount of quibbling over phraseology can change that basic response. If all men are really created in God's image, there should be no question, at least among those alleging to be Christians, to carrying out those programs and projects that will most nearly approximate that condition. The continual bickering over legal

Unless the white Christians control pollution, all of mankind, Christian and non-Christian, may become extinct.

sophistries with respect to treaty rights, integration, welfare, the aged, orphans, speaks of a society in which law and not covenant dominates. That society and its members who so loudly proclaim to be members of the covenant, the New Covenant, should either put up or shut up.

Most of us really know what is right. We rarely do it. But there is a corresponding responsibility on Christians today that faces no other group. For

# A Violated Covenant *(continued)*



Christians have not only proclaimed that they are right, they have proclaimed that they alone are right and that everyone else is wrong. And then they have backed away from their responsibilities to uphold the right. When minority groups have tried to get them to respond in a manner that speaks of the spiritual commitment to the principles which they proclaim and not the legalistic footnotes behind which they have always hidden, then the Christians have fought back thinking that all efforts to make them live up to their responsibilities are subversive to the great society that they, allegedly with God's help, have created.

The case of the American Indian is clear and uncomplicated. American Indians suffer because the non-Indians have devised ways and means of not keeping their word. Non-Indians have violated their covenants with Indian tribes. Let them

fulfill these treaties and covenants and then come talk to us about problems. For it is then that we will be able to discern which problems are really our problems and which are problems created by non-Indians for us.

(1971)

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# Perspective on Lutheranism

By José Miguel de Jesús



Let's take a quick look at the origins of Lutheranism in the USA, in order to see how its culture has been set in place. If you are not Lutheran, I would invite you to look at the history of your denomination in order to see how the culture of your church has come to be.

The things which were established in this society and in this church in order to provide privilege for certain persons, were never meant to be for anybody else. Congregations were

In the South Bronx, there were once eleven Lutheran congregations within a sixteen block area.

specifically designed to give certain people an advantage. In its origins, the Lutheran church here is an immigrant church. Many Lutherans came to the United States, among other reasons, to escape religious persecution. Others came seeking better opportunity than was available in their homeland.

Because they did not speak English, in order to provide support, protection, community, familiarity, and continuity for one another, they settled in separate communities. Yet at the same time, this male dominant group added to the myth of rugged, (male) individualism which still pervades this country today.

These communities developed both in the cities and in the country. In the city, Lutheran immigrants supplied hard labor for the industrial revolution. In the country, they became part of the backbone of this nation's food production system. Everywhere, they lived in "colonies." The colonies were of people who had something in common from back home. Perhaps they were from the same town. Perhaps they were of the same extended family or "Clan." They spoke the same language, German, Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, Finnish, and others.

When it came to worship, they gathered in these groups. As they grew, they often called, or were sent, a pastor from their home town, province or homeland. (Where there was a state church, in

the old country, that church did its best to exert control and maintain their national identity.) The congregations were established to give each group life. It was a place to come together with those who were most like themselves, be affirmed, sustained, and nurtured. (Although being rugged, they might never admit to a need for nurturing.) This was a place to escape the harshness of life in a new nation where they were strangers. Here they could keep their language and the traditions of their culture. Here they could get away from the hardships of working on the land and the way others looked down on farmers. Here, they could come away from the harshness of the mills, the foundries, the factories, where they were just part of the machinery, and be someone special.

The congregations were a place for them. It was for their group, the community. In what today is known as the South Bronx, for example, there were once eleven Lutheran congregations within

People of color must get beyond internalizations of racial oppression in order to challenge, encourage and construct a new culture.

a sixteen block area. Each was a safe place for a different group which had a common identity.

These congregations were run by male hierarchy. Their women had no voice or vote until rather recently. In some Lutheran bodies, women still have no vote today.

I know of congregations where the original language was still being used as late as the mid 1970s.

Looking at this helps us to see how Lutheran unification has been so difficult in this country. It also helps us to see how it has been so difficult for Lutherans to let anybody else in. Although we are in a very different place in history, the old standards still remain. The imprint of this tradition is still prevalent in the church of today. In fact, looking at this, it seems a miracle that we (people of color) have gotten past the door.

# Perspective on Lutheranism *(continued)*



Immigrant Lutherans remained who they were within their community, yet in order to survive and thrive, they had to become “white” or mainstream within U.S.A. society. It was only within the church that they were able to protect their traditions. To many, these traditions were what set them apart from the rest of society here. Many have expressed to me that they or their ancestors were the holders of the “true Gospel.” Only Luther got it right!

This is what we walk into. This is a church which was set up for the benefit of certain people. Because of this, by its nature, it is designed to exclude others. Because of this, systemic racism and internalized racial oppression are firmly in place. This is why it has been so difficult for people of color to maintain our identity and still be a part of the Lutheran church.

If this culture is ever to evolve, grow or change, people of color must get beyond our internalizations of racial oppression in order to challenge, encourage and construct a new culture.

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*José Miguel de Jesús Avilés grew up in a home and community that was culturally Puerto Rican. His home congregation was a Spanish-speaking Lutheran community. He attended a German, Lutheran Missouri Synod elementary school, where he was the first Puerto Rican to graduate.*

*Miguel has served the Lutheran church in ministries in the South Bronx; Denver, Colorado; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He served on the Task Force on Racial Inclusiveness of the American Lutheran Church. He served on the staff of Lutheran Human Relations Association for eight years and continues to serve LHRA as a consultant.*

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# Season of LENT

## Session 8

### Entering the Story of the Church

#### **Purpose**

Despite God's vision and God's call to be one, the church has historically been a part of the system of oppression and dominance. In this session, we will explore attitudes and beliefs that have supported the system of racism.

#### **Discussion on Judeo-Christian Worldview**

- Recall the words from Genesis 1:28, "...have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." How has "dominion" been used over the course of time in ways that are contrary to God's vision?
- How have the concepts of dominion, of being chosen, and of singleness of truth and divine sanction of patriarchy shaped how the people who held those concepts saw themselves?
- What effect have those concepts had on others? How are they played out in the timeline?
- Choose one or two other teachings that are listed and discuss their effect on the people who held them and on people outside of that group.
- How do those concepts and teachings continue to underlie actions and attitudes within our nation and our church?
- How were you taught these concepts? How have they shaped your worldview? What role have those teachings played in how you see yourself and others?

#### **Unpacking the Timeline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

(Note: If your group background is not ELCA, consider the same questions using dates from your own denomination's history.)

Work in the same groups that developed the timeline of the United States, focusing on the same sections of time:

1. 1607-1787
2. 1788-1864
3. 1865-1920
4. 1921-Present

- Review the list of dates on the handout.
- Add other dates and events during this period of time as you recall them.
- How would you describe this period of time in your church body's history? What image could you create to visualize this time period?
- Discuss the relationships of people of American Indian/Alaskan Native, European, African, Asian, Latino, and Arab/Middle Eastern heritages within the church during this period of time.
- How are the foundational values reflected in this timeline?
- Put selected dates and events on the timeline or draw a symbol or symbols on the timeline to depict the feelings and events of this period of history.



### **Journaling**

Take time this week to take a walk—to reflect, to watch, and to listen to people’s interactions, to notice words or actions that reflect the Judeo-Christian values and teachings that were named. Take time to journal—to write, or otherwise record—what you notice and how you feel about all you have talked about.

# Lutheran Church Timeline



- 1623** Dutch establish New Amsterdam — Lutherans barely tolerated
- 1649** First Lutheran Church founded in Albany, New York —oldest ELCA congregation
- 1664** British begin to take over Dutch and Swedish colonies. New Amsterdam becomes New York. Lutherans gain religious liberty
- 1666** Frederick Lutheran Church founded by the Church of Denmark in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands
- 1669** An African named Emmanuel baptized as a Lutheran in New York
- 1708** Lutheran and Reformed Germans begin immigrating in large numbers, settling in the Hudson River Valley
- 1736** Jerusalem Evangelical Lutheran Church founded by Salzburgers in Ebenezer, Georgia
- 1743** Nicholas Sommer baptizes American Indian people for the first time in the Mohawk and Schoharie valleys
- 1748** Henry Melchior Muhlenburg establishes the Pennsylvania Ministerium to legitimize pastors' credentials
- 1820** The General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States was founded, forming the first North American “church body”
- 1820s** Second wave of German and Scandinavian immigration begins
- 1826** The Lutheran Theological Seminary established in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania
- 1839** African-American Daniel A. Payne, Gettysburg Seminary graduate, ordained by the Franckean Synod in New York. Payne never serves a Lutheran congregation. He goes on to become the sixth bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church and founder of Wilberforce University.
- 1847** Organization of German Lutherans in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and Missouri. In 1848 becomes The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
- 1845-1890** Founding of The Buffalo Synod, Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod in America, The First (German) Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Texas, The Norwegian Synod, The Iowa Synod, The Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, The Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod in North America, Norwegian-Danish Augustana Synod, Danish Evangelical Lutheran Association in America, The Icelandic Synod, and The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, or Suomi Synod
- 1860-61** A visitor to the Norwegian settlements in Texas, wrote very unfavorably about the area, saying among other things, that his countrymen there owned slaves and “felt themselves made if they could possess one”
- 1860s** Pro and con slavery debate among Norwegian Lutherans in Illinois
- 1871** As part of President Ulysses S. Grant’s so-called “peace policy,” the Lutheran churches assigned the Sac and Fox Reservation. Other reservations assigned to other faith groups
- 1880** The North Carolina synod ordained David J. Koontz, an African-American
- 1892** The Oaks Indian Mission started by Danish Lutherans among the Cherokee people in Oklahoma who had survived the “Trail of Tears”

