

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Continue to Presentation and Discussion: Levels of Oppression



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ONE BODY MANY MEMBERS

Part 2: Meeting Our Neighbors Again for the First Time Going Deeper Presentation and Discussion: Levels of Oppression

EXPLORING AND TRANSFORMING THE LEVELS OF OPPRESSION

INSTITUTIONAL

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

CULTURAL

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

INDIVIDUAL

Attitudes
Behaviors
Interpersonal interactions
Individual behaviors

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Examine institutional structures within your congregation:

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

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

Continue to Presentation and Discussion: Definition of Racism



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ELCA Social Statement

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

Prejudice + Power + Privilege

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Continue to Presentation and Discussion: Stretching our Worldview



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

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

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

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

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

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

Racial and Ethnic Differences in Worldview

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

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

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

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

Class Differences in Worldview

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

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

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

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

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

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

(continued)

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

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

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

Going Deeper Completed - Continue to Table of Welcome



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