

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

**“What do we do now?  
How do we hold our congregation  
together?”**

**“How do we address the conflicts that  
come up?”**

**“What does it mean to share power and  
decision making?”**

The journey of transformation is not easy and certainly not conflict free. It is always easier to manage things quietly when everyone thinks the same and has the same way of going about life. For people who have grown up within an atmosphere that stresses sameness in order to get along and keep the peace, living in a congregation of diversity can be jarring. It is challenging to come to a new understanding of conflict or tension as something good that leads to change and growth.

As things change and shift within the congregation, there will inevitably be struggles over who has access to the kitchen, who makes decisions and holds the power, whose traditions take precedence. The acts of loving one another, listening to one another, and talking with respect through difficult situations are acts that reflect what it means to be one body in Christ with many members.

This resource does not give answers on what worship should look or sound like; what educational programs should be offered for children, youth, or adults; what evangelism, stewardship, or social ministry programs should be a part of the congregation – those are the realities of ministry that need to be formed and shaped within the dialogue of the congregation. In each place, the lived experience of a diverse congregation will look and sound different.

The common elements in a congregation that is reaching across race, ethnicity, and class will be a clear and central vision based in scripture, intentionality, diverse and shared leadership, strong relationships, and a culture that embraces change, that welcomes everyone’s voice and gifts, that continually brings new people into leadership,

that shares power, and that conveys openness and welcome in all it says and does.

The journey is based on the foundation you have been building over time. Exercises and background material in this section will help to:

- Examine the dynamics of power
- Explore the shaping influence of family patterns and approaches to conflict
- Understand where and how to enter the cross-cultural conversation
- Deepen relationships and strengthen the faith journey through sharing of faith stories

**Use the tools for discussion and new insights as they are helpful to you in your journey.**

Continued For Discussion: Maps are Just a Start



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The young couple was standing in the middle of the street, engrossed in a map. It seemed to me that they were European tourists, and they were lost. “Can I help you?” I asked. “Let’s get out of the street...Where do you want to go?”

“We don’t know where we are,” the man said. “We are on the Bowery, yes? We want to go to Little Italy,” the woman said. They did have a new map of lower Manhattan; they had come prepared. But the map wasn’t large enough for details to show. They were standing just across the street from the 44-story Confucius Plaza housing complex, a landmark easy to see, once it was pointed out. From there it was easy to find Little Italy, just a few blocks away.

They thanked me and we parted ways. I wish I’d asked them where they were from! It would have been fun to hear. I continued along, with a spring in my step. Having an “intercultural interaction” can sometimes be very brief—yet still put a big smile on your face.

This interaction has its similarities to journeying across race, culture or class. It is good to prepare by studying the big picture of diversity. That’s your starter map. But when you get to ground level, your map might not show block-by-block detail. You may momentarily feel lost. Landmarks may be right in front of you, but you might miss them because you are in unfamiliar territory, with many sights and sounds to digest all around you.

Maps are excellent tools. If we don’t have one that is very detailed, it’s time to ask someone nearby for help!

- Reflect on joyful interactions you have had as individuals and as a congregation in your journey across culture, race, or class, no matter how small the moment was.
- What do you think enabled the contact to happen?
- How might those “enabling factors” be intentionally used and built on to strengthen your next steps in the journey?
- What are some signs or signals that some people in the congregation may be lost or confused on this journey?
- How can you offer them encouragement?
- What “unfamiliar territory” appears daunting to you as you consider your next steps as a congregation?
- What persons or resources do you need to seek out for help and guidance?

Continue Issues of Power



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**As we work to build authentic multicultural community, the issue of who holds power in the congregation is certain to come up.** If you're like me, we really feel like fish in water when we talk about power. The dynamics of power are like the water we swim in. We have a sense that those dynamics affect our lives significantly. But we can't really say how they do. Being able to see how the power works, who's pushing the button that makes the power go on in a certain manner, and where the power flows is a real challenge. Yet if we as "the church" are called to stand up against powers and principalities in the name of Christ, that definitely means learning what we can do about it.

When the word "power" comes up, what comes to your mind? Who has it? My first thoughts are "power of God," "powerful businessmen," "powerful politicians." It's influence, we realize, on all levels of society. To begin to understand power, ask the question, "Who's in charge and what do they do?"

- Personally, who's in charge? The popular answer for middle class United States is "I am!" If that's the case, we feel we have power to do, to act, and to make choices.
- At the family level, who's in charge? Husband, spouse, either or both, depending on the situation?
- In a congregation council or leadership group, who's in charge? Who determines how meetings are conducted, and for what length of time, and has the final say in decision making?
- Studying power at broader levels of organization (businesses, city/state/federal government, synod/churchwide offices), there's a great deal more to learn about who makes things happen or blocks them from happening.

Yet for all levels, the question remains: who's in charge? For Christians called to proclaim God's love and justice in the world, answering that question is key. It calls for finding out who pushes the power buttons, and analyzing the results that ensue. Where there is injustice, abuse, or violence, we are called to act as God's agents for social change.

### **Pushing the Power Button—Together**

Faith-based discussions across culture, race and class are going to have an entirely new outlook on who's in charge, or ought to be. Often the world defines power as those who are the biggest, strongest, most forceful, most able to do what they want, no matter how it affects others.

But God's radical concept of power calls us to ask a new question: "How shall we push the power button, together?" In other words, to share power for the good of the whole community.

As a leadership team, who do you see as those who currently hold power?

What challenges do you face as a congregation in shifting power so all are included?

Continued: For Discussion: Setting the Agenda, Hearing all the Voices



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**Being truly multicultural means creating an environment in which decision-making is shared among all those at the table.** It means standing up for those who

are not able to voice themselves, so that their needs can be included. The world being what it is, there are many in positions of power who would say, "What concern is it of mine when people do not speak? And what need have I to listen?"

People of faith, however, seek to genuinely hear all the voices involved, and to include them in decision-making. Becoming an authentic multicultural community takes practice and change.

**Consider the following questions for starters.** Your answers will suggest who is in power in your given setting. Remember, power isn't in and of itself a "bad" thing. Each person has power. Power becomes bad or oppressive when it is misused as power over; when it becomes concentrated in the hands of a few who then are able to make decisions and dominate and control the lives and situations of many. In the right hands, it can be an opportunity to wield the power (the influence) to serve God's purposes for community.