- 1898** Gabriela Cuervos is the first Puerto Rican to become Lutheran
- 1903** Two African American colleges open – Immanuel in Concord, N.C., and Lutheran College in New Orleans
- 1917** First significant Lutheran work among Hispanics begins in Texas
- 1917** Cooperative work for the 400th anniversary of the Reformation leads to the uniting of 90% of Norwegian Lutherans in the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America; The General Synod, General Council and United Synod of the South merge to form the United Lutheran Church in America in 1918
- 1930** The American Lutheran Church formed, merging the Joint Synod of Ohio (1818), Buffalo Synod (1845), and Texas (1851) and Iowa Synods (1854). Later becomes part of the 1960 merger resulting in the second American Lutheran Church
- 1937** True Light Lutheran Church, New York City, is founded as the first Asian Lutheran congregation in America by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
- 1960** The American Lutheran Church founded by merger of the UELC (1896), the ALC (1930) and the ELC (1917)
- 1962** The Lutheran Church in America results from a merger of the Augustana Church (1860), the AELC (1872), the Suomi Synod (1890) and the ULCA (1918)
- 1964** Statement on Race Relationships passed in LCA
- 1966** Lutheran Church and Indian People (LUCHIP) begin convening annually to bring Lutherans together to discuss better ways of advancing and supporting the churches’ mission among Native Americans
- 1968** Formation of Association of Concerned Black Clergy by pastors of LCA, ALC and LCMS
- 1975** Stanley R. Goodwin and George Tinker are the first American Indian Lutherans to be ordained as Lutherans
- 1976** The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) founded by “moderates” who left the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
- 1979** The Association of Black Lutherans formed
- 1983** Nelson Trout is first Lutheran African American bishop in the United States, elected by the South Pacific District of the ALC
- 1984** Will Herzfeld becomes the first African American bishop of a national American Lutheran church body, AELC
- 1987** The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America formed by merger of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America
- 2000** U.S. population 69.1 percent white; ELCA 97.8 percent white

# Season of LENT

## Session 9

### Examining the Construction of Culture

#### **Purpose**

In this session we will explore the story of the Good Samaritan. As we enter the roles of the various people in the story, we will examine the cultural attitudes and actions of those persons. We will explore the layers of White culture that reinforce and hold traditions and practices in place.

#### **Discussion on Parable of Good Samaritan**

Enter the story from your character's perspective:

- How did you see yourself in the story?
- How did you see others in the story?
- How did your view of yourself and of others guide your actions?
- What other factors helped to determine your actions?

#### **Background on characters:**

**TRAVELER:** We have no identification of the traveler, but it seems to be assumed he is a Jew. The person is left for dead at the side of the road.

**ROBBERS:** Did the robbers see this as an easy way out to live off the well being of others? Was this their last resort for survival? No mention is made of their identity.

**PRIEST:** An Israelite who had been set apart from everyone else to serve God. A priest must be made clean, by washing and sacrifice, before he could take on his holy work. He is to avoid touching a corpse, unless it is that of a close relative, because death is linked with sin. Touching a corpse would make him ritually unclean and unable to perform his work in the Temple. A priest is to be both a teacher and a living example of God's holy ways.

**LEVITE:** Also an Israelite, of the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe. Within the tribe of Levi, different families and clans are responsible for caring for different parts of the tabernacle. Levites also need to be set apart through a special ceremony of washing and offering sacrifices. A Levite is to remain clean, to be pure in body and mind, to serve God in the tabernacle.

**SAMARITAN:** A person hated and despised by Jews. Samaritans were people from various races who came into the land of Samaria after Israel was defeated and its people were carried into captivity. Samaritans worshipped God according to the first five books of the Old Testament, but because of their mixed race and incomplete religion, the Jews regarded them as enemies and would go out of their way to avoid them.

**INNKEEPER:** No identification is made of the innkeeper's background. The person is there to provide a service.

### Large Group Discussion

- Present the story from your character's perspective.
- With whom do you most identify in this parable? Why?
- How do you see prejudices, cultural practices, and institutional policies as factors in how this story is played out?
- Why did Jesus so specifically name the person who helped a Samaritan?
- Hearing this story from the perspective of the lawyer — who was trying to justify himself — what challenges might Jesus be laying before him?
- What challenges might Jesus be giving us through this story?
- Jesus knew that the lawyer, and the other Jews who were listening, likely would have found it too distasteful to identify with the Samaritan. Note that the lawyer cannot even say the name "Samaritan." He responds to Jesus' question of who is his neighbor with "The one who showed him mercy." The listeners wouldn't want to be like the Priest or Levite; that leaves the hearer identifying with the man in the ditch. What does it mean to be the man in the ditch? What challenge does that raise in you? From whom do you need help for support and healing?

### Discussion on Cultural Pyramid

- How do you benefit from being White in the church?
- How do you see the White cultural norms and values shaping the way things are done?
- Talk about a tradition in your congregation — the time of services, the order of worship, the type of music, the programs of evangelism or education, etc. — and explore why that tradition is important. What is its value base?
- Physically or mentally walk through a part of the church building. What images greet people? What messages are conveyed of the culture that defines this place?
- Name a cultural value that is important to you. Talk about your struggle when that value comes up against someone else's value, e.g. the use of time, order of decision-making, etc. What would it take for you to give up that value as definitive?

# Season of LENT

## Session 9 *(continued)*

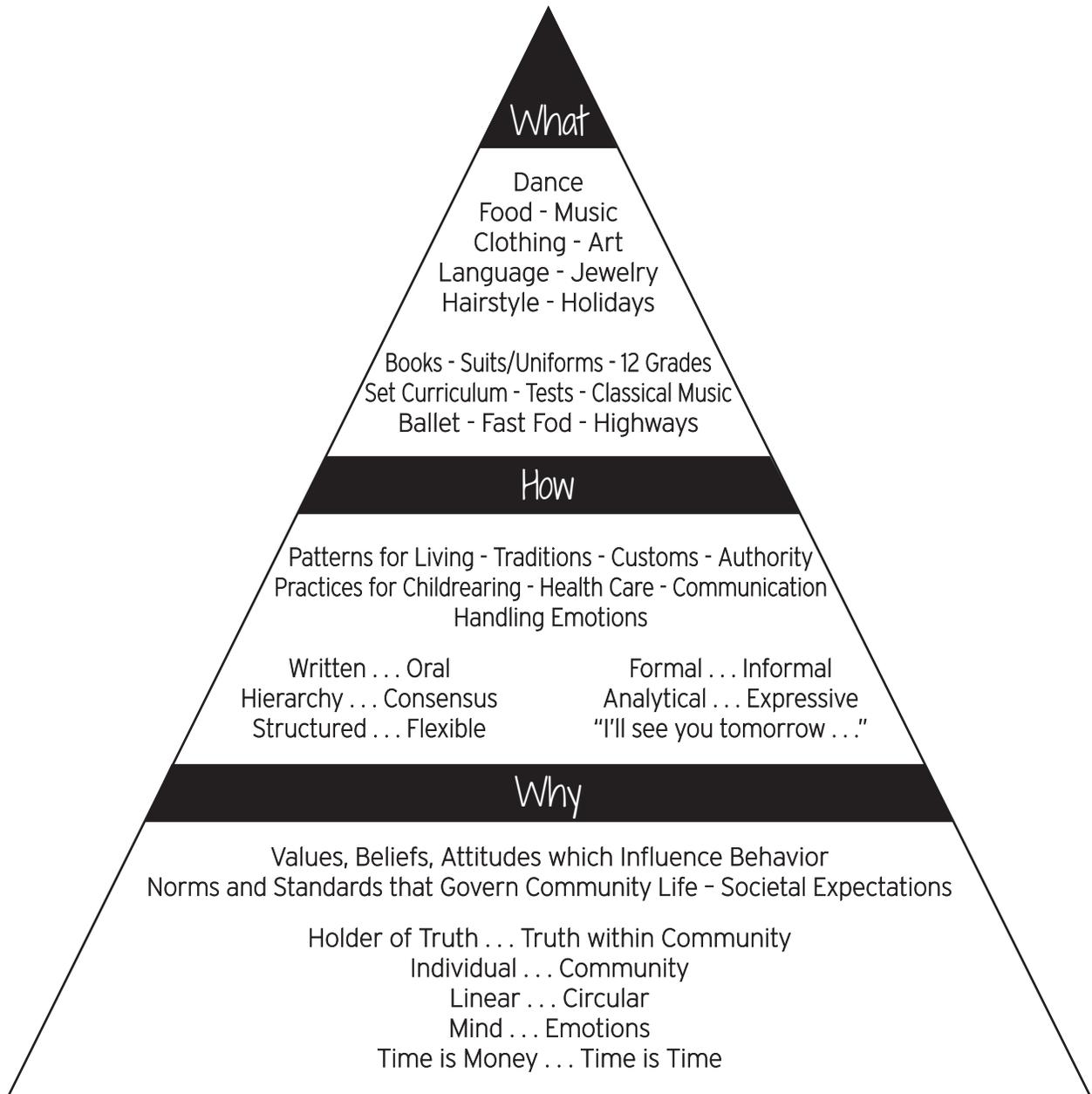
### **Culture and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

