

A Journey for Christians across Race, Culture and Class

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

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

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

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

Be grounded in prayer and worship.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Be grounded in prayer and worship.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Continue to Checklist for the Journey



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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

What would you pack; how would you prepare?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Leadership Readiness Completed Continue to Vision



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

The story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 and 11 is a story of crossing culture and class in the early church. The separate world-views and cultural chasm between the Jews and Romans positioned Peter and Cornelius and their respective communities in worlds apart. And yet, grounded in prayer and vision, we find them giving up the divisive messages of their cultures and taking steps to come together in a new community as the body of Christ.

The journey of Peter and Cornelius across culture and class began in prayer and vision. Both were engaged in prayer when they had a vision of where God was calling them to go. Each responded to the vision by sharing it with those around him and taking action. Their openness to receive God's vision was central to the story. Without a vision they could not have imagined the actions they took. Without a vision that prodded him to see life in a completely new perspective, Peter would not have been able to sit in a Gentile house, preach the story of Jesus, baptize, and finally stay in Cornelius' house for several days. Staying with Gentiles, eating their food, meant giving up foundational cultural traditions. The vision of God's great inclusiveness led to concrete action of baptizing Gentiles and expanding the community of the early church.

Vision – in all the many books, workshops, and conferences on congregational change, growth, or development – is always central. If you have come to this resource, you may already have engaged in a process of discerning God's vision for your congregation. Or you may have a vision toward which you are hoping to lead the congregation. Living in an increasingly diverse society, you have a vision of becoming – or becoming more fully – an authentic multicultural church.

Vision is vital for the journey. It grounds us in who God calls us to be as a community of faith in the particular place we are located. It gives us life as a community of faith and connects us in common mission. Vision grows out of the past and leads us into the future. It gathers its life and meaning from the current context and reality. "A vision clarifies what the congregation wishes to become. And then the congregation lives into its vision" (Boots, p. 12).

The congregation's vision grows out of prayer and study of God's word and is held in tension with the current reality. If the congregation has been in a steady decline while the neighborhood has changed around it, there may be a sense of urgency for "getting new members." Vision is fed by a sense of urgency to be about God's work in the particular community, but the vision needs to focus on ministry with the community and not on numbers. A vision of numerical growth is inward focused. God's vision leads outward so that the congregation is known as a place of God's love enacted within the community.

The vision is given shape by the leadership team and/or the entire congregation. It needs to be communicated regularly and re-visited often so that it is embraced by the congregation and becomes the guide

for ministries and priorities.

Movement toward the vision needs to be intentional. It won't just happen. The section "One Body/Similar Members" provides tools to prepare the congregation for the process of discerning the vision. "Meeting my Neighbor" will help take intentional steps into the neighborhood. "One Body/Many Members" provides a picture of a congregation's ongoing intentionality.

Leadership Readiness Completed Continue to Beginning Conversations



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Need Help? Contact Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries | Phone: 800-638-3522 | email: ESMM@elca.org
Write: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America | 8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101

Who's Beyond the Maps We See?

In New York City the subway system is a massive network that connects five boroughs and carries seven million riders a day. The printed representation of it, "The Map," is complex and far-reaching; yet when we ride it often, we no longer need the print version with us for reference. We have learned to navigate the system, including alternate routes when changes are announced.

When I was young and had not yet commuted widely, I used to think no one lived beyond the routes that were shown, especially in the outer boroughs. They did of course; I just didn't know. They were the New Yorkers who took buses to locations beyond the subway stations, or who owned cars, living in areas not easily reached by subway lines.

Similarly, each of us has in our minds a representation of our world as we see it. Unless we live in a very racially/ethnically diverse neighborhood, we don't have daily contact with people who are very different from us. We know how to navigate our system. But because everyone is traveling on their own journeys, and only use portions of the map, we don't pay much attention to people who may exist beyond the map of our minds. Of course they do; we just don't know.

Whether on a subway or a diversity journey, you don't have to know everything about it in order to ride. You can take a short trip for a special occasion, and take a friend along for company. After a while you can find your way around more easily. As we become even more familiar, we will lose the discomfort of the newness and grow more confident in travel.

. . . Here There Be Dragons!

In the diversity journey, you are likely to meet people who see the world differently, while also sharing commonalities with you. I smile when I think of early western cartographers who wanted to indicate yet-unexplored areas on their maps. They would write in those areas, "Here there be dragons." In western culture, dragons were feared, mutilated and slain.

In Chinese culture, dragons are magnificent and benevolent companions to humankind. They are creatures to be respected and honored, which our community does with traditions such as dragon boat races and dragon dances. Wouldn't I love to meet a dragon!

Gather in small groups to talk about your maps of the world and traditions that give support on the journey. Regather as a large group to share the insights and "aha" moments of your discussion.

When did you first realize that the world was bigger than the map in your mind? What did your first map consist of?

What was your first experience of traveling (literally or figuratively) beyond what was racially/ethnically familiar? What thoughts and feelings went through you?

Talk about a tradition from your culture that blesses those who are beginning a new stage on the journey of life, e.g. beginning college, getting married, having a baby, beginning retirement. What is the significance of that tradition for both the traveler(s) and for the community that surrounds them?

Recall together the cultural heritage of your congregation. How has it been a blessing to people on the journey of faith? Who are those who have been equipped within the congregation and have gone to other places to live lives of witness and service?

Continue to Leader Reflection: Becoming Aware of Culture



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Need Help? Contact Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries | Phone: 800-638-3522 | email: ESMM@elca.org
Write: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America | 8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101

Fish in Water

We're all like fish in water

Often seeking those the same

With human limitations

Doing more is not our aim

Yet God works through and in us

For love and not for blame

To lead us to new waters

Is the reason that God came

For most of us, being a family member was our first experience of being part of “one body.” And what we did was just how we did things. How did we cook rice, bake tortillas, make corn bread, muesli or pancakes? What was considered good use of time? What did we learn to believe about relationships, who to trust or not? How did we react to differences and conflict?

These and countless other areas of life became ingrained in us, as our culture – our traditions, customs, norms. As human beings, culture is like the air we breathe. Like fish in water, culture is the water surrounding and sustaining us.

So who is ever aware of culture? Why would we need to be? As it turns out, culture also applies to church families, organizations, institutions. Whenever human beings gather together, a way of doing things is going to develop. So actually it's not how things were

always done. It's how they developed to this point when we received it. **Becoming aware of culture is our first step toward knowing if we want to preserve something, or improve on it.** What a gift it is from God, to be able to help shape culture as a legacy for generations to come!

For Christian people, awareness of culture as it relates to race and class is paramount in a world of diversity. What do others perceive Christianity to be, by what Christian people say and do? Can they tell we are Christians by our hospitality and behaviors? It's easy to love those who are near and dear to us. Learning to love across differences of race and class is more of a feat. One Body, Many Members is a gathering place for us to learn together, infused by the power of God's Holy Spirit for love. Recall together the cultural heritage of your congregation. How has it been a blessing to people on the journey of faith? Who are those who have been equipped within the congregation and have gone to other places to live lives of witness and service?

Continue to Leader Tips: Awareness—Getting Started



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

“We’ve always done it this way!”

“Why do something different?”

“What would happen to our traditions?”

“Everyone is already welcome.”

Do these statements and questions reflect your congregation?

Are you one body in Christ with members of similar race, culture, and class?

Does your neighborhood include persons of other parts of the body?

Are you as a congregation beginning to ask, “Where do we go from here?”

Traveling across race, culture, and class is not easy. It will require honesty as we reflect on who we have been and who we want to be. We need to be fully aware of what we’re getting into and what we’re asking of our congregation. And we need to commit ourselves to all of the time, resources, and energy that it will require.

Don’t hurry through this first stop. Take time to share stories and celebrate who you are. Spend time here as a leadership team and as a congregation. Solid preparation is essential for a good trip. It is deeply important to know ourselves before we reach out to our neighbors. We need to:

- understand our fears and our challenges;
- examine our feelings and attitudes that may become roadblocks;
- share our stories and honor our heritage;
- celebrate steps already taken that have brought us to this day and place.

Beginning Conversations Complete - Continue to One Body



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God’s work. Our hands.

Time Frame: Opening devotion for use with all groups meeting in the congregation.

Time Frame: Approximately 20-30 minutes. May also be used with “One Body—Living Out of Joint” for an expanded session.

The theme and image of one body with many members – with each member essential for the wholeness of the body – is set forth in clarity in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. This image of the one body stands at the center of this study.

Read I Corinthians 12:12-13.

Reflect on these verses as a group.

- What is the meaning for you of being baptized into one body?
- What is your picture of the oneness of the body of Christ?

Consider these words of Paul to the church in Corinth within the context of their life together as a community of early Christians. If we read the 11 chapters that precede these verses, we find Paul openly addressing a church with divisions and controversies. He challenges his listeners to confront those divisions and deal with how they are to live with one another. He notes jealousy and quarreling among the people and the power that some have been asserting over others. In seeking their own advantage, they have been serving their own needs and keeping others out. Some have been setting rules for others to follow, arguing about the need to follow Jewish law in order to be a Christian.

It is a world not unlike ours, filled with division and separation – some asserting or being ascribed power over others; some having more resources and using them at the expense of others; some using the Word to keep others out.

Listen again to I Corinthians 12:12-13 within the context of today, and hear the word continuing in verses 14-27. How do you hear this reading within the reality of our world and the body of the church? Which members of the body are being disrespected or dishonored?

Re-read I Corinthians 12:12-13. Insert the separations of the body in today’s reality as you read verse 13 – “Jews or Greeks, slaves or free” . . . male or female, gay or straight, rich or poor, old or young, person of color or white, mentally/physically able or challenged – “and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” Continue reading verses 14-27.

Reflect on the reading as a group.

- What are the challenges of these verses to who we are as the body of Christ in this place?
- Which members of the body are missing or are being disrespected or dishonored?
- What would it mean to fully live as the body of Christ in this place?

As we embark on this journey, we live with all the challenges and tensions of living as

the body of Christ. Our jealousies and quarreling, our divisions and separations, our misuse of power – all these are not new in life together within the church. But it is clear in these verses that Christ calls us to live as new people – to live as one body, with many members; to live in unity within our diversity.