1. Who sets the agenda? Is there a mechanism for group members to ask in advance that agenda items be included? Does everyone know that and is it an easy and accessible process? How could you open the process of setting the agenda?
2. Who determines how meetings are conducted? Are they run in a manner so that all in attendance truly have a chance to speak and be fully heard? If there is a barrier that stands in the way of full participation, how can you remove it? For example, if English is not the first language of persons attending, how can you enhance participation? (E.g. offer printed agendas/information in the other language(s) before and at the meeting; look for cues that people are wanting to speak, and help them get their turn; use a structure for sharing that enables all to participate...)
3. Who is included in decision-making? Who is not, and what are the reasons? How will you address those reasons?
4. How are decisions made? Is there both a formal and informal process? How can you address informal, behind-the-scenes decision-making? In the formal process, are all thoughts equally open on the table? Do some voices generally have a "last word" in the decision making? Does "majority rule" (and who holds the majority)? Are decisions made by consensus? If so, is adequate time given to the process; are there unspoken rules or pressures to conform?
5. Are there persons who are unable to come to meetings or join committees, due to lack of transportation or family responsibilities? How can you improve the chances of participation across barriers?
6. Who is invited to serve on ministry teams? Do they have to be official members of the church in order to do so?
7. How open is the group to new ideas, new members and new leadership styles? How can openness be cultivated?

8. Are you open to discovering new ways for business to be conducted, especially when the former ways are not working well, such as not leading to full inclusion?
9. What if there is already diversity in your governing groups, and there is tension between older and newer members? How can you explore the root of that tension – values, ways of doing things, communication patterns, traditions, etc.? How can you incorporate awareness and understanding of different ways of approaching problems and one another? What guidelines for communication might be helpful to enhance empathetic listening and reduce tension?

Issues of power and decision-making need to continually be re-examined as we easily fall back into old patterns. Much of Paul's message to the church at Corinth addressed how some members were using and asserting their power over others. The pull to dominate and control and have things our way is strong. The call to live God's vision of justice for the powerless and silenced is the call that moves us forward.

Continue to - Presentation and Discussion: Cycle of Gospel Living



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For many years I observed that racial/ethnic/multicultural discussions would reach an impasse when the issue of power came up. “Multicultural ministry” in our church began to offer special ways in which people of color communities could meet. But for many reasons, it wasn’t clear to many white members that ethnic caucusing was not meant to be an end in itself. It was meant to enhance ethnic community strengths so that we could take part more holistically in building a church for our children, a church that embraced all people and included sharing of power (white as well as people of color).

One of the best teaching tools I’ve ever seen about faith-based power and diversity comes from Episcopal priest Eric Law. For those who fear that we will lose power that we have, and for those who fear we will not gain power that we need, this chart illustrates how we are all living on the same cycle, but with different entry points! It is a vital and foundational message to understand and to share, as we travel on our journey across culture, race and class.

Eric Law provides background for understanding the meaning of the cycle. (Reprinted from *Living the Gospel of Peace: Tools for Building More Inclusive Community*. Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2004.)

When dealing with inclusiveness, we have to consider who holds more power in a situation or institution. Because of power differentials, we create institutions that are not inclusive. In any given context, an institution might favor one group over another. These institutions then serve to perpetuate the differences in power that led to their creation. The ability to discern power differentiations is an essential skill needed to challenge an institution to be more inclusive because the challenge of inclusion is different for the powerful and the powerless.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, God’s attitude toward powerful and rich people is very different from God’s attitude toward people who are powerless and poor. The powerful in society are challenged to give up their power and wealth and redistribute it in order to achieve equality among the people of God. The emphasis is on serving and being humble. God judges the powerful by their use of their power and privilege. “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Matt. 19:24).

The powerless, on the other hand, are lifted up, cared for, and loved by God. God has compassion for the oppressed and suffering. God loves them and will deliver them. The emphasis is on endurance and faithfulness. “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today. . . . The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still” (Exod. 14:13-14).

This difference in attitude toward the powerful and the powerless was clear throughout the ministry of Jesus. Jesus never told the poor and powerless to sell all they owned and give the proceeds to the poor. That would obviously be absurd. Jesus healed the poor, loved them, ate with them, touched them, comforted them, blessed them, served them, encouraged them, taught them, and liberated them by his own suffering, death, and resurrection. Finally, Jesus breathed on them, infusing them with the Holy Spirit’s power to teach and heal in the name of God.



At the same time, Jesus did not tell the rich and powerful that they are blessed. Jesus warned them and challenged them to serve and to humble themselves. He reminded them of what the law and the prophets said and extended an invitation to relinquish power, take up the cross, and follow him.

Jesus never asked the powerless to choose the cross because, by their condition of powerlessness, they were already on the cross. Because the powerless were already on the cross, they were called to endurance and faithfulness in the hope of God's deliverance through the resurrection.

In a given situation, it is crucial to determine where we are in relation to the cross. No one can stay on one side of the cross all the time. Living the gospel involves moving through the cycle of death and resurrection, the cross and the empty tomb, again and again. The moment we are resurrected into a new life of empowerment, we must begin to think about serving, giving away our power, and taking up the cross again. Failing to do so brings the chance of abusing our power. The moment we take up the cross and become powerless, we must begin to think about faithfulness and endurance and looking toward empowerment through the empty tomb. In this dynamic of death and resurrection, the cross and the empty tomb, Lent and Easter, the gospel comes to life in each of us. This is the Cycle of Gospel Living.

#### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion:**

- How do you see your congregation in relation to the Cycle of Gospel Living?
- Who are the powerful? In what ways are they being called and challenged to give away their power?
- Who are the powerless? In what ways are they being called to empowerment?
- What new understanding and insight does this cycle give you for the ongoing dynamics of living together as one body in Christ?

Issues of Power Completed - Continue to Communication and Conflict



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**Reflect back on the story in Part I: One Body/Dislocated and Out of Joint.** As the body of Christ you have been taking steps to become reconnected as a whole body across race, culture, and class. That journey has not been easy, and I expect you have experienced resistance, disagreements, tensions, and possibly open conflict. You may have felt the pull to try to hold your body as a congregation in a distorted position as you try to keep everyone happy and maintain peace.

Church culture is often one of trying to be nice on the outside while small groups form around disagreements. “Parking lot” conversations rehash what went on in the meeting or interpersonal interactions. Feelings simmer and threaten to boil over with scalding power. Connecting as the body of Christ in the congregation – or as congregations in partnership – requires a willingness to walk through the pain in order to find wholeness.