- Read paragraphs 2-4, pages 15-16, “A Time to Take Culture Seriously” in the ELCA Social Statement.
- 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 church?

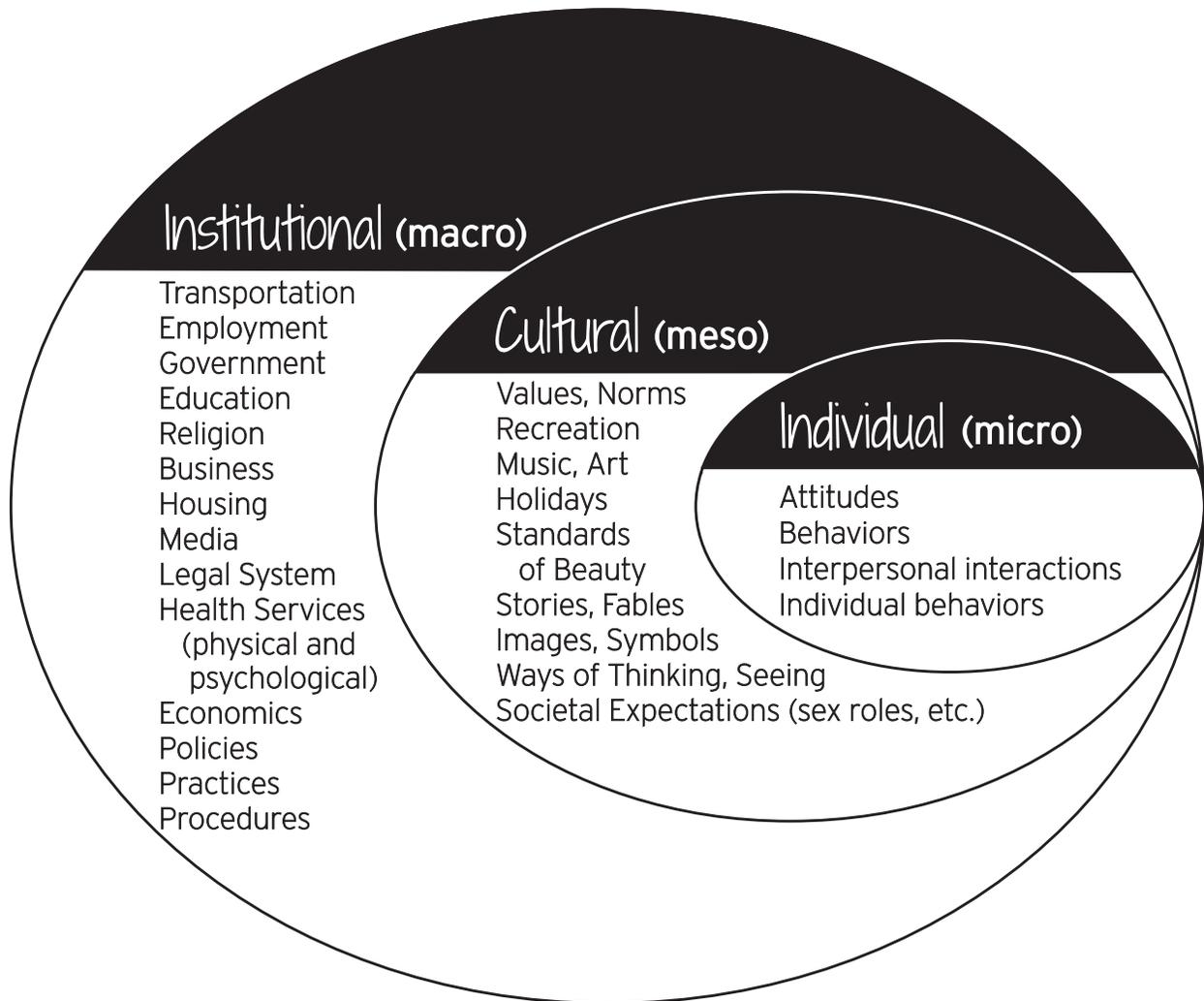
### **Journaling**

This week notice the culture of your local congregation. Notice how time is viewed and used; how people think and communicate; how people make decisions within groups. Notice also the pictures on the walls and expressions of words and music. Record what you see differently and note your feelings and thoughts.

# Dissecting the Cultural Pyramid



# Levels of Racism



# Season of LENT



## Session 10

### Entering My Story of Privilege

#### **Purpose**

This session will explore the personal impact of racism by helping us examine our own legacy of privilege. The work of repentance, of turning around, is to know and understand racism as institutional, cultural, and personal. The final work of repentance is to see the sin of racism within oneself and to know the need for healing.

#### **Building the Chain of Privilege**

- Consider who you are today and your location in all factors of life — your employment, education, housing, transportation, community, entertainment and travel opportunities, family, friends, and social groups.
- How has your life today been shaped by people, places, and events that preceded you? For example, how did you reach your level of education—who paid for it, what resources were available to you, how were you given information or access to resources, how were those resources shaped or put in place by previous generations? How have you been able to live where you do; to get the job you have; to be able to travel where you will; etc.
- Using the paper links, create a paper chain that shares the story of your legacy of access or stream of opportunity that brought you to where you are today.

#### **Small Group Discussion**

- Share the story of your chain of privilege.

#### **Reflection on Chain of Privilege**

- What thoughts and feelings did you have as you worked on your chain?
- What new meanings, insights, or understanding did you experience?
- How has being White shaped your experience and reality?
- What have you lost because of racism?
- What does it mean to you to repent of racism?

#### **Journaling**

Continue to journal on your thoughts and feelings. Set aside time during Holy Week for silence and reflection.

# Season of EASTER Session 11

## Entering the Healing Waters

### **Purpose**

In this session we will enter into the healing process. Using the biblical story of Naaman, we will explore the process of healing, and will come to understand the process of healing as a life-long journey that requires coming back to the river many times.

### **Discussion on the Healing of Naaman**

Discuss the reactions and feelings of your assigned character from 2 Kings 5:1-14. 1) Naaman, 2) the young Israelite girl, 3) Elisha, 4) the king of Aram, 5) the king of Israel, or 6) Naaman's servants. Speak from the first person perspective.

- Define your role and position in the story.
- What are you called on to do?
- How do you act or react and why?
- From your character's perspective, how do you see the events in this story?

### **Write a Story of Healing from Racism**

- Rewrite the healing of Naaman as a story of healing from the leprosy of racism.
- Search the story of Naaman for its meaning and application to the disease of racism, including as you can, the role of the different people in the story.
- Consider questions, such as: How do we know that we are afflicted with the disease? What and who are the voices that lead us toward healing? What are the "waters"—the activities, learnings, experiences—that we need to enter in order to begin the healing of our disease of racism? What is the role of our community as we enter the river for healing? What does it mean to enter the river to find healing? What prejudices or old understandings do we have to lay aside in order to enter the healing water? What is the meaning of going in seven times?
- Prepare to present your story in whatever way you wish.

### **Journaling**

Continue to journal. Reflect this week on what it means to enter the Jordan. How do you see yourself in need of healing? What will it take to find that healing?