For Discussion go to Readiness for the Journey



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Need Help? Contact Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries | Phone: 800-638-3522 | email: ESMM@elca.org
Write: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America | 8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101

ONE BODY MANY MEMBERS

Part 1: One Body, Similar Members One Body/Dislocated and Out of Joint For Discussion: Readiness for the Journey

Setting:

Small group discussion with various groups within the congregation

Time Frame:

Approximately 1 hour

Introductory Reflection:

Several years ago I was cross-country skiing on a sunny winter day. The hillsides and trees were sparkling in the bright mix of sun and snow. The beauty of creation filled me with wonder as it enveloped me. The occasional laughter and talk of friends was a pleasure as we skied along. I was aware of the special rhythm of my body and soul, as my skiing felt almost effortless on the well-groomed trail. We rounded a curve, and I started down a hill that stood open in the sun.

With the warmth of the sun and the cold temperatures, the trail in that section had been moving through the cycle of melting and freezing and melting and freezing. As I started down the hill, my skis skidded out of control on the part of the trail that was now ice. I laid there for a few moments, and heard the laughter of my friends start to turn to concern as they called down to me, asking when I was going to get up. It was clear to me that I wasn't going to get up quickly. My right shoulder was dislocated and in great pain.

One of my friends was able to get a car nearby, and I eased myself carefully into it. Sitting there without moving, the pain was starting to subside. I thought, "If I move very, very carefully and we don't hit any bumps, this is OK." But at the doctor's office, I thought, "Now this is going to hurt." He moved my arm around and snapped my shoulder back into place. That hurt a lot! But then, with my arm immobilized in a sling, I could begin the long process of healing.

For me, my dislocated shoulder stands as a metaphor for the process of working with groups across race, culture and class. Grounded in the wonder and beauty of God's diverse creation, we live in a reality that binds us together as one. We confess this oneness in our creeds, and hear and see it portrayed in I Corinthians 12 as Paul creates for us the image of the body of Christ. Each part is important and necessary for the working together of all. In many ways we recognize our intricate connection in a global world and in our local congregations and communities. When all the parts work together, we can flow in effortless motion with each part adding its gifts.

The reality, however, is that we live in a world of brokenness and sin. We are part of systems that draw borders, establish states, and build fences to separate us from one another. We become caught up in patterns of fear, separation and domination. Our oneness as God's intended community becomes dislocated. We walk around one another, out of joint, moving gingerly and carefully. As a society, we think, "If we smile at one another and if we don't talk about race and just be nice, we can live like this and we'll be OK."

We know that it will require pain to talk openly and honestly about race, culture and class, to acknowledge the depth and pain of others as well as ourselves, and to confront the complexity of a history of oppression and systems of domination. But as with my dislocated shoulder, it is only through that process of pain that we can become whole and begin the long process of healing.

(continued)

Small Group Discussion:

If the group is larger than seven or eight persons, divide into smaller groups of three or four so everyone has an opportunity to share. Check with the small groups after 25 minutes to determine whether they need additional time. After small group sharing, re-gather as a large group for feedback and reflection as a whole group. Conclude the session with prayer.

In what ways do you see yourself living in a “dislocated” society?

How do you and people around you talk about issues of race, culture, and class? Are those issues part of regular conversation? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?

Talk about your experiences and interactions with persons who are different from you by race, culture or class. How do you see those interactions in terms of dislocation, re-connection, and healing?

Describe the life and ministry of your congregation in terms of dislocation, re-connection and healing. Identify places of pain.

What issues and questions are being walked around or avoided in the congregation?

Discuss your readiness and how you see the willingness of the congregation to enter into the process of becoming connected with members of the body of Christ of race, culture or class different from you. What are the challenges you face.

Continue to History and Culture



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Culture informs our every waking moment. Consider some cultural moments in your day.

- How did you know when to wake up? Did an alarm clock wake you up?
- How did you get ready for the day? Did you shower? How did you get water? Did you save the water for the next person in the family or let it run down the drain?
- What did you eat for breakfast? Why? How did you prepare it? How did you know how to do that? Or did someone else prepare the food for you?
- Did you eat breakfast with other people? How did you know the process of eating – what utensils to use and when to begin eating?
- When did the “work” of your day begin? How did you share work with others?
- Was there a sequence to your work? How did you know that?
- Did you meet and talk with other people? How did you greet them? What was the substance and structure of your conversation?
- Did you purchase anything during the day? Where did you go to buy things? How did you get there? What actions did you follow in making a purchase?

And the list goes on and on. Culture is the shared pattern of life, grounded in values and beliefs, and learned through relationships, that guides our behavior and helps us interpret our experiences. We sometimes think of culture as the food we eat, the music we listen to, our dances, jewelry, art, and hairstyles. Those are all tangible elements of our culture, but those things alone are

Like a fish swimming in water, culture is all around us. We don't see it. We're not aware of it. Sometimes we even think we don't have a culture! That's because culture is the stuff of life. It is so much a part of us that it is as challenging for us to step outside of our culture and live, as it is for a fish to get out of the water and live.

Culture takes us deeper into who we are, how we interact, and what we value. As individuals we are shaped and formed in our culture from the moment of our birth. We are socialized in a culture that helps us learn sounds and language, that teaches us our place as girls and boys, that grounds our beliefs, and that shapes our expectations of life. We are cultural beings.

Our national or ethnic culture shapes many of our values and patterns for living, but we also live within secondary cultures of gender, socioeconomic class, age, sexual orientation, work, religion, geography, education, etc., to shape our unique experiences. We are complex cultural beings.

Becoming multicultural does not mean giving up our culture. Becoming multicultural means that

- 1) we become aware of our culture and how it shapes and forms how we think and how we see the world, ourselves, and each other; and
- 2) we open ourselves to receive the gifts of other groups so that we can also see and know the patterns and values of their culture and deeply appreciate and respect the greater depth and breadth they bring to our life.

When we see and act – and know God – only through our own cultural lens, we are limited. We are monocultural. We walk one narrow path in life. It may be easy and comfortable, but it is limited. When we work to build relationships with persons of other cultures, races, and socioeconomic classes and come to know how they see the world, how they interact in life, and how they know God, our perspective broadens and we grow as a more complete body. As we add other cultural ways of being,

not our culture. Culture is deeper than an ethnic meal or an ethnic festival of music, dance, and crafts. We have not become a multicultural congregation because we invite people of diverse backgrounds to share their gifts in congregation events several times a year.

knowing, thinking, and doing, we become more than just an eye or an ear or a hand. We become one body with many members, and our understanding of God and God's world becomes bigger.

We can't fully appreciate another culture without first being able to see, understand, and appreciate our own culture. Enjoy the journey of discovery of the many differences that already exist within the stories of people in the congregation.

Steps to take in understanding culture:

- Read the stories of our cultural journeys as a guide.
- Write your own cultural story and engage others in sharing their stories.
- If possible, talk with older family members or older persons in the congregation or community to learn more of the gifts of your own and your congregation's cultural heritage;
- Use the guided process "Exploring Culture – Sharing Our Stories" for small group discussion.
- Explore the cultural story of the congregation through the time line and the congregational event of "Celebrating our Past – Sharing our Collective Story."

Continue to Leader Tips: Who we are and Where we have been



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Sharing Our Stories and Exploring Congregation History

We don't begin journeys without looking back at where we have been and asking ourselves "do we want to re-visit the same places or plan for a new journey?" Without that assessment we may simply go back to the places we have been in the past because that is what we know and where we are comfortable. If we choose to do that, it should be a conscious choice, knowing we will not be in a new place.

When congregations look back, we can celebrate all the places we have been. In fact it is important to take time to celebrate the past:

- the vision of those who began the congregation
- the ministries that touched people's lives
- changes of growth through the years.

Honoring the legacy we've received gives clearer vision for our journey ahead. An honest look at the past suggests to us what to remember and build on—or what to leave behind.

The process of exploring who we are and where we have been, both individually and as a congregation, is described here as a three step process. Each step is important in understanding who we are and what grounds us.

Picture this phase of the journey as an assessment of who we are as a body and of the condition of our body. As we seek to grow as one body with many members, we first need to know more fully the parts of the body that are present. That means knowing our gifts, celebrating the ways we work together, and recognizing the gifts we lack when our body is incomplete.

As we come to more fully know ourselves, we can identify the values, customs, and practices – the shared pattern of life – that give shape to congregation life. We can see our cultural life as one culture alongside others, rather than as the "right" culture with which to judge others. As we seek to grow in relationship with persons of other cultures, we can talk about shared values and about patterns and traditions that can adapt and grow to encompass other ways of relating and doing church.

As in all of this work, the process of knowing who we are and where we have been is an ongoing process. We will come to know our own stories more fully as we listen to the stories of others. But to begin, plan a period of six to nine months to work through the three steps – after the leadership team has already entered into some of this conversation.

- Allow 2-3 months for preparation—informing the congregation, scheduling dates, equipping leadership, assigning tasks.
- Spread the three steps of Sharing Stories, Timeline, and Congregation History over a period of 6-8 weeks, possibly longer if Sharing Stories is done as a

- small group activity within a variety of settings.
- Schedule these activities in conjunction with other introductory material and the Bible studies.

Continue to For Discussion: Exploring Stories of our Cultural Journey



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Need Help? Contact Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries | Phone: 800-638-3522 | email: ESMM@elca.org
Write: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America | 8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101

ONE BODY MANY MEMBERS

Part 1: One Body, Similar Members History and Culture

For Discussion: Exploring Stories of our Cultural Journey

Time Frame:

75 – 90 minutes

Setting:

Congregation event or small group settings
Room large enough for participants to gather
chairs into small groups of 4 or 5 persons

Schedule

(with approximate time frames)

Introduction to One Body, Many Members 10
minutes

Introduce background and purpose for sharing
stories 3 minutes

Present guidelines for sharing 5 minutes

Introduce process and questions for sharing 5
minutes

Model the sharing of stories 12 minutes

Divide into groups of 4 or 5

Share stories in small groups 30 minutes

Large group feedback and process 15 minutes

Introduction to One Body, Many Members:

You may use the reading and reflection on I Corinthians 12 as an introduction. Emphasize our connection as one body and the importance of being grounded in our connections. As we share our stories with one another, we deepen those connections and become more fully aware of the gift of our diversity.