The troublesome journey requires learning how to talk and listen openly and honestly about disagreements in style and values. The source of the conflict often reaches deep into who people are and what they hold dear. How we engage in those authentic conversations is challenging when people bring different styles of communication and different approaches to conflict.

Some people have grown up in cultures or families that embrace conflict and enter freely into noisy and vibrant discussions. Some have grown up in cultures that are based on group harmony and a deep avoidance of conflict. Some people have been socialized to value individual voice and some to defer to authority. Not only does the issue itself provide a place of difference, but so does the understanding of how to talk with one another.

It is important to again be aware of one’s own acculturation and what that means in being able to communicate effectively. It is also important to look carefully at how the congregation traditionally has dealt with conflict. How do people in the congregation communicate with one another – in “peaceful” times and in times of disagreement? Seeing conflict as healthy and an ingredient for growth may require a new perspective, which could be a strong first step toward engaging in deep and honest dialogue.

Before dealing with the particular issues of conflict, engage people in talking about how they communicate and how they view conflict.

- Describe how people communicated in your home growing up.
- How were disagreements addressed?
- What messages did you receive about communication styles, especially as related to conflict?
- What attitudes and behavior patterns do you bring to communication interactions today?
- How do you approach conflict?

- If someone speaks differently from you – more loudly or more softly, appears too controlled or too aggressive, seeks to push the issue or seeks to avoid the issue – how do you respond and how does it affect your continuing engagement in the discussion?
- Describe communication patterns in the congregation.
- How has the congregation historically addressed issues of disagreement and conflict?
- How do people communicate on the formal level; on the informal level?
- What is needed to communicate effectively together as a whole congregation?

Continue Leader Tips and Resources: Dialogue across race, culture, class



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

## Resources on Dialogue

A vast array of resources awaits you. These organizations/websites are just a few that offer inspiration and how-to information.

<http://ncdd.org> is an amazing gateway to a world of learning and support on the subject of dialogue. Reading the series of quotes is like hearing a panel of great presenters. And as websites are provided for their organizations, this page is a very good starting point for journeying. <http://ncdd.org/> is the site of the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, fostering a world of conversation, participation, and action.

“Race Dialogue and Common Work,” by Frances Moore Lappe and Paul Du Bois, is a brief and interesting article from Yes! magazine. The authors ask: “If civil rights failed to break down race barriers, what can?” They then report on community initiatives to cross the racial divide.

<http://www.futurenet.org/article.asp?ID=909>  
[www.classism.org](http://www.classism.org) Class Action: Building Bridges Across the Racial Divide seeks to raise consciousness about the issues of class and money, and their powerful impact on individual lives, relationships, organizations, institutions, and culture. The group seeks to heal the wounds of classism, support the development of cross-class alliances, and work with others to catalyze the movement of resources to where they are most needed to create justice, equity, and sustainability for all.

[www.euroamerican.org](http://www.euroamerican.org) is the website of the Center for the Study of White American Culture —a multiracial organization that supports cultural exploration and self-discovery among White Americans. It encourages a dialogue among all racial and cultural groups concerning the role of White American culture in the larger U.S. society. It is not an organization for white supremacists.

A featured publication is: *The Anti-Racist Cookbook: A Recipe Guide for Conversations about Race that Goes Beyond Covered Dishes and Kum-Bah-Ya*, by Robin Parker and Pamela Smith Chambers.

## What is a dialogue?

When we say “dialogue,” we don’t mean a debate,

...that aims to win over an opposing view.

Neither do we mean polite friendly conversation,

...that starts but doesn’t take you far in building trust or understanding.

Neither is it a discussion,

...that introduces but doesn’t get into issues deeply.

What we do mean is a conversation with clearly stated goals and structure, in which people can safely speak, to build understanding and trust from differing points of view. The purpose of dialogue is twofold. One is to build and strengthen relationships, and the second is to work toward solving a problem or issue of concern.

In searching the internet, you will find a vast array of resources in the ever-growing field of dialogue. The process has been used within the international community to address situations of longstanding and deep differences. The process is not a quick-fix, but a sustained commitment to enter into an authentic dialogue in which we can listen deeply to one another. Dialogue has primarily been used to create and strengthen civil society, but the skills for doing dialogue can also be learned and used within the church.

Dialogue engages participants at a deeper level – a Christ-like level – in which people are willing to give up their own defenses and posturing to enter into the world of the other and listen with empathy. In dialogue, people listen in order to hear and know the other rather than listening to respond or defend. The challenge of dialogue is to move beyond attitudes of “right” and “wrong” and a dualistic worldview, to a perspective of complexity and exploration of common ground.

Three principles stand at the center of dialogue and need to be present:

- Establishing an atmosphere of equality and trust, free from unequal power or authority
- Listening with deep attention and empathy, entering into another person’s thoughts and feelings

[www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org) trains people in study group leadership, as well as offers tools on how to lead on topics like race relations and immigration. You can download many of their resources freely, such as “Organizing Community-Wide Dialogue for Action and Change”.

[www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com) offers “A Resource Guide for Hosting Conversations That Matter at the World Café” 2002. The website offers a concise guide to hosting dialogues, along with other resources and support in beginning meaningful conversations. The World Café is dedicated to keep listening together to the insights that emerge from cross-pollinating diverse perspectives.

<http://clinton2.nara.gov/Initiatives/>

[OneAmerica/america.html](http://OneAmerica/america.html) Download President Clinton’s Initiative on Race. You can download One America Dialogue Guide: Conducting a Discussion on Race. 1998. Learn characteristics of community dialogues, organizing and conducting them, and the role of a dialogue leader. Additional resources include a sample small group dialogue, the difference between debate and dialogue, examples of racial reconciliation across the nation, and quotes on race relations.

***Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race & Ethnicity, The Ohio State University:***  
[www.kirwaninstitute.org](http://www.kirwaninstitute.org)

A university-wide interdisciplinary research institute working to deepen our understanding of the causes of and solution to racial and ethnic disparities and hierarchies.

***National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP):***

[www.naACP.org](http://www.naACP.org)

Seeks to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination.

***ColorLines: www.colorlines.com***

National newsmagazine on race and politics published quarterly by the Applied Research Center.