# Season of EASTER Session 12



## Walking the Journey toward New White Identity

### **Purpose**

The work to find healing within a new White identity is a lifelong journey. This session will introduce us to the statuses or stages of racial identity development. The chart of racial identity development can serve as a guide to understand the complex dynamics of growth in finding what it means to be White.

### **Individual Reflection on Chart of Racial Identity Development**

Use the chart to recall your story, remembering words, interactions, and things you may have thought that reflect statuses of identity. We may feel embarrassed by those things, but remembering is also an act of healing. Chart your journey alongside the descriptions.

### **Small Group Discussion**

- Share one or more experiences of challenge and growth in your journey of racial identity.
- What was good about being in a particular status? What was difficult?
- Where do you see yourself now?
- What are your challenges to grow?
- How do you see the tension in yourself between where you are now and former statuses?

### **Journaling**

Journal on your memories of growth, especially remembering those people or events that were helpful in moving you forward on the journey.

### **Assignment**

Read the article by Frances Kendall on allies. Be aware of how you can be an ally to people who are oppressed. Note your questions, comments and concerns as you read. Journal on the feelings and responses the article raises in you. Bring your thoughts and reflections to the next session.

# White Racial Identity Development



Stages	Definition	My Journey of White Racial Identity
<b>Phase I: Abandonment of a Racist Identity</b> 1. Contact	Timid and naively curious about the “other.” Ignorant of White privilege. Passively absorbs messages of White capability and superiority, accepting White culture and values as definers of “normal.” Pays little attention to significance of racial identity. Doesn’t describe self as White. Sees self as color-blind.	
	2. Disintegration	
	3. Reintegration	
<b>Phase II: Establishment of a Nonracist White Identity</b> 4. Pseudo-Independence	Begins to question Whiteness and justifiability of racism in any form. Acknowledges White responsibility for racism and confronts White privilege. Sees racism as system of advantage, but doesn’t know what to do with it. Wants to “help” people of other racial groups. Feels self-conscious and guilty. Often distances from other Whites. Seeks to be “less White than thou.”	
	5. Immersion/Emersion	
	6. Autonomy	

Created from information in several sources: Helms, Janet. Black and White Racial Identity, 1990; Howard, Gary, We Can't Teach What We Don't Know, 1999; Tatum, Beverly Daniel Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria, 1994

# How to Be an Ally If You Are a Person with Privilege



By Frances E. Kendall

One way to work for social justice is as an ally. The gay and lesbian community realized ten or fifteen years ago that, without the help of straight allies, gays and lesbians don't have the clout needed to fight heterosexist and homophobic legislation. Gradually the call for allies has spread to other communities against which discrimination is systemic.

## Being an Ally

What it means to be an ally varies greatly from person to person. For some, it means building a relationship of love and trust with another; for others, it means intentionally putting oneself in harm's way so that another person remains safe. Each type of alliance has its own parameters, responsibilities, and degrees of risk. For example, being an ally to someone who is in a less privileged position than I am requires different work than is necessary if the person has privileges like mine. There are also a variety of styles that an ally can use. Some of us are bold and audacious, others are more reserved. The common bond is that we align ourselves with a person or people in such a way that we "have their backs."

When I use the term "ally," I am not talking about love or friendship, although I grow to love many of the people with whom I align myself. I even see myself as an ally of people whom I don't know, individuals who are members of groups with which I align myself as a matter of principle.

Those of us who have been granted privileges based purely on who we are born (as white, as male, as straight, and so forth) often feel that either we want to give our privileges back, which we can't really do, or we want to use them to improve the experience of those who don't have our access to power and resources. One of the most effective ways to use our privilege is to become the ally of those on the other side of the privilege seesaw. This type of alliance requires a great deal of self-examination on our part as well as the willingness to go against the people who share our privilege status and with whom we are expected to group ourselves.

[Note: In the following descriptions of ally behavior, the federal government's term "target groups" refers to those who are at greatest risk of being targeted for discrimination, e.g., people of color, women, gays and lesbians, people with disabilities, and so on.]

## Developing an Understanding

Allies work continuously to develop an understanding of the personal and institutional experiences of the person or people with whom they are aligning themselves. If the ally is a member of a privileged group, it is essential that she or he also strives for clarity about the impact of privileges on her or his life. *What this might look like:*

- Consistently asking myself what it means to be white in this situation. How would I be experienced now if I were of color? Would I be listened to? Would I be getting the support I am getting now? How would my life in this organization be different if I were not white/male/heterosexual/tenured/a manager?
- Closely observing the experiences of people of color in the organization: how they are listened to, talked about, promoted, and expected to do additional jobs. For example, members of target groups counsel all the people in the organization who look like them even though that is not a part of their job description, or they have to speak for all members of "their" group or serve on a disproportionate number of committees so that there is "racial input." Few of us who are white ever have to be "professional whites," asked to speak for our race, represent our race, or offer support to people purely because their skin color is the same as ours.

## Allying Publicly and Privately

Allies choose to ally themselves publicly and privately with members of target groups and respond to their needs. This may mean breaking assumed allegiances with those who have the same privileges as you. It is important not to underestimate the consequences of breaking these

# How to Be an Ally *(continued)*



agreements, and to break them in ways that will be most useful to the person or group with whom you are aligning yourself. *What this might look like:*

- Stepping into a situation in which a person of color is being overrun by someone who looks like you: “John [a white man], I think Eugene [a Filipino] is making an important point. Would you hold your comment for a second so I can hear what Eugene has to say?”
- Speaking out about a situation in which you don’t appear to have any vested interest: “Jean, there are no women of color in this pool of candidates. How can we begin to get a broader perspective in our department if we continue to hire people who have similar backgrounds to ours or who look like us?”
- Interrupting a comment or joke that is insensitive or stereotypic toward a target group, whether or not a member of that group is present. “Lu, that joke is anti-Semitic. I don’t care if a Jewish person told it to you; it doesn’t contribute to the kind of environment I want to work in.”

*This is NOT about rescuing or grandstanding, nor making a show of our support so that we will look good or progressive or liberal.*

Other white people may perceive our stepping in as betraying of our same-race relationships. Comments such as “Who made you the political correctness police?” or “Don’t you have a sense of humor?” or “Can’t Chong take care of himself?” alert you to the fact that you have broken the unspoken code about criticizing another white...broken what Aida Hurtado calls the “unspoken rules of privilege” (*The Color of Privilege*, p. 128). While we may choose to take this risk ourselves, it is important to work strategically so as not to put the person with whom we have aligned ourselves in greater jeopardy. The example above about the unbalanced pool of candidates is worded to make it clear that it is in the department’s interest to interview and hire people who bring different experiences and

points of view to the table. The white person could have covered himself by implying that his concern was for the lonely woman of color already present. (“Jean, there are no women of color in this pool of candidates. I know from talking with her that Josephina is sick of being the only Latina in our department.”) Instead, he made it clear that a mostly white staff was not in his personal interest or that of the institution.

## **Working in Our Interest**

Allies believe that it is in their interest to be allies and are able to talk about why this is the case. Talking clearly about having the privilege to be able to step in is an important educational tool for others with the same privileges. *What this might look like:*

- Regularly prefacing what I am about to say with, “As a white person, I [think/feel/understand am not able to understand...]” By identifying one of my primary lenses on the world I let others know that I am clear that being white has an impact on how I perceive everything.
- Choosing to make an issue of a situation, acknowledging that our whiteness gives us the privilege to speak with impunity. “As white women, because of our race privilege, our promotions are at far less risk than those of the women of color. Let’s speak to the women of color and follow their instruction about the harassment we have all been experiencing.”

## **Committing to Personal Growth**

Allies are committed to the never-ending personal growth required to be genuinely supportive. If both people are without privilege it means coming to grips with the ways that internalized oppression affects you. If I am privileged, uprooting long-held beliefs about the way that the world works will probably be necessary. *What this might look like:*

Recognizing the lack of equitable access to education that I had always been told was present.

# How to Be an Ally *(continued)*



A brief story. As I was finishing my Master's degree at Bank Street College of Education, I began to look at doctoral programs. My scores on the GRE did not meet minimum requirements for any of the programs I was interested in, and I had no grades because Bank Street then used a pass-fail system. Further, I was clear that the doctoral work I wanted to do was to create anti-racist curriculum. So, not only did I not have grades or scores in my favor, but

Allies are committed to the never-ending personal growth required to be supportive.

I was also openly preparing to challenge the current educational system. I did, however, have four aces in my pocket. First, I had gone to Bank Street and that said a lot to the schools to which I was applying. Second, I had a recommendation from one of the most esteemed child development theorists in the country. Third, I was born with class entitlement and, thus, interviewed well. Fourth and I believe most importantly, my whiteness made me more appealing and less threatening to all of the schools. I know that rules were bent on my behalf to admit me to three prestigious schools. I also know that, had I been a person of color proposing to do anti-racist work, the chances of my being accepted into two of those programs would have been slim.