Background and Purpose for Sharing Stories:

Before we cross cultures, we need to know and celebrate the stories of our own cultural journeys. Too often we move across cultures expecting people to interact and respond according to our ways of knowing and experiencing life, particularly when we are formed and shaped as White people within the dominant culture. As we have been socialized into the dominant culture, the particularity of how we have been shaped and formed loses its meaning and we are prompted to see ourselves as part of a general whole without a culture. When our stories remain invisible, we lose a part of ourselves, and we act out of the invisibility of our stories and impose our ways of being on others often without our intention. As people of color our stories have been discounted and left unheard in the dominant culture. Our wholeness as persons is lost in the invisibility of our stories.

Each of us brings a unique story to the work of crossing race, culture, and class. Our stories are part of who we are and give meaning to our journey. As we share our stories, we come to better appreciate our own cultural heritage and can listen with greater care to the stories of others. We honor one another as we share our stories and we are enriched by the diversity of our stories.

Guidelines for Sharing: List the introductory phrases of the guidelines on newsprint, board, or other visible place. Refer to each of the guidelines adding your own explanation using the expanded explanation as a model. Ask for group agreement to these guidelines.

- Listen to each other's stories. Listen with care and deep attention, not interrupting. Allow each person to unfold their story in their own way. If you wish to hear more after the time of sharing, ask permission.

(continued)

- Respect each person's journey. We are all on different places on the journey and in understanding the meaning within our own stories. Listen with respect as people share.
- Be open to share and grow. As you share, you may be surprised at the new insights you discover. As you listen to others, you may find significant connections and may be reminded of other events in your own story.
- Respect confidentiality. As we share the stories of our past, we may be sharing things we seldom talk about. It is important to share the vulnerabilities and pain in our stories, and we need to hold them in deepest respect and care as we listen. You may speak about your own story outside your small group and you may share your own growth in insight or understanding as you listened to others, but do not speak for someone else or share their story without openly expressed permission.

Process and Questions for Sharing: Tell the persons present that after you as leaders model the process of sharing, they will be sharing their own stories within small groups. When you re-gather as a large group, people will be simply reporting back how it felt to share stories and where they saw connections. Tell people they will each have six minutes for their sharing and you will let them know the time. It is helpful to have the questions listed on a board or newsprint, or printed out on slips of paper to be handed out at this time. Read through the questions.

- Describe your culture (in whatever way you define that) as it shaped your life and world view in your early years. What values guided life?
- Who were “your people” when you were growing up? How did being a part of your family/group/community shape and form you?
- Who were people on the outside of your group? How did you become aware of them; how did you feel toward them; and what experiences influenced your feelings?

Note that culture is as each person defines it in his or her life. Culture is defined as a lens through which life is perceived and lived as a particular experience of reality. It is the place from which one receives values, norms of behavior, and ways of seeing and being in the world.

Model the Sharing of Stories:

Have one or two persons model the sharing. If both White people and people of color are in the group, make sure that your leadership represents that diversity and that both a White person and a person of color model the sharing. Take time to carefully prepare for your sharing and be prepared to be vulnerable in that sharing. The depth of the sharing within the group – and therefore, the depth of the connections that are made – will depend on the depth and vulnerability you model. We have presented our stories in this resource as a model of our walking with you in this journey. If it is helpful, you may refer to our stories to help you prepare for the sharing of your story.

Divide into Small Groups:

Based on the number of people who are present, divide the group into small groups of 4 or 5. It is best to have people count off in order to mix people up and have them share with new people.

Share stories in small groups:

Have a timer and a soft bell or other non-jarring audible signal to let people know when

six minutes have passed. Be watchful of the groups to note whether a group has not moved on to the next person after a reasonable time for that person to finish their sharing after the audible signal. You may need to give a word of encouragement directly to a group to move on to the next person. Groups with 5 persons have 5 minutes per person to share.

Large group feedback and process: When the time is complete, invite participants to come back to the large group, staying together as a small group. Invite responses and feedback.

- What were your thoughts and feelings as you shared and as you listened?
- Where were the connections in the stories?
- What differences did you find in the stories?
- What did you learn about yourself or others?

Close with a brief statement on the importance of knowing our stories. Thank people for their willingness to take the time to share and listen. Encourage them to continue to explore the people, values, and traditions that have shaped their lives. Invite them to use these questions to deepen relationships with others in the congregation – including people they have worshipped with for years. Close with prayer.

Continue to Reflection: Lily's Story, Joyce's Story



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Need Help? Contact Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries | Phone: 800-638-3522 | email: ESMM@elca.org
Write: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America | 8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101

Exploring our Cultural Journey – Lily's Story

I'm Chinese American from Cantonese heritage—that is, the Canton province in the southern part of China. My grandfather was a Methodist minister who served Chinese communities in western Canada; my mother was a deaconess, organist, youth leader and missionary in Canada and Hong Kong; and my father came to the United States under the auspices of a Christian high school in Canton. So church culture was a major part of my life since childhood. I grew to realize that faith life wasn't a "Sunday only" thing. Rather, it was a whole life with God, who wants us also to connect well with other people.

Born in New York City, I also have an American heritage. After American school, I'd go to Chinese school every day for language and history lessons. I had homework nonstop, it seemed! It was hard to keep up. After a while, my parents decided I should concentrate on English school. After a while I spoke mostly English everywhere, while my parents spoke at home in a mix of English and Cantonese.

I took my studies very seriously, because that was my responsibility. I knew from a young age that everyone in the family had a responsibility. Dad and Mom had their jobs, while the job of my brother and me was to do our best in school. I grew to love learning, reading, the arts, and words. But the greatest love of all was to know I was not alone in this world. I had a family and a purpose for my life. I had a role to play, and work to do, in keeping the family healthy.

We cherished our belonging to the family. To honor what we cherished, we lifted up the value of not pushing for what we might want individually. Instead, we wanted to be mindful of others and their needs also. Even the way we share meals together reflects this value. Round tables are preferred, so that everyone has equal access to the center of the table, where the food is placed. We each have a bowl of rice, and chopsticks with which we reach for food to put into our bowl, to eat. So if you see a favorite food, it's not right to scoop a huge amount of it for yourself. While you eat, you watch, ask and share so that everyone is respected.

So I was shaped by Christian church, Chinese, American, family and group values, in the context of immigrant life of Chinatown, New York. Friends and family in my community were my people. Being part of them gave me a deep sense of home, and belonging. This was especially important because from television and experiences outside our community, I knew that we were considered "minorities" and "different." And being different in mainstream culture is often considered not good. Although we were Chinese, and could draw from lessons learned in 5,000 years of culture, achievement and struggles, there were plenty of people outside our community who considered us undesirable and unwelcome here.

Still, my parents wanted to introduce me to the wider world of cultures beyond our own. My Mom, an educator by profession, taught me to love music and performing arts. My Dad was well known in our community as manager of one of the largest banquet-sized restaurants in Chinatown. I met customers from across the United States and many places around the world. So my favorite image of "One Body, Many Members" is one of diverse peoples happily sharing a meal together. I also have warm

memories of big picture details; such as older African American women, wearing corsages on their dresses, being lovingly assisted into our restaurant by male family members. People from so many backgrounds enjoyed taking their mothers or grandmothers out for Chinese dinner on Mother's Day.

But people outside our group could be hostile to us too, I knew. When I was 12 and on vacation away from New York, a group of small-town boys accosted a girlfriend and me as we strolled down the street with our ice cream cones. "Hey you -- Chinks! Where were you born, Chinktown?" they sneered. We ran, but they pelted us with stones from the gutter so that our backs were bruised. At the police hearing, the mother of two of the boys didn't even pretend to be sorry. "You can't blame the boys and their friends," she told the police chief. "They're only children!"

That was a major turning point in my life. I was astounded that the white woman defended what her sons had done, instead of teaching them right from wrong. Anti-Asian violence has been part of Asian community life ever since Asian people came to these shores. I have experienced it personally. So to this day I know that in the land of my birth, I can be targeted for violent attack at any time, from people who would hurt me and then justify their actions.

"My people" today are family and friends of various backgrounds who seek to build harmony among peoples—lifting up the values of kindness, generosity, justice and compassion. They include volunteers in Chinatown, New York, are teaching Cantonese to people of any background who want to learn. They include members of the Chinese dance group I belong to, who are working hard on a benefit concert to boost the education of children in need in China. They are church friends who astound me with their dedication, commitment, and love across barriers of race, culture, and class.

They are all my people because when I am with them, I feel that God is among us. I feel that God is infusing our interactions with the joy of friendship and shared purpose for peace amid diversity. They are a gift in my life, and I am blessed to know them.

Exploring Our Cultural Journey – Joyce's Story

My ethnic cultural heritage is German with my ancestors on both sides of my family coming to the United States from Pomerania (Pommern) in 1843. As devout Old Lutherans they could not tolerate the Prussian government's establishment of a state-mandated Union Church nor its requirement that their children must be educated at state-run schools. With their fellow travelers, Georg Gotthilf and Hanna Louise (Raasch) Ziemer, journeyed to the U.S., purchased land, and established their life northwest of Milwaukee. Five generations later, that is where I grew up.

While my mother's first language was still German after four generations, my parents never spoke German to my sister, two brothers, or me. The language, along with much of the German culture, was pushed aside after WWII. I grew up with little identification with any German culture.

The culture that shaped my life and world view as I was growing up was a rural, farming culture in which family and church were the primary social institutions. We attended church every Sunday, shared in morning and evening family devotions, and enjoyed many church activities. I shared a room with my sister and I enjoyed playing dolls with her, but actually preferred playing in the sandbox with my brother and cousin. In addition to my nuclear family, I was surrounded by an extended family of grandparents, aunts and uncles, and many cousins. Holiday gatherings were large affairs with a regular "children's table" in the kitchen. Birthdays and anniversaries always gave reasons for gathering together.

The rural, farming culture shaped my life within the rhythms of the seasons and a deep love of nature. My world view was shaped around a sense of self-reliance and hard work. Our family's livelihood depended on a daily routine of milking morning and evening and long hours and hard work during the planting, growing, and harvesting times. Outcomes in life, however, were also highly dependent on the weather, and so my world view was set in a context in which I knew that ultimately I was not in control and one in which I learned the value of interdependence. While often seen as independent, farmers relied on each other for mutual assistance. When my family's barn burned down when I was a baby, the surrounding community was a critical part in the rebuilding process.