- Examining one’s own assumptions and those that other participants bring to the dialogue, for the purpose of better understanding, not for judgment

Past exercises and discussions on examining culture, understanding communication styles, naming power differences, and building relationships and trust through sharing stories are all important groundwork for dialogue. As you begin dialogue in the congregation around an issue of joint concern, you might want to use the process of Mutual Invitation introduced by Eric Law. See Additional Resources for reference to his book *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*.

Remember: skills of dialogue are learnable. Dialogue does not have to be a specialty of community activists or international peacemakers. When more people know the purpose and benefits of dialogue, and put the skills into action, that’s when tremendous strides are made in relationship-building and collaborating for any community or congregation.

When you take part, you also learn skills that can help make the church more viable in a diverse world. How many community dialogues in your area take place without any involvement at all from churches or church people? When you help to open up avenues for dialogue in your congregation and beyond it, you are showing God’s love in a very practical way.

Continue to Congregation Event: I Love to Tell the Story – and Hear it too



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**Stories of faith are often hidden treasures in our personal and congregational lives.** Both old and new members have stories to share. Older members may have held their faith stories for many years and may seldom have been asked to share them. Newer members may be anxious to share their stories of what their faith means to them and why they are choosing to become a part of the congregation. Faith stories are powerful in bringing people together and strengthening the community of believers.

In a time of transition and change, the sharing of faith stories becomes even more important. Those who have been long-time members of the congregation have given much of themselves to the life and growth of the congregation. They may have raised families in the congregation; they have seen people come and go; and they have invested themselves and their faith in the congregation's life and ministry. As they watch the congregation change, they may be afraid that everything they worked for will be gone. They may feel that even the memories that have sustained them in times of loss will disappear with no one to preserve the story.

Those who are coming to the congregation with new stories and new energy and life may be wondering if anyone there cares about their story. They are coming into a place which is filled with traditions and history, and they may be wrestling with where and how they fit in. They come with new stories to share, new experiences, and their own journey of faith.

Many tensions can be rooted in the assumptions each group has of the other. Long-time members may assume that the new members will never take the church and its faith as seriously as they did. New members may assume that longer time members are just holding onto a dead past and want to keep them out to keep things the same.

The church is not a building – it is people, and people are rooted in relationships. For long term members to trust those who are coming to the church with new customs, they need to hear and feel and see the depth of faith that will carry on their church – maybe not in the same outward way, but with the same depth and commitment to follow Jesus. Those who are new, need to hear and feel and see the depth of faith of those who been there before them so they can know the commitment that has sustained this community of faith through the years. By sharing their stories, they can walk together into a new future.

Plan a gathering, or several gatherings, for people to share their stories. Use the time of story sharing as a way to discover and polish gems of faith that can undergird the journey across race, culture and class. Here is an outline for leading a storytelling program in your congregation. For group guidelines and other background, revisit the sharing of stories in Part I, One Body, Similar Members. You may also want to repeat a session on sharing stories of cultural journey. Remember: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (Proverbs 25:11).

### **1. The Power of Story (10 minutes)**

We hear stories from other people every day. Ask the group to name some. (Bedtime stories, books, movies, newspapers, TV...). We also tell stories at family gatherings, when chatting with friends, or with children. Ask the group to name a favorite story

**Feeling with facts** (putting these together, for a healthy whole brain and whole life activity.)

**Attuned to God** (It's a spiritual discipline to be aware of God in our lives)

**Increase knowledge of God's greatness**

**Tell what God has done** (practicing through telling a story)

**Have relationships to build on for God** (it's about relationships)

teller in their family. Is there someone in their family who holds and tells the family story and history? Most of the time, stories flow in and out of our lives without recognition of their power. Invite the group to talk about the power of stories and why it is important to tell stories.

## 2. The Power of Biblical Story

Jesus, Master Storyteller, knew that people love stories and find meaning in them. He told parables. We became part of God's living story of salvation. And many of Christ's stories had to do with his interaction with people of a different culture and class.

## 3. Role/Purpose of Personal Storytelling (5 minutes)

What is a faith story? Ask participants how they define it. (Story of your life, God's activity in your life, what you believe, where you get your strength and direction for living, what you are thankful for) Affirm with the group: "Yes, we are living our stories, with pages yet to be written."

Why do we tell faith stories? Ask participants to share their insights. Then you can share this acronym. We are all storytellers, and this is good!—because it means:

## 4. Modeling Faith Stories (15 minutes)

Invite two or three people in advance to be prepared to share their faith stories. Give them the list of thoughts to help them form their story. Encourage them to share a story of depth and meaning in their lives. Their sharing in this section serves as a model and stimulus for the whole group and will set a tone for the depth of sharing within the group. Provide a guideline of four minutes each if you have three people; five minutes each if you have two people.

Review the list of faith story questions before you have the persons model the sharing. Tell the group that these are simply thought starters. They are free to choose one that is important in sharing their faith story or to share what has meaning and importance to them. Introduce the two or three people who will model the process and tell the group that they will have an opportunity to share their own stories in small groups after they listen to those who will model it for them.

### Thought questions for sharing faith stories:

- Talk about the people who have been important to you on your faith journey and why.
- Share an experience in your life when your faith was especially important to you.
- How does your faith give you purpose and direction? Share examples.
- How have you seen and felt God's presence in your life?
- Where and how have you recently seen God in your life or those around you?
- What are you thankful for?

## 5. Sharing Faith Stories (25 minutes)

Divide people into small groups of four persons each. It is helpful to count off so people are randomly mixed. The goal is to have persons sitting in small groups with people who are new to them. Try for a mix of ages, backgrounds of race, culture, or class, and years in the congregation.

Tell people they will each have five minutes to share their stories. (A three person group would have a bit longer; a five person group a bit less.) Mention the importance of

*(continued)*

listening with full attention and giving each person equal time to emphasize the importance of each person's story.

Watch the time and gently indicate each five minute interval. If you notice a group in which people are not equally sharing the time, remind them to move on to the next person so everyone can be heard.

### **6. Feedback (10 minutes)**

Invite people to share how it felt to tell their stories and to listen to the stories of others.

- What connections did they find with one another?
- What will they take from this experience that can strengthen the journey together as a congregation?

What did people learn? Was anything surprising?

### **7. Closing (5 minutes)**

Thank people for coming and encourage them to both reflect on their own faith stories and continue to share their stories with one another. As new people come into the congregation, encourage current members to get to know people's names and then to know their stories. Encourage them to continue the listening process by taking time to sit down with people and inviting them to share their story of God's activity in their lives.