Mine is a clear example that our educational system is not a meritocracy. While I had known intellectually that racism is ingrained in every American institution, this was the first time my privilege was so obvious to me. In order to be clear about the role that white privilege played, and in order to be an ally, I had to give up my belief that we live in a world in which everyone is treated fairly, much less "the same."

- Facing in an on-going way the intentionality of white people's treatment of people of color, both historically and currently. In order to be an ally, I must hold in my consciousness what my racial group has done to keep us in positions of power and

authority. This is not about blaming myself or feeling guilty. In fact, I think guilt is often self-serving; if I feel terribly guilty about something, I can get mired in those feelings and not take action to change the situation. Staying conscious of our behavior as a group moves me to take responsibility for making changes. It also gives me greater insight into the experiences of those with whom I align myself.

## Articulating Oppression

Allies are able to articulate how various patterns of oppression have served to keep them in privileged positions or to withhold opportunities they might otherwise have. For many of us, this means exploring and owning our dual roles as oppressor and oppressed, as uncomfortable as that might be. *What this might look like:*

- Seeing (as in the story above) how my whiteness opened doors to institutions that most probably would not have opened so easily otherwise.
- Understanding that as white women we are given access to power and resources because of racial similarities to and our relationships with white men. In fact, we often receive those privileges at the expense of people of color, both male and female. While we certainly experience systemic discrimination as women, our skin color makes us less threatening to the group which holds systemic power.

## Not Using Mistakes as an Excuse

Allies expect to make some mistakes but do not use that as an excuse for inaction. As a person with privilege, it is important to study and to talk about how your privilege acts as both a shield and as blinders for you. Of necessity, those without privileges in a certain area know more about the specific examples of privilege than those who are privileged. *What this might look like:*

- Knowing that each of us, no matter how careful or conscious we are or how long

# How to Be an Ally *(continued)*



we have been working on issues of social justice, is going to say or do something dumb or insensitive. It isn't possible not to hurt or offend someone at some point. Our best bet is to openly acknowledge our mistakes and learn from them.

- Questioning how your perceptions might be different if you were not a member of a privileged group. For example, consider what it might be like to be the only woman of color in a group of senior decision-makers who are all white and male. Would you read situations and conversations differently than one of the white men? What things might you say or how might you make your comments? What kind of support might you want if you were other than white and male?
- Keeping a filter in your mind through which you run your thoughts or comments. Remarks such as, "If I were you..." or "I know just how you feel..." are never very helpful in opening up communication, and, in conversations in which there is an imbalance of privilege, they take on an air of arrogance. People with privilege can never really know what it is like to be a member of the target group. While I can sympathize with those who are of color, it is not possible for me truly to understand the experience of a person with different skin color because I am never going to be treated as they are. The goal is to show someone you are listening, you care, and you understand that being white causes you to be treated differently in the world. Much more useful comments would be "Because of my white blinders I don't always notice how he or she responds to you" or "Obviously, as a white person, I have never had your experience, but I really want to know how you perceive that you're being treated."

## **Taking Responsibility for Change**

Allies know that those on each side of an alliance hold responsibility for their own change, whether or

not persons on the other side choose to respond or to thank them. They are also clear that they are doing this work for themselves, not to "take care of" the other. *What this might look like:*

- Although it is difficult to remember that we do this work for ourselves, it is essential. For example, in a workshop in which I was a participant, we were talking about really painful stuff, and I heard myself say, "I have supported African American women all my life. I wish they would support me now." Luckily for me, a white woman who had done a lot of work on race was present and said, "African American women don't owe you shit. You chose freely to act as their ally." I thought to myself, "Oh, yeah, I have been knowing and saying that for years, but I forgot." I was grateful that there was another white woman to put me back on track so that no woman of color had to make the effort to remind me.
- Examining continually the institutional and personal benefits of hearing a wide diversity of perspectives, articulating those benefits, and building different points of view into the work we do.
- Interrupting less-than-helpful comments and pushing for an inclusive work environment. We do it because we, as well as others, will benefit. We do not step forward because we think we should or because the people or color can't speak for themselves or because we want to look good to the people of color around us. We are allies because we know that it is in our interest.

## **Initiating Change**

Allies know that, in the most empowered and genuine ally relationships, the persons with privilege initiate the change toward personal, institutional, and societal justice and equality. *What this might look like:*

- Assessing who will be at least risk when stepping into a situation to initiate change, conferring with others who are at greater

# How to Be an Ally *(continued)*



risk about the best strategies, and moving forward. Being an ally is like performing in a ballet. Our moves should be carefully designed to have the greatest effect.

- Understanding that this is not another opportunity to take charge, to ride in to fix everything. Ally relationships are just that: relationships. Together with the people who aren't privileged, we choreograph who makes which moves and when they will be made. On many occasions, people of color have looked at me and said, "You help her understand what's going on. She's your white sister." They implied that it is not their job to educate white women and that, because of my privilege, I am less likely to suffer from speaking straightforwardly than they would.

## **Promoting Inclusiveness and Justice**

Allies promote a sense of inclusiveness and justice in the organization, helping to create an environment that is hospitable for all. *What this might look like:*

- Recognizing the expectation that people of color will address racism, women will take care of sexism, and gay men and lesbians will "fix" heterosexism in the organization and, in their stead, becoming the point person for organizational change on these issues. Clues that this assumption is operating: the Diversity Committee is composed predominantly of people of color and white women, while those with greater positional and informal decision-making power are on the "important" committees; the senior manager reroutes all announcements of "diversity" conferences to a person of color with an attached note that says, "Thought you might be interested," implying that addressing issues of diversity is not his or her concern; men joking on the way to a sexual harassment seminar that they don't know why they have to go since they "already know how to harass"; the majority of people pushing for domestic partner benefits are gay or lesbian.

- Paying attention to the days and times meetings are scheduled so that no one group bears the brunt of exclusion. For example, being sure that meetings are not regularly scheduled on Saturdays or other Jewish holidays or before or after the regular work day so that parents have difficulty with childcare.

## **Sharing the Lead and Seeing Things Through**

Allies with privilege are responsible for sharing the lead with people of color in changing the organization and hold greater responsibility for seeing changes through to their conclusion. Sharing the lead is very different from taking the lead. When we take the lead we get to keep ourselves central and see ourselves as riding in to fix everything. Sharing the lead requires that we are in alignment and partnership with people who are working toward the greater good of all of us. *What this might look like:*

- Working to build a strategic diversity plan for the organization, tying it to the organization's business plan, and placing our personal credibility on the implementation of the plan.
- Securing funding for scholarships so that an economically and racially diverse student population is guaranteed.
- Assessing current policies and procedures in the organization and working to change them so that they don't impact various groups of people differently.
- Intentionally using our access to power, resources, and influence to push those who are in positions to be able to bring about change.

## **Laughing to Survive**

Allies are able to laugh at themselves as they make mistakes and at the real, but absurd, systems of supremacy in which we all live. As many oppressed people know, humor is a method of survival. Those with privilege must be very careful not to assume that we can join in the humor of those in a target group with whom we are in alliance.

# How to Be an Ally *(continued)*



*What this might look like:*

- Appreciating that there are times when laughing together is the only thing we can do short of throwing ourselves off a bridge. As Cornel West, an African American scholar, asked, “What could be more Theater of the Absurd than being Black in America?”
- Paying attention to the boundaries of who-can-say-what-to-whom: While it may be okay for a person of color to call me his “white sister,” it would be presumptuous for me to call him my “Latino brother.” In some communities, African Americans call white men “White boys” to lessen the feeling of white men’s power. It would be very insensitive, on the other hand, for a white male ally to call African American men “Black boys.” This is because of the history of that phrase and the indication that a person with privilege is ignoring the impact of race and believes that we are really all the same under the skin.

## **Understanding that Emotional Security is Not Realistic**

Allies understand that emotional safety is not a realistic expectation if we take our alliance seriously. For those with privilege, the goal is, as my friend David Tulin says, to “become comfortable with the uncomfortable and uncomfortable with the too comfortable” and to act to alter the too-comfortable.

*What this might look like:*

- Being alert to our desire to create a “safe” environment for an interracial conversation. My experience is that when white people ask for safety they mean they don’t want to be held accountable for what they say. They want to be able to make mistakes and not have people of color take them personally, and they don’t want to be yelled at by people of color. Those of us who are white are almost always safer, freer from institutional retribution, than people of color. That knowledge should help us remain in uncomfortable situations as we work for change.
- Identifying committees, decision-making

teams, and departments that are “too white” and working to bring a critical mass of people of color and white allies into the group. We do this not because it will look good but because the current composition is less able to make wise decisions due to its narrow vision. While discomfort is certain to follow, the benefits of inclusiveness far outweigh the discomfort.