I didn't always appreciate the limits to my life growing up on a dairy farm. Time wasn't my own – or of anyone in our family. Time was set by the cows and by the work of the seasons. The place I found greater freedom was in school. Neither of my parents had gone to high school because of the need of their families on their farms, but they highly valued education. We were expected to do well in school and to go on to college. College was not an unknown in my family since my father's brother was a pastor, and each generation and branch of the family seemed to have at least one pastor.

The values of self-reliance, hard work, interdependence, and education all shaped my life, but the underlying values that gave meaning and shape to my life were an interconnection of God, family, and land that were so tightly interwoven that I couldn't have separated them. They were foundational to my being, and also served to define who "my people" were.

My church family, my immediate and extended family, and our neighbors were "my people." The small and close community of those groups gave me a sense of belonging and safety as I was growing up. My identity was shaped within those groups and I saw myself more as a part of the whole, sharing and expressing common beliefs and ideas, than I saw myself as an individual. Both the need to rely on one another within the family and the central place of faith expressed through the church fit together to shape me to fit quietly within the whole.

The people outside of my group were everyone else. I became aware of some people outside my group when I was able to go along on the "egg route" that my parents had in Milwaukee. My grandparents had established customers for eggs, chickens, and vegetables at some time in the past, and my parents continued the route every Friday. When we went into some of the houses, I was aware of very different smells and different patterns of talk. I was curious about the differences, but since my parents never made anything of the differences, I didn't ask and simply absorbed a curiosity and wonder about how people lived in different ways. It wasn't until years later in talking with my sister that she looked at me with surprise and said, "Didn't you know that they were Jewish?"

Belonging to an American Lutheran Church and attending the Wisconsin Synod grade school of the church my mother had grown up in, I saw myself as an outsider. Several of the students in the school were my cousins and all were children living and growing up around me and were my friends, but I felt outside the group when my sister and brothers and I were excluded from participation in Christmas Eve practices and other rehearsals for singing in church. The four of us had to sit in the last pew in the back of the church while our fellow students practiced. I wondered how people could say God loved and included everyone when it didn't feel that way.

I had little awareness of others outside my group. When I attended high school I knew my parents wanted my closest friends to be Lutheran and not Catholic. I was also very aware during high school that to be labeled "farmer" was not cool and I wrestled with

(continued)

that part of my identity and even tried to distance myself from it. I had no direct contact that I remember with persons of color until I attended college. I had not heard comments, derogatory names, or stereotypes of other people from my parents, so entered into those new contacts and new relationships with curiosity and a deep desire to learn.

The identification of “my people” has grown and expanded in many wonderful and precious ways since those early years. I have experienced many turning points that have expanded my view of God to a far bigger and more gracious God; my view of land to a concern for all of creation; and my view of family to a global understanding of all of God’s people. “My people” today includes a vast array of members of God’s family and through them my life has been blessed in unimaginable ways.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Need Help? Contact Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries | Phone: 800-638-3522 | email: ESMM@elca.org
Write: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America | 8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101

Exodus 3:13-15;
Isaiah 49:15, 63:16, and 66:13;
Matthew 23:37(Luke 13:34);
John 14:8-11a

Photocopy the suggested passages or write them on a board for participants to look up in their Bibles. Divide the participating body into three groups to share with each other the caricatures of God that are enshrined in the passages.

Group 1 can devote attention to the name/s of God (Exodus 3:13-15)

Group 2 can devote attention to male images of God (Isaiah 63:16b, 66:13, John 14:8-11a)

Group 3 can devote attention to female images of God (Isaiah 49: 15, Matthew 23:37, Luke 13:34)

Ask the groups to:

Identify similar passages that refer to the names and gender of God.

Try to locate the context in which these images of God have emerged.

Discern the possible values and theological insights these portrayals are meant to communicate.

Gather as a large group and invite the three groups to share their findings, insights, questions, doubts and perspectives. Inform them that differing perspectives are bound to emerge on a subject like understanding God. After initial feedback, invite the members to formulate some concluding remarks and statements.

In what ways might the biblical writers' prevailing context have shaped the portraits of God? Are such images relevant for today in the context of North American churches?

Images of God: A Reflection

Use the following reflection as a reference on the themes of the suggested passages. Bible study or group leaders, read it in advance and summarize it for the group if you think that will help. Or you can hand it out to participants to take home for further study.

Belief in God is central to Christianity. The God Christians believe is the one who has been disclosed to humans on God's own will throughout human history as recorded in the Bible. However, the Gospel of John 1:18 categorically states that no human has seen God except his son Jesus Christ. In spite of the general acknowledgement that God is beyond any known or existing materials and living creatures on earth, Christians as well as people of other faiths have portrayed God in a variety of ways. They have projected on God what was familiar to them. Predominantly, people have drawn models from forces of nature and characteristics pertaining to animals and humans.

God as an elderly European male

Such a process has led to projecting racial and ethnic characteristics, gender and age attributes to God. It has contributed to a dominant prevailing image of God within Christianity as an elderly male, ethnically and racially belonging to a European community, and embodying patriarchal values. When such images were picturized through paintings, icons and statues, they received a permanent status within the Christian community. Western Christianity developed an image of God as an elderly white male with special favors towards His chosen people (of European descent).

Such a distorted image of God continues even today. Historic church buildings in the United States are full of such images mounted on walls and decorative stained glass. For example, during Christmas, many nativity scenes are depicted through pictures, arts, artifacts and plays. Most of these--circulated among Christians and even the general public-- subscribe to the ethnic/racial biases that have crept into imagining God. These biases have extended to depictions of Jesus, the Holy Family, disciples and all who are closely associated with Jesus. Unfortunately such depictions continue to contribute

How can these biblical caricatures be reinterpreted to help in the mission and ministry of the church today?

What new names and images of God can be used to communicate the message and vision found in the Bible, drawing on the suggested passages and others identified in the group sessions? For example, in a number of Islamic nations, Christians use 'Allah' (the generic name in Arabic for God) for God.

toward including and excluding communities, as well as perpetuating discriminations that exist in the larger society.

As communities in North America become more multicultural, Christians belonging to the majority population (of European descent) and others must become cognizant of historical processes that have contributed to the prevailing images and characterizations of God. We must seek new possibilities for imagining God.

Origins in understandings of God

Interest in God or gods is as old as humanity itself. The initial impulses might have emerged for the purpose of dealing with forces of nature, seen and unseen, on which humans had little control. The cumulative results of such probes and searches were the emergence of hosts of gods and goddesses. This was not a one-time venture. Every generation has been formulating its own understanding of God. As human needs keep changing, such a spirit of creativity has to go on. However, the process of religious reforms is often a painful venture. People are seldom open to changes, especially in areas of beliefs and convictions. This is true even when the beliefs have

moved far away from the religious intentions and spiritual paths of the founders of their faith tradition.

In Christianity, absolutizing the select images and caricatures found in the Bible (and developed later in the church tradition) has created some conflicts both among clergy and laity. But there is a healthy awareness and acceptance that the biblical writers (as well as Christians through ages) were shaped by the cultures of their time, despite the fact that they were close to the events they recorded for posterity.

Biblical references to God's name and gender

In this section we refer to the name and gender of God as found in the Bible. A personal name is a significant identity mark. When a name is given to a person, it may have certain historical references, if the family or given names are picked up from persons of past generations. However, such a name is not meant to explain the total personality of an individual. Therefore, for persons of great accomplishment, society gives honorific titles such as Christ to Jesus, Saint to Paul, Mahatma (great soul), to Gandhi.

Exodus 3:14 has recorded an important disclosure by God to Moses about God's own name. "I AM WHO I AM" (which is also translated as "I AM WHAT I AM" or "I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE") (NRSV, 1989). What God has disclosed seems very elusive. At the same time, it offered a possibility of being expansive and inclusive. It allowed generations to follow to engage in an understanding of God as per the demands and needs of their time.

When historically restricted, ethnic and cultural limitations creep into this evasive and yet expansive name of God as expressed in verse 15. "God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.'" God is supposed

to have failed to mention the spouses of these patriarchs, Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel. The immediate context of liberating the Israelites from Egypt and the patriarchal pattern of the society shaped that particularized focus.

As mentioned above, names always have a relational reference and do not necessarily exhaust the full significance of the individual they identify. There may be different ways of understanding this citing of patriarchs. By citing patriarchs of the immediate past, God is not restricting Godself. Rather, God is indicating close engagement with humans and their histories.

The reference to the gender of God (in the passages read by the group) can be easily explained, as it is rare that any ELCA members will still insist that God possesses any particular gender. Even though Jesus often referred to God as father, Jesus makes it clear in his discourse with the Samaritan woman that “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). The reference to gender is to highlight the quality of parental type of relationship that the people of Israel and early Christians experienced in their faith journey. Their cultural and ideological ethos made them ascribe gender to God more as a pedagogical tool than a gender truth about God. Reference to male or female gender may assist in highlighting a needed characteristic of God, but is certainly not meant to captivate God to any particular gender.

References:

The Holy Bible (New Revised Standard Version). NY: National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A, 1989.

HSWilson/Jan 2006



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Psalms 139:7-10
Romans 11:33-36
John 14:8-11, 15:5-8

Divide the participating body into three groups. Encourage them to read the suggested passages, which may be photocopied for them, or written on the board for them to look up in their Bibles). Invite the groups to discuss the divine and human relationships as expounded in the passages.

Group 1 can devote attention to the inescapable nature of the divine-human relationship (Psalms 139:7-10)

Group 2 can devote attention to the admiration of the divine by the human heart (Romans 11:33-36)

Group 3 can devote attention to the possible meaning of Christian existence “in the Father” and “in Jesus” (John 14:8-11, 15:5-8) *bs2_discerning_divinehuman_relationship*

Ask the groups to:

identify similar passages that refer to divine-human relationships (Group 1)

identify key words and concepts in the passages that refer to the divine-human relationships (Group 2)

discuss some ways of understanding the concepts of Jesus being in the Father and Christians being in Jesus (Group 3)

Gather as a large group.