Close with prayer.



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# 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

- 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 was 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 humanity 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 Going Deeper



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**In a congregation of similar members**, people may disagree about painting the church sanctuary, or the purchase of an organ or keyboard, or the times of worship, but there tends to be little disagreement about how meetings are run or how people communicate with one another. People generally share the same foundational values and the same patterns of communication. In fact, most congregations have developed their own culture of how to deal with conflict. Some have lengthy annual meetings with much heated discussion; some have short, harmonious meetings that affirm decisions of leadership. Some may have a history of major membership shifts or even beginning a new and separate congregation in times of visible, public conflict

A sizeable number of Lutheran congregations have grown out of a rural, European immigrant background that has helped to shape attitudes both toward outreach and evangelism to persons of different backgrounds and attitudes toward conflict. Immigrant congregations were places of safety for persons of common language and background. The primary focus was on ministering to persons within the congregation and teaching the next generation.

Rural communities thrive on sameness, harmony, and interdependence. Conflict certainly exists, but there is often little healthy social practice of dealing openly with conflict. The social fabric relies on being able to get along. People who don't fit the community mold frequently leave. Conflict may also be seen as something to strongly avoid since it can spin into violence when out of control. Congregations that were formed by immigrant rural people may still carry a cultural reluctance to openly embrace difference, change, and conflict

Congregations that share a racial, cultural heritage – whatever that heritage is – usually share ways of thinking, speaking, and relating together. The culture of communication and the ways of dealing with conflict are often invisible and simply exist as the way of life that is taken for granted.

When a congregation is taking the journey across race, culture, and class, the invisible ways of communication can become problematic when groups see and interpret the words and actions of another group from within their own lens. Issues of power and voice, of hearing and listening, of coming together to resolve concerns and needs take on another level of complexity when people communicate in different ways. Possibilities for conflict increase.

The reflection and discussion pieces in this section dig deeper into where and how the journey becomes more challenging as a congregation lives its way into a new authentic multicultural reality. Specific issues come and go, but issues of power, conflict, and communication are ongoing and need continual attention. Use the pieces in this section to strengthen the skills and understanding of the congregation for ongoing life together.

## CYCLE OF GOSPEL LIVING

### EMPTY TOMB RESURRECTION POWERFUL

-ENTRY POINT FOR THE POWERFUL

Give Up Power, Choose The Cross

### CROSS DEATH POWERLESS

-ENTRY POINT FOR THE POWERLESS

Empowerment Endurance

### EMPTY TOMB RESURRECTION POWERFUL

Eric Law provides background for understanding the meaning of the cycle. (Reprinted from Living the Gospel of Peace: Tools for Building More Inclusive Community. Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2004.)

## The Cycle of Gospel Living

For many years I observed that racial/ethnic/multicultural discussions would reach an impasse when the issue of power came up. "Multicultural ministry" in our church began to offer special ways in which people of color communities could meet. But for many reasons, it wasn't clear to many white members that ethnic caucusing was not meant to be an end in itself. It was meant to enhance ethnic community strengths so that we could take part more holistically in building a church for our children, a church that embraced all people and included sharing of power (white as well as people of color).

One of the best teaching tools I've ever seen about faith-based power and diversity comes from Episcopal priest Eric Law. For those who fear that we will lose power that we have, and for those who fear we will not gain power that we need, this chart illustrates how we are all living on the same cycle, but with different entry points! It is a vital and foundational message to understand and to share, as we travel on our journey across culture, race and class.

\* When dealing with inclusiveness, we have to consider who holds more power in a situation or institution. Because of power differentials, we create institutions that are not inclusive. In any given context, an institution might favor one group over another. These institutions then serve to perpetuate the differences in power that led to their creation. The ability to discern power differentiations is an essential skill needed to challenge an institution to be more inclusive because the challenge of inclusion is different for the powerful and the powerless.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, God's attitude toward powerful and rich people is very different from God's attitude toward people who are powerless and poor. The powerful in society are challenged to give up their power and wealth and redistribute it in order to achieve equality among the people of God. The emphasis is on serving and being humble. God judges the powerful by their use of their power and privilege. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24).

The powerless, on the other hand, are lifted up, cared for, and loved by God. God has compassion for the oppressed and suffering. God loves them and will deliver them. The emphasis is on endurance and faithfulness. "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today. . . . The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still" (Exod. 14:13-14).

This difference in attitude toward the powerful and the powerless was clear throughout the ministry of Jesus. Jesus never told the poor and powerless to sell all they owned and give the proceeds to the poor. That would obviously be absurd. Jesus healed the poor, loved them, ate with them, touched them, comforted them, blessed them, served them, encouraged them, taught them, and liberated them by his own suffering, death, and resurrection. Finally, Jesus breathed on them, infusing them with the Holy Spirit's power to teach and heal in the name of God.

At the same time, Jesus did not tell the rich and powerful that they are blessed. Jesus warned them and challenged them to serve and to humble themselves. He reminded them of what the law and the prophets said and extended an invitation to relinquish power, take up the cross, and follow him.

(continued)

Jesus never asked the powerless to choose the cross because, by their condition of powerlessness, they were already on the cross. Because the powerless were already on the cross, they were called to endurance and faithfulness in the hope of God's deliverance through the resurrection.

In a given situation, it is crucial to determine where we are in relation to the cross. No one can stay on one side of the cross all the time. Living the gospel involves moving through the cycle of death and resurrection, the cross and the empty tomb, again and again. The moment we are resurrected into a new life of empowerment, we must begin to think about serving, giving away our power, and taking up the cross again. Failing to do so brings the chance of abusing our power. The moment we take up the cross and become powerless, we must begin to think about faithfulness and endurance and looking toward empowerment through the empty tomb. In this dynamic of death and resurrection, the cross and the empty tomb, Lent and Easter, the gospel comes to life in each of us. This is the Cycle of Gospel Living.

#### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- How do you see your congregation in relation to the Cycle of Gospel Living?
  - Who are the powerful? In what ways are they being called and challenged to give away their power?
  - Who are the powerless? In what ways are they being called to empowerment?
- What new understanding and insight does this cycle give you for the ongoing dynamics of living together as one body in Christ?

Continue to For Discussion: Dealing with the Hard Issues



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## Defining cross-cultural conflict: a small group activity

Learning to be specific about conflict is a first step toward managing it. This activity may uncover issues too large to act on right now. But it will build up relationships in your group as they hear of one another's concerns. And it will suggest a "map" of concerns which you can later look more closely into for action when the time is right.