## **Being Clear about the Experience of Being Other**

Allies know the consequences of not being clear about the experience of being Other. Some of these are:

- lack of trust
- lack of authentic relationships
- lack of foundation for coalition

For allies with privilege, the consequences of being unclear are even greater. Because our behaviors are rooted in privilege, those who are in our group give greater credence to our actions than they might if we were members of groups without privilege. Part of our task is to be models and educators for those like us. *What this might look like:*

- Understanding that because we don’t see a colleague of color being mistreated doesn’t mean that daily race-related experiences aren’t occurring. I often hear white people make comments such as, “Well, my friend is Black but he’s beyond all this race stuff. He is never treated poorly.” Or, “I’m sure she doesn’t have any problems with white people. You’d hardly know she’s Hispanic.” Or, “He is Black, but he’s really like a white Black person. He’s treated better than I am.”

Comments such as these alert a person of color to the fact that we don’t have those experiences, we can’t imagine other people having them, and therefore put little credence in the stories that people of color share. If we are to be genuine allies to people of color, we must constantly observe the subtleties and nuances of other white people’s

# How to Be an Ally *(continued)*



comments and behaviors just as we observe our own. And we must take the risk of asking, “What if I am wrong about how I think people of color are being treated in my institution? What can I do to seek out the reality of their experiences? How will I feel if I discover that people I know, love, and trust are among the worst offenders? And what will I do?”

- Reminding a colleague who says, “She’s always whining about race. This is not about race,” that as white people we simply can’t know what it is like to be of color. We will

Being an ally is so difficult because the less I protect my eyes from the world around me, the more I see and understand.

never be treated as if we were. While not everything is about race, there is always the possibility that it is an element in any situation. To deny that reality signals people of color and other white people that we can’t be trusted as allies or as members of a coalition.

## **Allying and Aligning**

Throughout many iterations of this chapter I used “allying” and “aligning” as interchangeable. It wasn’t until my friend and colleague Monza Naff pointed out that while they look alike, at their roots they have quite different meanings, both of which are vital to my discussion here, that I began to think more deeply about the word “align.” To “ally” oneself to someone means to bind to or unite with that person — to support or to stand with that person or group. To “align” oneself with someone means to bring yourself into line or alignment with her or him. In other words, to align is to bring into correct relative position — to actually move myself into a different place, one that I feel is the right one relative to the person or group I want to be an ally to.

In the specific examples of behaviors described above, both allying and aligning take place. If I interrupt an anti-Semitic joke even though I am not

Jewish, I am binding or allying myself to Jewish people. In that moment I am moving out of the safe position granted me by my Christian privilege and placing myself in the position of ridicule that is inherent in being the butt of an anti-Semitic joke — aligning myself.

Being a genuine ally is some of the hardest and riskiest work we can do. It requires those of us with privilege consciously to move ourselves into the fray so that members of target groups can more easily move out of the line of fire. Being an ally is lonely and frightening as well as incredibly enriching and rewarding. If I am serious about this work, I must strive to remove the layers and layers of blinders that my privilege places around my eyes.

One of the reasons that being an ally is so difficult is that the less I protect my eyes from the world around me, the more I see and understand. Often the seemingly intransigent determination to keep things as they are pushes me to despair. I have many ways of keeping myself buoyed up — others’ wise words are among the most useful. This quotation from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is one of the most helpful to me:

I am convinced that the universe is under control of a loving purpose. And that in the struggle for righteousness man has cosmic companionship. Behind the harsh appearance of the world there is benign power.

“Pilgrimage to Nonviolence.” 1958.

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# Season of EASTER Session 13

## Building toward a Multicultural Church

### **Purpose**

In this session we will explore how our learning becomes real in the life of the congregation. We will work through the racial journey of the congregation, describing the current life and ministry, and identifying steps and possibilities for change.

### **Drawing Your Congregation**

Draw—words, images, symbols, stick figures—how your congregation looks, thinks, and acts. Consider who the people are, the nature of art and architecture, how people relate with one another, who makes decisions and how. Reflect how the congregation does worship, education, youth ministry, stewardship, outreach, social ministry, etc.

### **Draw Your Congregation's Next "Look"**

Look at the description at the next level of growth. What would your same congregation look like at that level? What would be some of the changes? Identify the challenges that the congregation would face in implementing those changes. What conversations would need to happen?

### **Assignment and Journaling**

Continue to be aware of your congregation, paying close attention to what you see and how things are done. Note where you see signs of openness and possibility for change. Who might be possible allies in working for change? Note the things you notice.

# Building toward a Multicultural Church



The Journey of White Congregations and Institutions

Stages	Definition	My Journey of White Racial Identity
1. Monocultural in Norms, Values and Practices	Sees its way of doing things as the right way and the “norm.” Teachings, structures, decision-making, policies and practices of education, music and worship, building design, stewardship, social ministry and outreach are based in White culture. Members cannot see need for change.	
2. Tolerant of Differences but Maintaining Norms	Maintains White ways of thinking and doing things, but will tolerate a limited number of people of color who will fit in. May say, “We don’t have a problem,” but is not a safe place to talk openly and honestly about racism, sexism or other forms of oppression. Seeks to maintain status quo.	
3. Acceptance of People	Sees itself as open and committed to include people of color. May incorporate outward, symbolic images of inclusion. May recruit people of color and say, “All are welcome here,” but mostly unaware of White cultural norms and habits of privilege and paternalism that underlie congregational life.	
4. Awareness of Cultural Difference	Recognizes and understands importance of differences and seeks to eliminate discriminatory and exclusionary practices. Holds racism awareness training and may expand view of diversity to include disabled, gays and lesbians, and other oppressed groups. May include music, pictures, stories, food from other cultures, but decision making and policies remain rooted in dominant culture. Focus on what, not how, of culture.	
5. Understanding Cultural Norms and Values	Recognizes and understands systemic cultural norms and biases. Seeks to change structures by auditing all aspects of congregational life. Sincerely respects differences and affirms benefits of including perspectives and contributions of people of color. Encourages dialogue to discern differing values.	
6. Living in New Community	Strong community of people actively working for justice and against systems of oppression. No one culture or group dominates in decision-making, policies, or practices. Life of the congregation reflects diversity of people with all people fully participating in decisions. Deep care and respect for one another as they struggle together to live out a new community.	

Sources: Rita Hardiman, Lutheran Human Relations Association, Crossroads Ministry, Women of the ELCA.

# Season of PENTECOST Session 14

## Stepping Out in Faith

### **Purpose**

This session engages us in the story of Peter and Cornelius as told in Acts 10 and 11. We will explore this story of crossing a cultural chasm that had been put in place over a long period of time and held in place by tradition and the teachings of authority. The session will address the vision, the fears and hesitations, and the risk-taking of the people in this story of Acts.

### **Background on Individuals and Groups in Acts 10-11**

Peter was a lifelong Jew who had learned all of the teachings and laws of Moses and the prophets. He was schooled in what it meant to be a good Jew and to observe the laws of what was clean and unclean. He had carefully followed all of the laws of what he could and couldn't eat and would have had a strong reaction to eating what he had been taught was unclean. Eating what was unclean would defile him. He had also been taught that Gentiles are unclean and that as a Jew he was not to associate with Gentiles.

Simon the Tanner was a tanner of hides. He was also a Jew, but would be seen by some as somewhat of an outsider because of his occupation. He lived in Joppa and provided a place for Peter to stay during his time in Joppa.

The six circumcised believers were also Jews who had been schooled in all of the laws. They would have learned well what to eat and what not to eat, who to associate with and who not to.

The Apostles in Jerusalem were, of course, all Jews. They were people who had lived and traveled with Jesus. They were people of authority.

Cornelius was a Roman centurion, a leader of the occupying force, a Gentile. He was a man of great authority and power who answered to Rome and whose allegiance was to be given to Caesar and the gods of Rome. He was trained to see himself as superior to the lowly Jews whose land he occupied.

The messengers from Cornelius—the two slaves and the devout soldier—would likely have been Romans, or other non-Jews. Their loyalty would have been to Cornelius, knowing that their livelihood, and possibly their existence, depended on Cornelius and on obeying his orders. They would not have trusted Jews nor have been taught to look kindly at them. They would have known that Jews would look at them suspiciously as occupiers of the Jewish land.

Cornelius' household would also be Gentiles. They would have lived a life apart from the Jews. They lived in the land and would, therefore, have been observers of the Jews but would not have associated with them.

Peter and Cornelius—and their respective communities of Jews and Gentiles—were separated by religion, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, economics, and politics. There was much that divided them and created a great cultural chasm between their two worlds.