Invite them to share findings, insights and perspectives that emerged during their small group discussions. Inform them that differing perspectives are bound to emerge on a subject like understanding divine-human relations. After initial feedback, invite the members to formulate some evaluatory and concluding remarks and statements.

Explorations of faith traditions

The primary understanding of God in the Bible is that God is our Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer and Judge. The entire universe is the result of God’s creative action. Among creation, humans are supreme because we were created in God’s “image” and “likeness.” Such an understanding has made Jews and Christians--and people of most faith traditions--to seek a holistic relationship with God.

In discerning the relationship between God and humans, people may expound on it rationally, emotionally, psychologically or mystically, depending on the circumstances. For many believers, their understanding is governed by emotional and psychological criteria shaped by individual upbringing. In multi-religious and multi-cultural societies, there is dialogical-rational probe into the historical and contemporary factors that have contributed to various formulations of divine-human relationships. This probing is a necessity for building avenues of understanding and thereby helping communities to be more tolerant to each others’ views of divine and human.

In the last several decades, interdenominational conversations among Christians and interfaith dialogues have contributed to appreciating the varieties of ways Christians and people of other faiths have formulated their particular understanding of God, and their distinct ways of relating to God through worship, community living and engagement with neighbors.

Anthropological and psychological theories

In addition, a number of anthropologists and psychologists are of the opinion that God/s are in fact projections of humans to meet the felt need of their respective communities (Bingaman, 2003).

On the other hand, as per the recent neuropsychological experiments and findings of some scholars, the human brain in fact is “hard-wired for God” (Newberg, 2001, Alper, 2001). This theory has been proposed as a result of brain scanning of Tibetan monks and Franciscan nuns engaged in deep meditation. What is equally interesting in this experiment is that the finding does not identify such God consciousness with any religious tradition. Whichever position one takes, belief in God assures some crucial social benefits such as inculcating a sense of purposeful-

ness for human life, assurance of human beings' connectedness with God and fellow humans, and offering of social support beyond what family and friends can offer.

General perceptions of God: the four "isms"

Divine-human relations are conceived in a variety of ways depending on the Christians' perception of God. The most common perceptions are categorized as theism, deism, pantheism and panentheism (Geering, 2002:53-55).

Theism: God creates, sustains, relates, intervenes

The general perception among Christians about God is that of "supernatural theism." That is, God is not only the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists in the universe, but God continues to maintain a personal relationship with creation and provides constant oversight. God intervenes in the affairs of the world when necessary, even with miraculous events. The Bible is full of references to God's personal relationship and direct interventions in the affairs of humans, as it was written at a time when supernatural theism was the prevailing religious view of conceiving God's dealing with humans.

Deism: God as infinite intelligence/the clockmaker who left

Deism is an unorthodox religious attitude, which emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries, as a result of the European Enlightenment tradition. Deism perceives God as an "infinite intelligence behind the creation." God is like a clockmaker who has left the clock to function by itself after its creation. Therefore deism has no place for the supernatural and miraculous intervention of God in human affairs. Even though the views of deism are contrary to Christian teachings, it is still a popular views among Christians. That is, one can be a member of the Christian community without believing in a personal God and a divine savior.

Pantheism: everything is God

Pantheism, on the other hand, perceives God and all that exists in creation in a symbiotic relation, commonly understood as "everything is God." Since God is the ultimate being, all that is created by this ultimate being are in fact part of God. By contrast, a considerable number of Protestant Christians hold a view of radical separation of God and the rest of the creation. That is, God is the holy other, and the created order (humans and the rest) are fallen creatures from the original perfect state through human disobedience and sin.

Panentheism: everything is in God

Panentheism, which means that "everything is in God," is a recent development. German philosopher Friedrich Krause (1781-1832) conceived it as a middle ground between theism and pantheism. God contains the entire universe within Godself. In that sense, God's presence is found everywhere and in all things. However, the universe does not exhaust God. God is more than the universe.

Perception of divine-human relationships from the perspectives of panentheism has been adopted by a number of Christian theologians. It seems to be becoming a much more acceptable position as new explorations are done on the role and place of God in contemporary society. The notion of panentheism opens up new possibilities for Christians relating to people of other faiths and to the entire creation with ecological responsibilities, as nothing in the created order is outside God's care and concern.

Did Martin Luther hold the view of panentheism? Lutheran ethicists, Larry Rasmussen and Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda are of the opinion that Luther had a strong leaning toward panentheism. For example, Luther wrote, "God is 'present in every single creature in

innermost and outermost being . . . ' ” and “God ‘is in and through all creatures, in all their parts and places, so that the world is full of God and He fills all . . . ’ ” (Moe-Lobeda, 2002: 112-113).

Regarding the passages in this Bible study, Psalm 139:7-10 offers a graphic description of the inescapable presence of God, almost supporting the panentheism view of divine-human relations.

Unable to fully grasp God’s salvific plan for those Israelites who failed to accept Jesus as messiah (and as such God’s plan of salvation), in Romans 11:33-36, St. Paul gives up further speculation. In trust he leaves the matter to God with a reflective utterance of doxology.

In his Gospel account, St. John records that ultimately the fullness of humanity can only be assured by being incorporated to Jesus (“in Jesus”) and thereby incorporated to the Father, since Jesus as human maintained a perfect relationship with the Father.

References:

Alper, M. The “God” Part of the Brain. N.Y.: Rogue Press, 2001.

Bengaman, K. Freud and Faith. Living in Tension. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003.

Geering, Lloyd. Christianity Without God. Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2002.

Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia D. Healing A Broken World. Globalization and God. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002.

Newberg, A.B. et al. Why God Won’t Go Away. Brain Science and the Biology of Belief. N.Y.: Ballantine Books, 2001.

HSWilson/Jan 2006



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Need Help? Contact Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries | Phone: 800-638-3522 | email: ESMM@elca.org
Write: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America | 8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101

ONE BODY MANY MEMBERS

Part 1: One Body, Similar Members
Bible Studies

Bible Study #3: God's Intention for Diversity and Unity

Genesis 11:1-9 Acts 2:1-15

Divide the participating body into three groups. Encourage them to read the suggested passages, which may be photocopied in advance or written on a board for them to look up. The groups will discuss diversity and unity of the human/Christian community on the basis of the passages that are read.

- Group 1 can devote attention to the issue of diversity on the basis of the Tower of Babel story – Genesis 11:1-9 (Refer to Genesis 10:5 which records the plurality of languages.)
- Groups 2 and 3 can devote attention to the issue of unity on the basis of Pentecost story – Acts 2:1-15

Ask the groups to

- identify other biblical passages that refer to God's intention of diversity (Group 1)
- identify other biblical passages that refer to God's intention for unity (Groups 2 and 3)
- discern the implications of biblical teachings on diversity and unity for Christian faith and practices (all groups)

Gather as a large group and invite the sharing of findings, insights, criticisms and new possibilities. Inform them to be attentive and respectful of differing perspectives and proposals. After feedback, invite the members to formulate some concluding observations and statements.

- What are the societal visions and commitments for honoring diversity in North American society? In what ways can churches critically engage in such visions and commitments?

God's Intention for Unity and Diversity: A Reflection

Use the following as a reference. Bible study/group leaders may read it in advance and present a summary to the group if this is helpful. Otherwise, hand it out to participants for further study at home.

Great world religious founders lifted up universal values

The religious founders of the great world religions were visionaries. Even though they grew up in a particular cultural community and were shaped by a religious tradition, they exemplified values of universalities in their teachings and actions. They emphasized the importance of cherishing a common humanity with all its creative diversity, and voiced the interconnectedness of human life with the rest of the creatures in creation. They often directed their followers from rigid anthropocentric to an ecocentric approach to life. Judaism and Christianity as world religions share such an ethos.

Christianity and Christ grew up amid pluralism

Christianity evolved in a world of multiple religions, philosophies and contending political systems. As a faith tradition, Christianity emerged in the bosom of Judaism, which in the first century C.E. consisted of persons with different religious affiliations like Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, Zealots, Samaritans and proselytes. Christianity even existed for a while as a Jewish sect. Therefore, diversity and plurality was not alien to Christianity.

Jesus grew up in such a pluralistic society. The twelve disciples that were selected by Jesus had different personalities and gifts, which were valued by Jesus. In addition, Jesus had numerous disciples who were women or men with diverse gifts, drawn from different communities. When the account of the life and work of Jesus was compiled, the disciples did not produce a singular monograph. Instead they produced a number of gospels (four of which are included in the New Testament canon) honoring the diverse needs of the existing Christian communities. Even the subsequent attempts to consolidate the four gospels into one gospel narration were rejected by Christian leadership. Thus, plural and diverse existence was a core component of Christianity.

Unlike most other religions of the world, Christianity as a

(continued)

- How can churches benefit from the increasing diversity in North American society? How can they utilize it for regaining its authentic nature as a “Pentecost fellowship”?
- What are the hurdles for accomplishing a healthy balance of unity in diversity in the Christian communities of North America?
- What are some further resources that the ELCA needs to cultivate for greater inclusivity in its membership?

new faith tradition came into being in a burst of ethnic and linguistic plurality on the day of Pentecost. In the context of communities torn and segregated by ethnic and linguistic differences, the occurrence on the day of Pentecost was a miracle. It was a sign and symbol of how Christian communities should be, locally and globally.

Multicultural Christianity vs. Monocultural Patterns

As Christianity spread out of Jerusalem, the monocultural pattern of most of the then existing world communities did not allow the multicultural, multilingual and multiracial experiences of Pentecost to multiply, except in select commercial and imperial cities and towns. Even in and around Jerusalem, early Christians had to struggle with issues of inclusivity soon after Pentecost--for example, if circumcision as necessary for gentile converts (Acts 15:1-30). The Jerusalem Council had to resolve the issue by not insisting circumcision for gentile converts. When seeds of division crept in, St. Paul had to advise against the division among Christians in the city of Corinth (I Corinthians 1:13-18) and in churches in Galatia. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

In spite of the miracle of Pentecost, monocultural existence became a reality for a long time including in European societies and nations. The multicultural and plural thrust got lost among large sections of Christianity, giving rise to eventual ethnic, racial, class, color and gender segregations and discrimination. One unfortunate development within Christianity was the misconceived claim of superiority of western Christianity along with western civilization. This was a result of political and economic superiority vastly acquired through European colonial hegemonic means. Also, modern missionary outreach--beginning in the 16th century by the Roman Catholic Church, and from 18th century onwards by the European and North American Protestant churches--spread the false image about Christianity around the globe as a western religion.