Notes for leaders: Give each group member a slip of paper. Ask them to jot down—with just a few words or a phrase—one general example of a conflict across race, culture, or class in the United States. Afterwards, collect the slips and spread them out on a table for all to look at.

### Discuss the examples of conflict:

- Did you find it hard or easy to come up with an example? Why do you think that was?
- Do you notice any element/s that the responses have in common? What is it/what are they?
- What conflict(s) across race, culture or class do you think is (are) of major concern in your community, town or city? Why?
- In what ways do elements of cross-cultural conflict at the community or society level affect attitudes, behaviors, or ministries of the congregation?

### Where does conflict happen in church settings?

Within the church we may see one another as sisters and brothers in Christ. We may seek to share God's love and peace with those with whom we worship, or share a building, or meet in partnership. We may be surprised when we began those ministries with such good intentions and strong hopes for growth and now it is getting so hard.

- How do you or other established members of the congregation feel if newer people:
  - Use the church kitchen in a different way than you do?
  - Want worship styles that don't sound like music to your ears?
  - Seem to have different views on how children should behave in church?
  - Don't regularly volunteer when you need more hands to help?
  - See different priorities for your congregation's ministry (and spend time, energy and funds accordingly)?
- How do you interact with fellow Christians with whom you may share a building?
  - Who chooses the times for worship for each congregation?
  - What attitudes are expressed about the people and how the building is used?



- o Who is “owner”? Who is “visitor” or “guest”? What meaning do those words hold?
- How do you relate to members of another congregation with whom you are in partnership?
  - o What issues of race, culture, or class lie between the two congregations?
  - o Is one congregation seen as having greater power or more resources than the other?
  - o How are resources, assets, or gifts defined and used within the partnership?
  - o How do members of the congregations see one another?

As a leadership team, take time regularly to listen with care to how people are relating with one another and to hear voices of complaint, dissatisfaction, or pain and hurt. At this point, the people in leadership should reflect the diversity of the congregation. If the congregation worships in more than one language, equal numbers of each group should be represented in leadership. If two congregations share a building, equal numbers of each congregation should meet together to address issues of common concern. Congregations in partnership should jointly make all decisions of shared life and interaction. None of those steps will be easy or without challenge.

You have spent significant time shaping your vision, developing your commitment, and acting intentionally. You have spent time preparing—examining history, understanding cultural norms and values, and getting to know neighbors; and yet, in any setting where one group has originally been connected with the building, feelings and attitudes of ownership and greater power and decision-making, will be likely to arise.

The question is not, “How do we avoid conflict?” But, “How do we expect and embrace conflict and deal with the hard issues?”

Conflict here is healthy and vital for growth. Conflict across cultures is inevitable. But conflict when it is expected and embraced does not have to be a dualistic, “win/lose” conflict, but rather a recognition of differences, an invitation to learn from one another, and an openness to grow together into a new reality. Avoidance of conflict can mean a superficial peace in which those in power discount the voices of the less powerful and pretend things are OK, and those who are less powerful go along because it feels futile to speak up or they’re encouraged not to make waves.

As a congregation, you are creating a new culture that welcomes and embraces difference. Vision and leadership continue to be central to creating that new culture. Continual listening and assessment will help keep a pulse on the ability of people to seriously engage with one another.

- What reactions do you notice in the congregation when issues of disagreement arise?
  - o To whom do people take their complaints, resistance, hurt, or pain?
  - o What evidence do you see of old patterns of communication? What evidence of new patterns?
- Identify current issues of disagreement or conflict in the congregation, or name potential areas of disagreement as you look ahead.

- o What are the differing viewpoints that have been expressed on each of those issues?
- o In what settings and in what ways are those viewpoints expressed and heard?
- o What settings encourage all voices to be heard in an open and honest dialogue?
- o Once heard, how are those issues and differing viewpoints addressed?

None of the situations named earlier come with easy answers. What's important is **HOW** we address the conflicts. What process/structure will you employ to manage conflict internally, so that those involved can:

- be informed of the issue at hand
- get to know and trust each other, so that you can work toward solutions together
- reinforce shared participation in dialogue so that each person's voice can be heard
- share equally in decision making

A community of faith, such as a congregation, is an excellent place for practicing the management of conflict. God doesn't expect us to emerge full-blown and knowledgeable in things that are this important. Instead, when we step forward in willingness to learn, God blesses us with opportunities to grow and serve as peacemakers.

Continue to For Discussion: Building a culture of open Communication



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*You can be  
the music cue  
to bridge the silence  
and lead the way  
to harmony.*

Imagine you've placed a phone call to an organization. You've gotten through the automated menu, and have been told, "Your call is important to us, and will be answered by the next available representative." Then suddenly, you're cut off into silence...followed by more silence... How long do you wait until you hang up? Wouldn't it have helped to hear music as a cue that you were still connected? Or even a straightforward announcement that you would hear silence, but it would be followed by a response?

People need to know that they are being heard, which is akin to being seen and respected. In intercultural communication, it's a reality that differences can lead to conflict, especially when people feel they are not being heard (seen and respected). But that can never be the final word for Christians. Even while expecting conflict, how shall we address it, or build a culture which hears and thrives on differences? Your involvement, your communication, your intentional care can combine to make you the music cue that bridges the silences, and leads the way to harmony.

- Ground Rules for Communication

One good place to start is to practice creating ground rules for communication. For excellent guidelines on this, see the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s booklet, "Living the Vision: Becoming a Multicultural Church," chapter 4 (pages 51-62). See Additional Resources for online ordering information, or access the resource as a pdf document and read and print from the website <http://covnetpres.org/2016/02/becoming-a-multicultural-church/>.

Chapter 4 "Creating New Ground Rules for Communication" emphasizes differing ground rules for different settings in the congregation. It presents ground rules for 1) gatherings of the whole congregation; 2) small group gatherings in the congregation; and 3) interpersonal relationships.

The information in these pages provides a strong basis for building a culture of inclusion in all settings in which people interact. Print out, discuss, use, adapt, create post-ers, and continually revisit these guidelines for communication. Find ways to display your own ground rules for communication that are highly visible and serve as constant reminders in places where the congregation gathers as a whole and where people meet in small groups or talk interpersonally.