### Small Group Discussion

Explore the text and discuss the events of the story through the eyes of your assigned person(s). As you review the questions, prepare to share your responses from the first-person viewpoint.

- What is your role in the story?
- What were your fears?
- What was God calling forth in you?
- How did you feel about it?
- What did you do?

## Crossing the Cultural Chasm: Taking Steps to Act

The ten steps to act from Acts 10 and 11 serve as a guide for us in our journey. We will spend the next sessions following the steps laid out in this story of Acts.

- 1. Prayer:** Both Peter and Cornelius were so deeply engaged in prayer that they were able to see and hear God's vision.  
Do you pray with the expectation that you will see and know God's vision for your life and for your congregation?
- 2. Vision:** Cornelius and Peter each received a vision of what God was calling them to do.  
As you engage in prayer together and share in prayer-filled dialogue, what vision is emerging of what God is calling you to do as a congregation?
- 3. Giving up Old Messages:** Peter, Simon the Tanner, the believers who accompany Peter, and the apostles in Jerusalem all had to give up deeply imbedded beliefs about who and what is clean and unclean. They had to move across a barrier and associate with people they had been taught to avoid all of their lives. They had to see Gentiles as God's beloved people and not as untouchable, profane, and unclean. Cornelius, his messengers and his entire household had to receive Jews as messengers to them. In turn, they had to see that they had something to offer as they invited Peter to stay with them and gave him hospitality.  
What old messages, stereotypes, past hurts or traditions must you give up about other people in order to step forward into new relationships and new ministry? Who are people in the community who are not welcomed in the congregation? If the congregation and community are primarily White, why is that? What are the spoken or unspoken messages within the community that keep people of color out?
- 4. Commitment to Risk-Taking:** All of the people in the story had to step outside their comfort zone and take a risk, whether it was opening their home to the "other" as did Simon the Tanner and the members of Cornelius' household, or venturing into unfriendly territory as did the messengers and the believers who came with Peter, or Peter and Cornelius who took bold public actions, or the apostles who allowed the old law of distinction to be discarded. Each of the actions was a risk in breaking out of cultural traditions and ways of life. Each took a commitment of faith to step forth.  
What fears do you have in moving toward the vision? What barriers might hold you back? What consequences may you have to face? Given the fears and risks, what is your commitment to making White privilege visible and living out a vision of partnership?

# Season of PENTECOST

## Session 14 *(continued)*

**5. Gathering Community:** The entire story is a story of community. No one acted alone. Both Cornelius and Peter realized the importance of community in sending out messengers, and having others with them to give them support and to be witnesses to the events.

What does it mean to move forward with community? Who do you need to have with you? Who do you need to talk with? What help or support do you need and from whom?

**6. Retelling the Story:** Over and over Peter and Cornelius repeated their stories of God's call and direction. When Peter came to Jerusalem, he had to explain the story to the apostles, step by step. Central to the entire story is the telling of the story of Jesus.

What story do you have to share with others? What have you seen or heard in a new way during the months of this study? Who needs to hear your story?

**7. Action Step:** Cornelius took a first step in calling his servants and sending them to bring Peter to him. Peter's first step was inviting the messengers into Simon's home. Each step of this story builds on a previous step and each step is important in leading to the step of baptizing Gentiles—an action step that shook the foundations of the belief system.

What is a first step you can take?

**8. Receiving Hospitality:** Cornelius and his household invited Peter to stay with them several days. In his vision Peter had seen a sheet filled with foods he had been taught to see as unclean and avoided all of his life. They were foods common to the diet of a Gentile. As Peter accepted the hospitality of his Gentile hosts, he had to sleep in a strange place and eat the foods of Gentiles. At this point Peter fully accepted the Gentiles as genuine partners in the faith. Having eaten their food and accepted their hospitality, Peter no longer was in control. As shown in the vision, Peter had to let go of his cultural values and recognize and accept values of the Gentiles as also being of God. This step of receiving hospitality reflected the depth of change both in Peter, and in what the church would be. The Gentiles were not simply recipients of the Holy Spirit and of "mission efforts," but were full partners in the faith.

Who within your community or congregation do you regularly avoid? Whose hospitality do you find difficult to accept? From whom do you need to receive hospitality? Whose gifts need to be accepted within the congregation?

**9. Report Back/Reflect:** Peter had to report to the apostles in Jerusalem, explaining all that he had done. He reported each of the steps and God's direction in moving him to act. He reflected on all that happened and what it meant.

To whom will you need to report and when?

**10. Experience Change—Leading to Celebration and New Action:** When the apostles heard the story, they first were silenced. Then they praised God, recognizing that Gentiles, too, could hear and receive God's saving grace.

How have you been changed? For what do you praise God? With new understanding comes the need to again engage in prayer to seek God's continually unfolding vision, and to take new risks and new action steps.



### **Assignment and Journaling**

Spend time in daily prayer, seeking to hear where God is calling. Journal on what you are feeling and hearing. Are you hearing and seeing things around you differently? Are you becoming aware in new ways? What visions do you have of where God is leading?

# Season of PENTECOST Session 15

## Beholding God's New Vision

### **Purpose**

In this session we will work through the steps of Acts 10 and 11 in the context of our congregation. We will seek together to shape a vision of what God is calling us to be. We will unpack the old messages that could hold us back, express our fears, and articulate our commitments to live out the vision. Together we will name others to invite on this journey and prepare to go out to share the story.

### **Taking Steps to Act**

#### **Steps to Act: Vision**

- In Acts 10:3-6 and 10:10-16 we read that both Cornelius and Peter received a vision of what God was calling them to do.
- Briefly revisit the drawings from Session 13 on where the congregation currently is and how it would look at the next step.
- Individually draw a vision of how you would like to see your congregation ten years from now.
- Share your vision.
- What are the most important images and words that express the common vision for the congregation at this point in time?
- Write or draw that common vision and celebrate the vision as a group.

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#### **Steps to Act: Giving Up Old Messages**

- In Acts 10:13-16, we hear Peter struggling with the messages and traditions he had learned.
- On the back of your individual vision drawing, write the old messages, cultural values and traditions, stereotypes, or ways of thinking that continue to challenge you and get in the way of living into the vision you have drawn.
- In a small group share your old messages and develop a list of teachings, traditions, and messages that will be challenging for the congregation to give up in living into the group vision.
- Report your group list to the whole group.
- As a group, name those old messages that will be necessary for the congregation to struggle with in moving toward the vision. What cultural values and norms will need to be identified and addressed? Write those messages on the back of the group vision.



- Old messages and learnings never completely go away. They lie within us and we need to consciously work to unlearn them and put new awareness and understanding in place. We need to always be alert to how close below the surface those messages may lie and how they can come forward to disrupt our efforts to make the vision real. We need to be jointly accountable to putting them behind us in order to move forward with the vision.

### **Steps to Act: Commitment to Risk Taking**

- In Acts 10:7-8 and 17-25, Cornelius, the messengers, Peter, Simon the Tanner, the believers from Joppa, and Cornelius' relatives and friends all took risks.
- In a small group share your fears in moving forward on the vision and name the price you may have to pay in others' reactions as you name White privilege or question cultural values. What risks might you have to take?
- As a small group, name the fears the congregation will have to face, the barriers that might hold them back, and the risks the congregation will have to take to live into the vision.
- Share your responses with the large group. Together create a list of the fears and barriers.
- As you are ready and willing, share your commitments to take risks within the congregation.

### **Steps to Act: Gathering Community**

- In Acts 10:23b-24, we are reminded that both Peter and Cornelius gathered their community to support them and to be witnesses of the event. They both recognized their need to have allies with them on the journey.
- As a large group, talk about the role of allies in this work. Given the fears and barriers that were named, whom do you need to talk with in the congregation? Whose gifts could be helpful in this journey? Are there people within the community whom you need to talk with and interact with? Whose help and support do you need? Who would you like to invite with you on the journey? List the names on newsprint as they are lifted up.
- Within your small group review the list of names and help each person identify one or two people with whom they will share the story of this journey within the next month. You may also identify someone who has not already been listed.
- Regather as a large group to share the names of those with whom you will share the story.

# Season of PENTECOST

## Session 15 *(continued)*

### Assignment and Journaling

#### Steps to Act: Retelling the Story

- Throughout Acts 10 and 11, Cornelius and Peter retold the story as they had experienced it. In Acts 10:34-43, Peter retold the story of God's saving power through Jesus.
- Telling the story of a community is key to bringing others into that community. In the next month, schedule a time to share the story of this journey with one other person.
- To prepare for sharing, journal or reflect on what you have learned or how you have grown through this process. How have you been guided toward an awareness of what God is calling forth in you? How have you grown in your understanding of God's vision for the congregation and community?
- If the person you are sharing with is a member of the congregation, you may wish to invite that person to consider being part of a new group to engage in this study in the coming year, or to invite the person to consider how they might be helpful in the journey.
- If the person is a member of the community, you may share the vision of the congregation, talk about common visions you may have for the community, and ways the congregation and community can be allies in this journey.