A global view on pluralism

With new awareness and greater interactions between Christians in the western and non-western world, recapturing the primal/Pentecost vision of Christianity as an egalitarian fellowship is pursued with greater intensity around the globe.

Missionary outreach and the migration and mobility of people (Christians and others) began in a small scale with the European colonial enterprise. The movement was perpetuated in recent decades by commercial enterprises, and due to natural and human caused disasters like famine, earthquakes, wars and genocides.

World communities have become increasingly multicultural and more pluralistic than ever before. Such mixing of communities has created numerous conflicts in various parts of the world. In a number of countries, the issue of diversity and plurality has become key in election agendas. Meanwhile the involvements of international organizations (including churches), political bodies, and various programs of education, liberation and empowerments have contributed to the greater awareness and acceptance of plurality and diversity.

The United States as laboratory for diverse Christianity

The United States was built on immigration and the principle of being open to new immigrants from around the globe. Among the nations of the world, countries like the United States have a unique opportunity to recapture the spirit of Pentecost in its Christian and secular life.

In fact, the United States is seen as a laboratory for multicultural Christianity, as the nation is home to the largest Christian population (235 million at present) in the world, and is expected to remain so in the foreseeable future. With the unique situation of having Christians from among all the major denominations and church traditions, and almost all the countries and communities around the globe, the U.S. situation resembles what is recorded in Acts 2:5: "Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem."

Scottish missiologist Andrew Walls has articulated this expectation (the United States as a laboratory) from Christians and Churches as follows:

The great issues of twenty-first century Christianity . . . will be about how African and Indian and Chinese and Korean and Hispanic and North American and European Christians can together make real the life of the body of Christ. The principal Christian significance of the United States may now be in the fact that--thanks to the immigrant law of the 1960s--nearly all the main Christian disclosures have functioning congregations there. More than in any other nation in the world, the body of Christ could be realized--or fractured--in the United States. (2002:69)

Recapturing the Pentecost ethos anew should be possible without much difficulty. It is the same Holy Spirit that created the Pentecost miracle that is guiding the church today. The challenge is whether Christians are open to the prompting and guidance of the Holy Spirit as on the first day of Pentecost. The greatest need in the churches in the United States is the embodiment of the spirit of Pentecost, not just in the spiritual realm but also in day-to-day community life.

Tower of Babel liberation

The two passages selected for study record God's intervention in human affairs. Although the account of the Tower of Babel gives an impression that the whole of human-ity was speaking the same language, it may be referring to only the community that moved to the plain in Shinar (Genesis 11:2). In fact the preceding chapter, which gives a "Table of Nations," indicates that the people of different clans spoke their own languages (Genesis 10:5). The focus of the Tower of Babel was that a select group of persons tried to impose a single language (perhaps a commercial language) on a multilingual community to achieve their goal of building a city.

Cities in predominantly pastoral and agricultural communities stood for power and privilege. Cities were centers of trade and commerce. Cities were homes for people who exploited the villagers and smaller communities. God intervened on behalf of the exploited and challenged the values of reducing people into tools of labor to fulfill the megalomaniac ideas of city elites. As a strategy, God confused the language of the workers and liberated them from the clutches of the elite. The different languages helped the liberated people to articulate their own priorities and values and to celebrate diversity.

Pentecost charter

In Acts 2:1-15, we have the record of how the Church (messianic community) began. The miracle of Pentecost is a charter for Christian fellowship. It is a mandate for honoring people's cultures and traditions and finding a rightful place for them within Christian fellowship in healthy interaction.

The foundational commitment to diversity found in the life and teachings of Jesus, and affirmed at the inauguration of the Church at Pentecost according to the Scriptures, will also be the status at the end of time. (Revelations 7:9).

Reference:

Andrew Walls The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History. (Orbis, 2002)

HSWilson/Jan 2006

Continue to Deeper Conversations



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Need Help? Contact Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries | Phone: 800-638-3522 | email: ESMM@elca.org
Write: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America | 8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Need Help? Contact Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries | Phone: 800-638-3522 | email: ESMM@elca.org
Write: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America | 8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101

ONE BODY MANY MEMBERS

Part 1: One Body, Similar Members History and Culture

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Carolus Linnaeus, a Swedish naturalist, moved from his classification of plants and animals, to the classification of humans as *Homo sapiens*, to the classification of people in four racial groups. His student, Friedrich Blu-

menbach, a German naturalist, later classified humans in five categories and moved from a geographical categorization to a hierarchical one. Because he thought the people who lived near Mount Caucasus were the ideal in physical beauty, he created the term Caucasians and placed peoples identified by that term at the top of the racial hierarchy. His work, published in 1776, provided a “scientific” basis for the belief of Europeans during the Enlightenment that they were superior to all other groups (Pang, 2005: 88-89, 268-270).

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

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

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

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

(continued)

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

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

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

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

Questions for reflection and discussion:

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

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

Continue to For Discussion: Why do Something Different?



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Continue to Re-examining Identity and Vision



From “Us” And “Them”—To “One In Christ”

“What makes me uneasy about diversity,” the white churchwoman said, “is that people of color seem so sure of who they are. Meanwhile, I feel that by contrast I haven’t kept up my heritage. It’s rather overwhelming.”

Does her sense of “us” and “them” resonate with you and your congregation?

Do you often hear “us” and “them” language? Do people talk about “them” as those who might mess up or misuse the building? Does language of “them” cast an aura of “less than us”? If you share a building with another congregational group, does “us” and “them” keep the groups apart? What will it take to move toward “One in Christ” language?

It is true that many people of color in the United States have had to become more familiar with white culture, since the history and structures of our country are based on white norms. And many white persons haven’t had to learn about people of color, unless their professional work, family, interest or faith led them in that direction. Yet in the faith, we all have roles to play in the journey toward authentic multicultural community. This resource was designed to help us get a handle on some knowledge, skills and tools for living in a community of “one in Christ.”

If you shared the history of your congregation and your vision in “Celebrating Our Past” in the Awareness section, go a little deeper now. Examine who you are and articulate the meaning of “us.” Explore what it would mean to move to “One in Christ.”

If you did not do the earlier exercise, take extra time here. Exploring and affirming identity as a congregation is essential for the journey. How do you find out who you are and what your role is meant to be in this world abundant with diverse peoples? It’s important to know. It’s like being able to tell someone your name, when you begin to relate to one another.

Knowing your identity gives you a solid foundation for realizing what you want to keep, as well as what you may want to change. Learning about others/your neighbors will be discussed in other sections of this resource. For now, let’s concentrate on you and your congregation.

Continue to Comfort Zones



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God’s work. Our hands.

It's a phenomenal honor and opportunity: Jesus has invited you to accompany him on a trip across race, culture and class. What a wonderful idea, we agree . . . but are we going to accept the invitation? Or are we going to postpone it indefinitely? What's holding us back? What stands in the way of change?

If you feel twinges of discomfort at the thought of "starting a multicultural journey," you've got plenty of company. In fact, relating to other people even in our own culture, race and class isn't always easy. The biblical story of Pentecost, in which people of many different cultures were suddenly able to understand each other, seems beautiful, but also long ago. It's a lot harder to imagine that Spirit wind blowing on us today!

How did it happen that we, God's people, are so willing to settle for less than seeking that Spirit wind every day? We know the world is broken. We've experienced the beauty of what relationships can do to bring people together, to create wholeness, and even to mend and to heal broken hearts. Yet when we are faced with the "isms" that create havoc with the world God made, we forget that with God, nothing is impossible. The racism and classism, the me-isms are overwhelming; and we may honestly believe we are too small to do anything much about them. Or that this area of ministry is someone else's calling.

All too soon, the trip becomes something we hope to go on "someday," but which never truly happens. And oh what a trip we're missing! A chance to experience God's power in our lives, overcoming hesitations and fears, filling us with Holy Spirit love to bring hope and healing across our differences of culture, race and class. A chance to reclaim our identity as children of God, who hold to the promise that when we step out in faith, God will always be there with us.

All this said, it's not unusual that pesky internal barriers can persist. God has invited us to go on a trip with Godself, and we're not excited about it? What's holding us back? What's standing in the way of change?

God isn't surprised by anything we might confess during our prayer or devotion time. If we don't like being in a situation where rules may be different, where we feel vulnerable or it's scary, why don't we pray about that and expect a good answer? If we feel awkward talking with neighbors we don't know yet, it's likely they're not feeling all that comfortable either.

As a wise leader once said, "You have to believe that you can. That's the beginning of change." A Lutheran word on this would be, "We have to believe that we can—because we're not doing anything by ourselves. God does it all, through us."

Exercise #2: Dispelling the shadows with light

Reflect on times in your life when a fear or anxiety lost its power. What happened that made it go away? What did the experience teach you about yourself or other people? You've got a "travel kit" of tools for your life, and all the lessons and skills you learn become a part of it. From your storehouse of memories, what can you gather to encourage you now on a journey across race, culture and class?

For example, one lesson might be “I feared something in general, but once it became specific and I dealt with it bit by bit, it wasn’t so bad.”

As a group, share a fear that you live with, or a fear that has gripped you in the past.

How have you or do you now deal with and live with your fears?

For each of the fears named in the group, consider: Who do you know (either personally or generally) who seems to not fear what you fear? In what way can you learn from them? Through a website, a conversation, a book or article they’ve written, a program, an invitation to come and speak at your church? The world is full of people and resources who are willing to help. How do we find them if we don’t look? Sometimes, practical exposure to programs and role models is just what we need.

How can we learn from others as we face our fears of journeying across race, culture, and class?

o Are there persons within your congregation who have had greater experience and who can serve as guides?

o Are there congregations or other organizations in your community who have experiences to share?

Using resources to better understand your own journey as a congregation would be helpful at this stage of the journey. If you are a congregation of similar members who are primarily White, look at how you could use the resource *Troubling the Waters for Healing of the Church: A Journey for White Christians from Privilege to Partnership*. If you are a congregation of similar members who are primarily African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Arab or Middle Eastern, or a particular Asian or Latino heritage, consider using the resource *Breaking the Bonds: A Workshop on Internalized Oppression*.