As you read this chapter, why not read the entire booklet? It's a gift of a resource—so clearly and compactly written. We highly recommend it to all.

### **Communication through words: a discussion**

Communication is a great gift of God. Remember the story of Helen Keller, unable to speak or to hear—then realizing when her teacher pumped water over her hands, that “water” had a meaning. That words had meaning, and could connect her with the rest of the world. That was powerful! We who are sightless and unable to speak in our own way across boundaries are also freed by God’s waters of life. Just as Helen Keller was so excited to learn one word after another, as fast as she could, how wondrous it can be for us too, to ask God our Teacher to show us the words, the way to communicate with others.

In a small group, share an instance in your life, or a brief story you’ve heard, when good communication crossed a barrier of race, culture or class.

- What was the situation?
- What did the good communication achieve?
- From this example, what makes for “good communication”?
- What inhibits good communication from happening across race, culture or class?

### **Communication without words: a reflection time**

In a small group, recall when something meaningful was communicated nonverbally.

- Give an example of nonverbal communication that was meaningful in a setting familiar to you. (E.g. at a party, a spouse lifts an eyebrow to his/her spouse to say “Are you ready to go home now?”)
- Give an example of nonverbal communication that you did not understand in a setting familiar or unfamiliar to you
- Share an example of nonverbal communication that you did not like (E.g. a group at a bowling alley that leaves without cleaning up their leftover food and trash; fellow driver/commuter cuts you off, pushes by without apology.) What message did you receive (whether they intended to send it or not)? In keeping with the saying, we can’t change others, but we can change ourselves, how can we encourage in our own circles the growth of greater courtesy and civility with others?

### **Communication as a person of faith: for discussion**

- What are some ways in which people of faith can send good nonverbal communications together across race, culture and class? (E.g. partnership and joint activities with a congregation of color; financial gifts to support ministries/leaders across race, culture and class, etc.)
- Give an example of how a message (verbal or nonverbal) can relieve tensions across race, culture or class.
- What examples or signs of positive communication across race, culture, or class do you see within your congregation?
- What challenges to good communication do you see within your congregation?
- What small step do you think God is calling you to take this week to improve in good communication across cultures?

Remember: good communication can avert a lot of conflict!

Good communication can also lead to friendships that defy tensions across barriers. When the Los Angeles Uprisings happened, for example, rumors spread throughout the country of impending race violence and shootings. The rumors later proved unfounded. What if you had a friend to call, to ask what the real story was? Connectedness across race and culture can lead to a “one body, many members” community outside the church as well as within.

- What role is ours in the journey of diversity, to help such alliances to be built?

Continue to Group Activities: Exercises to Identify and talk through conflict



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**Timeframe needed:**

25-30 minutes for story portion

20-25 minutes for pyramid analysis and connection to stories

**Notes for leaders:**

Divide the large group into smaller groups of a few persons each. Within the small groups, each person is invited to briefly share their own experience or one they've heard in which there was conflict and in which the conflicting person was turned into a friend, or at least turned into a neighbor with whom differences were worked out. Offer participants the following questions to ponder. If there is time afterwards, ask for brief comments/feedback.

**Identifying the level of conflict: a small group study**

This study builds general awareness and knowledge useful for identifying the issues involved in a conflict. It can be a helpful exercise in identifying the layers of conflict using a "neutral" story. Skills from this exercise can transfer to identifying layers of conflict and talking at the deeper level on an issue within the congregation.

- What was the conflict? What was involved – misunderstanding, miscommunication, lack of information, or deeper issues of differing viewpoints and values?
- How was the conflict resolved?
- What elements made the difference in turning the situation around?
- Review the cultural "What, How, Why" pyramid in "Layers of Culture." If needed, again distribute copies. Point out that conflict may happen at all levels – in what we see and hear, in how we do things, and in what we believe and see as norms and standards. Conflicts over music, art, or symbols at the top level may be a conflict that reaches down into the "how" or "why" levels. Dialogue at a deeper level builds a stronger relationship and deeper understanding.

- For each story shared, identify the level at which the conflict was occurring.
- Consider what deeper cultural or values clash might have been involved.

**Using media to hone awareness**

Watching films together and discussing them immediately afterward is a great way to develop awareness on issues of race, culture and class. Use current and past movies to examine cross-cultural interactions, stereotypes, and whose viewpoints are presented.

For example, arrange for a group screening of "Crash," the Academy Award Winner for Best Picture 2006. After viewing, ask participants:

- What did you think as you watched? How did you feel?
- Were there persons and/or situations you identified with? How and why?
- What did you notice specifically about:
  - signs of power and positions of dominance
  - actions and interactions of persons who did not hold power

- cultural barriers to understanding among people
- causes and reasons for the “crashes” among the people

For a full-length review and more study questions, see <http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/reviews/crash.html>

### **Using creative presentation to invite participants to study**

Now and then, we need refreshing invitations to come and learn together at church! Here’s a quick and memorable way to invite your members to join an OBMM study session on managing conflict. Ask your pastor for an appropriate time to present this.

In advance, seek out three church members who enjoy acting/theater arts. All four of you come to the front of the sanctuary. The leader reads the following “poem” while the three “sisters” act out what is said. Use your creativity for clothing, mime, expression. Follow up by briefly inviting the congregation to your OBMM study.

Notes for the actors: Each sister is a superheroine, bright-eyed and strong. One looks ready to handle anything. One is in “action figure” mode (clearing away jagged thunderbolts of conflict, perhaps. How will you portray “conflict” visually?). The third pushes/blows a cloud-shaped conflict away so that it gently drifts off into nothingness.

### **The Three Sisters A temple talk invitation to OBMM study**

#### **Leader/reader:**

We speak of expecting conflict  
so it won’t catch us by surprise  
We speak of addressing conflict  
in hopes of shaping it  
before it shapes us  
Let’s not forget our third “sister,”  
the quiet one we might not notice at first  
She can really make us smile!  
Her name is Prevention.

Come to our next study session for “One Body, Many Members.” It’s about how to improve communication skills and manage conflict. Let’s see what we can learn together from “the three sisters” and build up some of their strength for ministry!

Going Deeper Completed - Continue to Living Cross-Culturally



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God’s work. Our hands.

“There’s always so much more to learn!”

“I still regularly have to check myself. Will it ever get any easier?”

“How do we keep moving?”

“Sometimes I just sit in awe at the wonder of God’s diverse people gathered at this table!”