# Season of PENTECOST Session 16



## Taking Steps to Act

### **Purpose**

This session will engage us in the process of identifying steps for action and the need to see ourselves as receivers. Others will need to be invited on the journey, and leadership needs to be actively engaged in the process of decision-making, but we will identify where action can begin to happen.

## **Taking Steps to Act**

### **Steps to Act: Taking Action**

In Acts 10:47-48 Peter took an action step in response to the action of the Holy Spirit. His ordering the Gentiles to be baptized transformed the understanding of who was included in the church. It was an action step that was built on very specific preceding actions and came about in response to recognizing God's action.

- Gather in small groups around common interests of ministry: music and worship, education, youth, stewardship, evangelism and outreach, social justice, etc.
- Brainstorm—and record on newsprint—possible first steps to take as a group within one or two areas of ministry. Remember to think in measurable, attainable steps, brainstorming specific examples of action. Be attentive to where God is leading. Search for what will call people to stretch beyond their comfort zone and will challenge cultural norms.
- Review the list and prioritize steps. Identify two or three action steps that can be taken in the next three months. Identify a timeline, person(s) responsible, and resources needed to accomplish each of the steps.
- Identify action steps to recommend to the congregation's leadership for the next year. Define timelines, responsibilities and resources for each of those action steps.
- Identify other people within the congregation who are important to taking action within these areas of ministry and name the person(s) responsible for sharing the story with them.

# Season of PENTECOST

## Session 16 *(continued)*

### **Steps to Act: Receiving Hospitality**

In Acts 10:48b we read of the profound step of significant change. If Peter had simply baptized Gentiles and left, it would have been a good story, but the chasm of culture would have been left unchanged. The meaning and depth of change is in Peter staying and eating the food of Gentiles.

- Review the action steps for what may have been missed in allowing White cultural norms and values to be the operative norms.
- Consider how the opinions, values and voices of people of color will be heard and fully valued and gifts fully received.
- What ways of living and thinking within the congregation need to continue to be examined in order to fully accept and trust the gifts of people of color?
- How can the congregation be receivers of hospitality and so begin to enter a genuine partnership with people of color?
- If the congregation and community are primarily White, how can the congregation be stretched to examine ways it maintains White exclusiveness? How can the gifts of people of color become a presence within the congregation?

### **Assignment and Journaling**

Note the dates set in the “Taking Action” section and the steps for which you agreed to be responsible. Continue to journal about your feelings as you take steps toward action. What old (or new) fears and hesitations do you notice? What joy and possibilities do you experience?

# Season of PENTECOST Session 17



## Reporting Back and Reflecting

### **Purpose**

Acts 11 is a record of Peter's report to the church at Jerusalem. Peter and Cornelius had visions, they gave up old messages, they gathered others with them and all took risks and moved forward step by step in action. Peter then had to explain it to the apostles in Jerusalem, step by step. In this session we will report back to the congregation regarding steps and learnings of this yearlong journey. We will share the vision, the things we have heard, seen, and learned, and will talk together about where the journey leads in continued action and growth.

*This session may be held with identified leaders of the congregation or as a special gathering to which all members of the congregation are invited.*

### **Steps to Act: Reporting Back and Reflecting**

(Instructions for group process)

#### **Vision**

- Invite a member of the group to share the vision for the congregation as the group has come to see it.
- Invite questions, reflections, or comments about the vision.
- Identify expansions or changes to the vision as they are articulated by the larger group, but be prepared to address concerns that would limit the vision and inhibit growth.

#### **Action Steps**

- Present the three-month and yearlong action steps identified by the group.
- Gather into small groups of five or six people with a member of the study group being present in each group.
- Ask small groups to choose one or two of the identified goals that are of special interest to them. Invite them to talk about how they see this action taking place within the congregation. What results may come about because of this action? How could this lead to further action and deeper learning?
- Invite small groups to identify any additional goals to help to bring the vision into being.
- Regather as a large group, inviting each small group to speak to one or two of the listed goals and to identify any additional goals.

# Season of PENTECOST

## Session 17 *(continued)*

- Work with the group to prioritize among all of the listed goals and establish consensus for taking these steps for action.
- If this is a leadership group of the congregation, work with the group to establish timelines and people or groups responsible for carrying out each action step.
- If this is a larger group of the congregation, identify the leaders who will establish timelines and responsibilities and a date by which they will accomplish that.
- Invite people to join in the action steps and to prayerfully consider their response if they are called.

# Season of PENTECOST Session 18



## Experiencing Change... Praising God... Continuing the Journey

### **Purpose**

After hearing and reflecting on Peter's story, those gathered in Jerusalem praised God. In this session, we will reflect on this yearlong journey, share what we have learned, and celebrate together. This session is not to be seen as a conclusion, but rather as a refreshment stop on the lifelong journey.

### **Steps to Act: Experiencing Change . . .**

In Acts 11:18 the apostles and believers in Jerusalem experienced a depth of change that silenced their criticism. They praised God, and then the journey and the struggles of growth continued.

- Reflect back on the cultural journey you drew in Session 2 in Advent. What new understandings or insights do you now bring to your cultural journey?
- What reflections do you have about your experiences of change or growth during the year and for what or whom do you give thanks and praise?
- Identify needs for continuing on the journey.
- How have you seen or felt God at work during this year?

### **Steps to Act: . . . Celebrating and Praising God . . .**

- Work as a group to create a liturgy for a worship service to celebrate the work of this year. Work together as a whole group or divide into separate groups to address different elements.
- What messages would this group like to share with the congregation? How would you share that?
- What symbols or images would you like to include?
- What songs or readings express the work of the year?
- Report back as a group and identify the person(s) who will take responsibility for preparing the service and communicating with the necessary people.

# Season of PENTECOST

## Session 18 *(continued)*

### **Steps to Act: . . . Continuing the Journey**

- Review the list of three-month steps for action.
- Evaluate the group progress. What steps have been taken? What is left to do? Who will be responsible for any remaining action?
- Name new steps for action to be taken individually or as a group. List those steps on newsprint and define responsibilities and timelines.
- If a new group will be beginning the study in Advent, identify people within the group who will be available for support and interaction.
- Remember that this year has been another step in your lifelong journey. Continue to journal, to pray for one another, and to engage in continuing action and growth.





# Troubling the Waters for Healing of the Church



A journey for White Christians from privilege to partnership

## Evaluation Form

Please rate the impact of this study you received by indicating your level of agreement with the following statements. Please answer by completely filling in the circle under the one response that best reflects your opinion. Please do NOT place a ✓ or an X in or on top of the circles. Feel free to make additional comments in the space provided.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Not Sure
<b>Understanding and Awareness</b>					
1. Before attending this study, I understood what White privilege mean	<input type="radio"/>				
2. As a result of this study, I am able to articulate what is meant by White privilege	<input type="radio"/>				
3. During the sessions, I felt comfortable discussing issues of White privilege and race with the other participants	<input type="radio"/>				
4. As a result of this study, I am more aware of some of the effects of White privilege in my life	<input type="radio"/>				
5. As a result of this study, I am more aware of institutional systems of racism	<input type="radio"/>				
6. As a result of this study, I am more aware of my capacity for contributing to institutional systems of racism	<input type="radio"/>				
7. As a result of this study, I can understand the impact of White privilege on the lives of those in other ethnic groups	<input type="radio"/>				
8. As a result of this study, I can understand the impact of White privilege on the development of the Lutheran church	<input type="radio"/>				
9. I am beginning to recognize how to take small steps to change the negative impact that White privilege has had on my life	<input type="radio"/>				

### Additional Comments?

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# Troubling the Waters for Healing of the Church (continued)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Not Sure
<b>Attitudes and Behavior</b>					
10. I am comfortable talking with others in a non-White setting	<input type="radio"/>				
11. I have established close relationships across racial lines	<input type="radio"/>				
12. As a result of this study, I am able to identify with some of my fears and the risks I must take to rid myself of the effects of White privilege	<input type="radio"/>				
13. As a result of this study, I will be intentional in setting goals and making plans to rid myself of the effects of White privilege	<input type="radio"/>				
14. This study has helped me to open up and communicate with others about my feelings of White privilege and racism	<input type="radio"/>				
15. I am willing to take action against racism	<input type="radio"/>				

## Additional Comments?

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16. Please describe the role you think Christians should play in addressing racism.

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