Deep examination of how you as individuals and as a congregation have been socialized into systems of oppression is deeply important as you prepare to embrace your fears and journey across race, culture, or class to “meet your neighbors again for the first time.”

Ask God to reveal to you further ways to challenge the fears that cast shadows on your journey. Look for the light that God shines on us always! Guidance is always at hand. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body.” (Proverbs 3:5-8, NRSV)

Continue to Exercise: Naming the fears or anxieties



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Exercise #1: Naming the fears or anxieties

It has been said that naming fears or anxieties is the beginning to making them lose their power. You have already named your fears of what you might lose. Now take time to name your fears as you contemplate embracing diversity. Consider a full range of fears from meeting your neighbors, to engaging in conversation, to entering into another person's world, to being able to respond to what will be asked of you. You might even begin with "I'm not afraid, really. I just don't know what's being asked of me" Then reflect some more and see what may arise.

- Take time individually to list at least five of your fears in reaching across race, culture, or class.
- Share your fears within a small group.
- Reflect on what would it take to release your fear or to embrace your fear and move on despite it.
- Reflect on the fears you hold collectively as a congregation.
 - o How can those fears be lifted up and named within the congregation?
 - o Can they be regularly included in the Prayers of the Church?
 - o What Gospel message can speak to those fears?
 - o How can congregation members support one another to walk through the fear?

Exercise #2: What's your vision?

Let your creativity flow. This exercise lends itself well to many avenues of expression—you may want to draw your vision and see it in contrast to your current picture of who you are, or act out your vision, or put it to song and music. Again, it is excellent for small group activity, an enlightening way to discover and shape a vision toward diversity. It can be fun, too!

- Begin your visioning process with prayer. Recall that in Acts 10, both Cornelius and Peter were deeply engaged in prayer when they saw God's vision.
- What do you envision your congregation could look like five years from now?
 - o What would you be seeing, feeling, and experiencing as you walked in the door?
 - o What characteristics would define the life of the congregation?
 - o What would people in the community be saying about the congregation?
 - o How would it reflect a community of faith that is "one body, many members"?
 - o Remember to review your distinctive traits from Exercise #1. How might those be seeds for growing into your future?

For example, let's say you are a congregation that attracts young parents with children. Let's say you hope to cultivate a next generation of leaders that will not leave the church or community when they grow up, but will stay and serve as a cadre of Christian leadership in some capacity.

o How shall your congregation focus its energy on this so that the group will develop?

o What would your church look like if this dream came true?

- Share your story with the wider group as a newscast from the future; a drawing; a role play; a skit; or some other form of presentation.

Collect the visions if they are drawings or in a written format. Take notes of skits or verbal presentations of vision. All expressions of vision – from this exercise, from the congregational event in the Awareness section, or any other activities – are important to guide and direct the leadership team. Spend prayer-filled time listening to the visions. Ask God's guidance and direction for the shaping of your vision as a congregation.

Continue to Exercise: Dispelling the shadows with light



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Reflect on times in your life when a fear or anxiety lost its power. What happened that made it go away? What did the experience teach you about yourself or other people? You've got a "travel kit" of tools for your life, and all the lessons and skills you learn become a part of it. From your storehouse of memories, what can you gather to encourage you now on a journey across race, culture and class?

For example, one lesson might be "I feared something in general, but once it became specific and I dealt with it bit by bit, it wasn't so bad."

- As a group, share a fear that you live with, or a fear that has gripped you in the past.
- How have you or do you now deal with and live with your fears?

For each of the fears named in the group, consider: Who do you know (either personally or generally) who seems to not fear what you fear? In what way can you learn from them? Through a website, a conversation, a book or article they've written, a program, an invitation to come and speak at your church? The world is full of people and resources who are willing to help. How do we find them if we don't look? Sometimes, practical exposure to programs and role models is just what we need.

- How can we learn from others as we face our fears of journeying across race, culture, and class?
 - Are there persons within your congregation who have had greater experience and who can serve as guides?
 - Are there congregations or other organizations in your community who have experiences to share?

Using resources to better understand your own journey as a congregation would be helpful at this stage of the journey. If you are a congregation of similar members who are primarily White, look at how you could use the resource *Troubling the Waters for Healing of the Church: A Journey for White Christians from Privilege to Partnership*. If you are a congregation of similar members who are primarily African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Arab or Middle Eastern, or a particular Asian or Latino heritage, consider using the resource *Breaking the Bonds: A Workshop on Internalized Oppression*.

Deep examination of how you as individuals and as a congregation have been socialized into systems of oppression is deeply important as you prepare to embrace your fears and journey across race, culture, or class to "meet your neighbors again for the first time."

Ask God to reveal to you further ways to challenge the fears that cast shadows on your journey. Look for the light that God shines on us always! Guidance is always at hand. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body.” (Proverbs 3:5-8, NRSV)

Continue to Bible Study: It’s about Relationships-Jonah or Mother Teresa



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Need Help? Contact Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries | Phone: 800-638-3522 | email: ESMM@elca.org
Write: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America | 8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101

No matter what race, culture or class we are from, we've all got our comfort zones. So did Moses, Jonah, and many other people in the Bible. Is it really possible to act beyond our comfort zones? Jonah was reluctant to go where God was calling and to embrace the people God forgave. He declared, "It is better for me to die than to live."

For a small group study and discussion, read the book of Jonah. Reflect together on the meaning of the story of Jonah to the life of your congregation.

- How does your congregation respond to God's call to go out and move beyond comfort zones and embrace people who are different from them?
- How far is the congregation willing to run to avoid entering into a relationship with persons to whom the congregation is being called?
- Are there persons within the congregation who would rather die as a congregation than live into a new reality?
- What is the tension between death as a congregation and life with new realities of diversity and a sharing of cultures?

Consider what it means to act beyond your comfort zones.

- Reflect on several instances when you went out of your way for someone else; or when someone did that for you.
- Collectively share experiences of going beyond your comfort zones.
 - Did you spend hours or days helping a friend get settled into a new home?
 - Or pick up someone at the airport late on a cold night?
 - Or lose sleep to care for someone else who needed it?
 - Name your experiences.
- Why did you do what you did?

Most likely you were willing to go beyond what was comfortable or convenient because of your relationship. As Mother Teresa said, "I can do no great things. I can only do small things with great love." And so can we.

So, surprise! It is possible to act beyond our comfort zones. The relationship is why we do it. As we grow in faith and closeness to God, we find ourselves infused with greater courage and willingness to step out with others on a multi-cultural journey.

Reflect on what it means for you to develop a relationship with those who are different from you.

- Share what relationships across race, culture, or class have meant for you in the past.
- What will it take for you to move beyond your comfort zone as a congregation?
- What do you yet need to do to prepare yourselves?
- What small things can you begin to do with great love?

Continue to How We Exclude



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

*(This article includes material from Eric H. F. Law's book *The Bush Was Blazing But Not Consumed*, chapter 7. It is reprinted from Eric Law. *Living the Gospel of Peace: Tools for Building More Inclusive Community*. Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, pages 21-23.)*

Before we talk about how to be inclusive of diversity, we must look at how we exclude. This is a necessary inward journey requiring courage as we explore parts of ourselves we might not want to acknowledge. Exclusion may not be something that we intend. Because of the disparity between what we want to happen and what actually does, this internal exploration needs to be taken seriously.

When we examine the ways we exclude on both conscious and unconscious levels, we are more able to recognize them and take constructive actions to change them. Responding to Jesus' call to remove the log from our own eyes means learning to recognize our ethnocentrism with which we judge and exclude. It means knowing what the act of exclusion feels and sounds like. More important, it means knowing why we maintain our ethnocentrism that separates us from others.

A way to diagnose our ethnocentrism is to consider how we respond to a person or group that is different. The following seven ethnocentric responses to difference by no means cover all possibilities, but they provide some clues to our level of ethnocentrism. The paragraphs in italics explore the cause or reason behind the responses. The paragraphs in boldface type suggest ways we may work to move beyond these ethnocentric responses.

STAGE ONE: DENIAL

A. Difference does not exist.

People who respond to difference in this way often deny that there is diversity among people even in the face of the most obvious observable differences. For example, a person went to Japan on vacation and described the experience: "Japan is wonderful. It's just like America. It has McDonald's and Coca-Cola, and everybody speaks English."

B. Difference is confined to broad categories.

People who respond to differences in this way recognize diversity only in very broad categories and are often unable to tell the difference among people within a category. For example, someone sees an Asian person walking down the street and immediately assumes that this person is Chinese. When told that the Asian person might be Japanese or Korean, the observer responds, "What is the difference? They are all Asians."

Possible causes of these two responses are isolation and separation, sometimes intentional, from people who are different. Persons at this stage often have little or no knowledge of people who are different from them. In this stage, knowledge about diversity among people may be limited to what the media provides rather than actual contacts.

For people in this stage some kind of cross-cultural contact is necessary. Such

contact needs to occur with openness and a commitment to learn from the groups and individuals involved and with great care from the leadership. Nonthreatening events such as cultural celebrations and the sharing of ethnic food are appropriate, but they must not end at the level of entertainment. Such events must show participants that there are differences not only between groups but also within groups. For example, a Latino/a cultural celebration could spotlight various groups of Hispanics such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran, Cuban, Costa Rican, Guatemalan, and other cultures.

A “European descent” cultural celebration could focus on various groups such as French, English, German, Italian, Irish, Norwegian, Czech, Russian, and other cultures. When celebrating Native Americans, different tribes and traditions could be recognized.

STAGE TWO: DEFENSE

C. You are different; therefore you are bad.

This kind of reaction is judgmental and exclusive. Persons recognize diversity and react to those who are different in an extremely negative way. This negative reaction may be expressed in verbal and physical abuse.

D. It’s okay for you to be different, but I am better.

Reacting in this way, a person will never put down someone who is different. However, this person might say things like: “We are more civilized, cleaner, or more intelligent.” By emphasizing one’s own superiority, such statements imply that the other is inferior.

E. I am different; therefore I am bad and you are good.

This reverses response D in that people critically judge themselves when they recognize that they are different. People may also judge the group to which they belong. Immigrants to the United States often go through this stage when they try so hard to gain acceptance in a new country that they reject their own culture. Peace Corp workers and missionaries sometimes express this response upon returning to their home country when they say things like: “Americans are so rude. I wish I were back in Zambia where everyone is so nice.”

F. If you don’t include like I do, you are bad.

Some people were raised to believe that we should not have any prejudices. In their formative years, teachers or parents may have reprimanded them for using certain words or actions that were considered inappropriate and offensive. As a result, they learned not to be prejudiced by behaving in very specific ways that were not unlike a set of rules of conduct. When these people encounter others who do not behave the same way, they judge them as bad people. In doing so, they are defending their culture, which consists of dos and don’ts regarding what it means to be free of prejudice.

People make these kinds of responses not because they are uninformed but because they lack cultural knowledge about themselves and thus lack true self-esteem. Our need to put down others who are different, thereby making ourselves superior, comes from the lack of in-depth knowledge of our cultural identity. The need to belittle one’s own culture in order to be accepted by the dominant culture is even a stronger indication of the lack of cultural self-esteem. If we are sure of our own cultural values and makeup, we are less threatened by people who act differently and who have different values and beliefs. We are also more likely to express an interest in learning about these differences.

The most effective strategy to deal with the lack of cultural self-esteem is intragroup dialogue. Intragroup dialogue brings together people with similar backgrounds or identities to share and explore what it means to be a member of that group. Many racial

ethnic groups in the church and in society have benefited from intragroup dialogue by finding mutual support and understanding while gaining a stronger group identity. The growing edge of this kind of work involves historically dominant groups engaging in dialogues about what it means to be part of such a group.

Another strategy is intergroup dialogue, which brings together people from two or more groups to explore in a constructive manner how they are different. With the help of skilled facilitators, participants learn more about their own cultures as well as those of others.

STAGE THREE: MINIMIZATION

G. I know there are differences, but they are not important.

This may be the most difficult response to address. It emphasizes commonalities and downplays differences among groups. People at this stage are genuine in their desire to get along with others by finding similarities between themselves and others. Nevertheless they are still attempting to preserve the centrality of their own worldview. If I want to accept only the part of you that is like me, I am ignoring the rest of you that is different, and I am not treating you as a whole person. I want to see only the part of you that affirms my identity. Many meetings where a fruitful discussion on diversity was taking place have been brought to a halt by statements like: “Why are we all wasting time talking about what divides us? We should be doing things that are common to all of us. We are all God’s children. We are all equal before God and we should be doing God’s work as one family.” Whether intended to do so or not, such statements derail opportunities to explore and appreciate diversity.

God does make and love us all. Jesus came to save all peoples and nations. However, God also makes us diverse. Such statements thus trivialize differences that exist among the diverse groups in the church. When people feel that their experience is being trivialized, they feel excluded. This minimizing response to differences may be the biggest hurdle for the church if we are to become a truly inclusive church.

This attitude may stem from negative experiences in dealing with difference. Perhaps we have experienced too many destructive behaviors resulting from efforts to deal with differences. We may have learned to avoid differences because we have come to believe that efforts to address them may result in more conflict.

To address the implicit belief that dealing with differences will be destructive we need to learn that knowing differences can and will be constructive and beneficial. Intergroup dialogue will continue to be an effective strategy for enabling people to see the positive effects of knowing and understanding differences. Another effective strategy is to provide experiential learning that supports why it is beneficial to know these differences. Examples would be roleplaying, experiential exercises, and presentations that point out the challenges we face if we do not know about differences. These kinds of programs should provide solutions and skills that help us grow in faith and ministry.

Continue to Action Steps



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Diversity comes to Pelican Rapids

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Diversity Comes to . . .

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

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

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

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

Continue to Exercise: Gathering Demographic Data on Congregation.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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

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

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

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

Exercise: Gathering Ministry Information on Congregation



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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

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

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

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

Reflect on the information you gathered.

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

Continue to Exercise: Gathering Demographic Data on Neighborhood



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

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

Continue to Exercise: Gathering Information on Community



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God’s work. Our hands.

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

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

Continue to Exercise: Building Survey



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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

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

From the outside of the building:

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

Inside the building:

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

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

Decor and environment:

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

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

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

Continue to Worship Survey



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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

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

After worship:

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

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

Continue to Self-Reflection



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

You have spent significant time preparing to take action. In fact, through many of the exercises and discussions, you have already been acting. Before moving ahead, check in with yourselves – individually, as a leadership team, and as a congregation – **to determine whether you are ready to engage more fully with the community or whether you need to spend more time preparing and embracing your vision.** Use the following discussion questions as a guide. Spend deep and serious time in discussion.

- How has the story of your congregation in the past helped prepare you for this next step?
- How healthy are you as a congregation spiritually and relationally? Are you grounded in God's love and forgiveness with care-filled relationships with one another?
- How prepared are you to talk openly and honestly as a congregation? Can you talk through conflict with empathic listening, respect, and care?
- Has your vision for crossing race, culture, or class been clearly communicated with the congregation? How deeply has it been embraced?
- What barriers, challenges, or resistance to change will you encounter?
- What fears and hesitations do you have as individuals, leadership team, and congregation?
- What have you learned about the history, culture, and traditions of your congregation?
- How do you assess the readiness of the congregation to be open to other cultures and traditions and to embrace those cultures alongside your own?
- What gifts are present in the congregation to help you move forward?
- What might you have to give up as a congregation in order to move forward?
- What is your current relationship with your neighborhood and its people?
- What does it mean to be the body of Christ in your particular community?

This honest self-reflection is the most important first step of action. The deeper you go in knowing yourselves as a leadership team and as a congregation, the better and stronger will be the relationships you will be able to build with the community. In order to build relationships that can last over time and that will not be threatened by resistance and fear, the foundation must be strong.

Continue to Part 2: Meeting Our Neighbors Again for the First Time



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

ONE BODY MANY MEMBERS

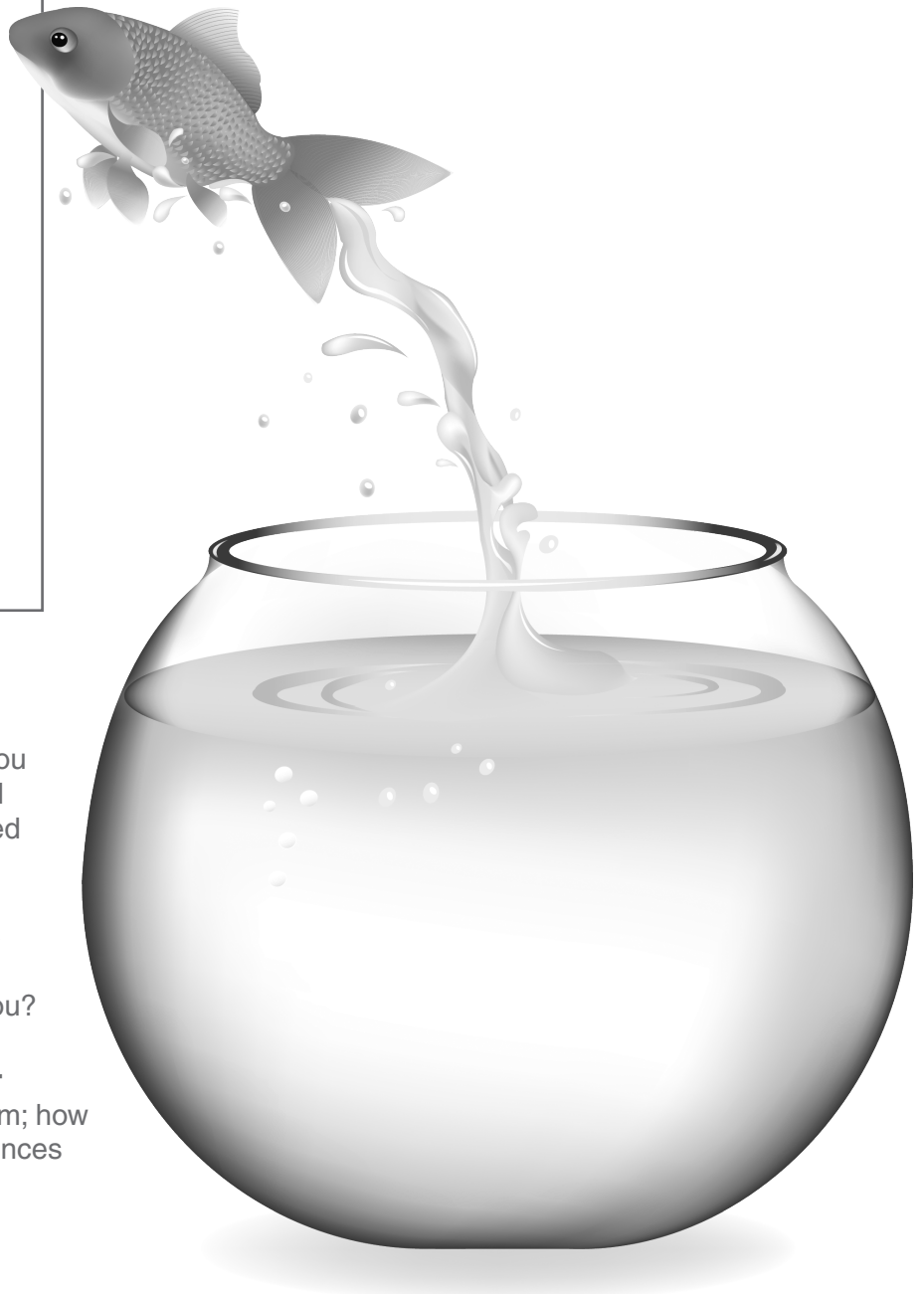
What's in your bowl?

Instructions

- Gather in groups of two or three people
- One person begins to answer questions below
- The other person summarizes what he or she heard the first person say
- Repeat the process until all people have had a chance to tell their story and hear what another heard

Questions

- **Describe your culture** (in whatever way you define that) as it shaped your life and world view in your early years. What values guided your life?
- **Who were “your people” when you were growing up?** How did being a part of your family/group/community shape and form you?
- **Who were people on the outside of your group?** How did you become aware of them; how did you feel toward them; and what experiences influenced your feelings?



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.