Living as one body, with many members brings new joy and richness with each new day. Sitting in places I never dreamed of sitting, talking with people I never would have thought I could talk with, seeing life from perspectives very different from those with which I grew up – God blesses the cross-cultural journey in amazing ways.

As you listen to Pastor Bob Fritch share his feelings of sitting at a Hindu wedding, or members of Pelican Rapids, Minnesota, talking about “the land of diversity” in their small town, or people at Augustana Lutheran in Portland, Oregon, who celebrate the gifts of diverse worship services within a diverse congregation – in all these voices you will hear the joy and excitement of living in new ways within a new vision.

The stories in this section provide a vision of hope. None of these congregations or communities would say they have things all figured out or that the journey is over. Each of these stories reflects a piece of the journey that will continue on for each of them, with new challenges and new opportunities. The hope in each story is the central hope of God’s vision. The people in each place made an intentional choice to live – to live with new vision, new hope, and with expanded openness to learn and grow along with those who became a part of their body. Each of the stories reflects the challenges, but also the greater wholeness and richness of living within the diversity of many members.

The journey is an ongoing spiral. As an original vision becomes realized, it is time to listen again in new ways to hear where God is leading next. The questions and exercises can be revisited as the congregation again changes. Sharing stories and listening deeply to one another need to be an ongoing part of the life of the congregation. The journey is one best reflected in “The Cycle of Gospel Living.” It is the continuing challenge of assessing where we are in relationship to the cross and resurrection. Where and to what do we need to die? Where and how are we being called to empowerment and new life?

Listen to the stories from three places. Use the questions to reflect on your own journey. Know that your journey will be unique to your place. Trust that God will be actively leading and guiding in your congregation, just as God was leading and guiding in Portland, Oregon; Pelican Rapids, Minnesota; and Jamaica, Queens, New York.

Continue to Reflection: Crossing Cultures—Food for Thought



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**We see the world through the lens of our culture.** We try to make sense of things we see and the people we talk with through the lens of our culture. We build our churches and develop our ministries and partnerships through the lens of our culture. We make decisions for our own lives – and for the lives of others when we can – through the lens of our culture. A Haitian proverb captures the challenge: “We see from where we stand.”

The challenge for people seeking to live in authentic multicultural community is to experience the transformation of standing in other places. When I see from where I stand, I will interpret the world through my lens of values and ways of doing things.

When I see my life and liberation intricately connected with the life and liberation of another, I can begin to experience the transformation of seeing from where another person stands. When I invest time and effort in listening and being with other people in their place, I can begin to see the world from the perspective of the other. I can never fully stand in that person’s place, but I can stand close enough to see in a new way.

The challenge of living as one body with many members is the challenge of stepping outside myself to see that there are multiple ways of doing things. What would it mean to step outside of our cultural lens and build our ministries from the place where others stand – and the places and experiences they have come from?

**What if** – you learned that in many countries there is **no worship on Christmas Eve, only on Christmas Day** – how would that change your worship schedule?

**What if** you learned that in many countries **Good Friday is a day of obligation** to attend worship in your home church, especially at noon – how would that change your thinking about joint worship services or not having worship at all?

**What if** you learned that in many cultures it is **important to be on your knees in prayer** at the stroke of midnight on New Year’s Eve – how would that affect your worship planning for New Year’s?

**What if** you learned that many cultures have different and varied **expectations at a time of death** – how would that affect your pastoral care and the questions you might ask?

**What if** you learned that the most important thing you could learn about ministry to those in a diverse setting – **is to ask questions** – questions about their expectations and their needs, both personally and ritually – how would that affect and bless your ministry ?

**What if . . .**

--*“What ifs” from Pastor Bob Fritch, Our Saviour Lutheran, Jamaica, Queens, New York*

Continue to Story and Discussion: Diversity? Yes!—Augustana, Portland



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**Augustana Lutheran Church, Portland, Oregon,** began on Pentecost Sunday in May of 1906. With Swedish Lutheran beginnings, after several years the congregation began offering worship in English in order to reach out to the broader community.

In the early 1990s, the congregation considered the possibility of closing, but members decided that God wasn't finished with them yet and they decided to enjoy and celebrate who they were as the body of Christ and to be open to discerning where God was leading.

In 1998, they set out on a five-year journey as a congregation, a journey which honored their past, assessed their current state, and presented opportunities to dream for the future as they continued in mission as a servant church on the corner of NE 15th and Knott, near downtown Portland. Since 1996, close to 400 people have joined the congregation. The voices of 35 different members of Augustana, along with the voice of Pastor Mark Knutson, are part of the telling of the story.

If you walk into any of the four worship services at Augustana on any given Sunday—or any meeting or gathering of the congregation—you will hear the mission boldly proclaimed, “Welcome to Augustana Lutheran Church, a growing multicultural congregation of justice-seekers and peacemakers in the heart of Portland.” As you walk through the building and move among the people, you will see, hear, and feel the life of that mission.

The journey for Augustana, as for any congregation, was not always easy and not without late night council meetings. Like many congregations, Augustana went through troubling times for a series of years. Members were tired of struggling financially, of not feeling energy, and of not seeing possibilities as a congregation. The discussions to close were serious. “We had to decide to take a step. We made a recommitment and individual lives started to change and people talked about Christ in their lives.”

How did the congregation take on new life?

**Relationships:** As various members of the congregation tell the story, the congregation went into the pit and found strength and support from community. They focused on rediscovering the place of God in their lives and the joy of working together. They talked together, engaged in scripture, formed a bookclub, went on trips. They developed relationships. They developed a culture among the leadership as people who loved each other and enjoyed being together. The internal culture created a posture of invitation.

**Vision:** The congregation had visionary leaders who found new life and strength as they called Mark Knutson as pastor. Members regularly lift up the scriptural vision of church as that is preached and taught. They see and capture Pastor Mark's sense of expectation of what God will do in this place. In his first six months in the congregation, Mark worked with the leadership to give a Bible to every member. He led studies in which members underlined passages that addressed the question, “Why be multicultural?” In verbal declarations of mission, in pictures and symbols in the sanctuary, in the work of council, committees, and servant mission teams, and in preaching – the

vision of God's diverse church is continually lifted up. The congregation expanded its vision in calling Pastor Ramona Soto Rank, Klamath nation, as a pastor to the entire congregation.

**Leadership:** The attitude that is spoken openly and often is, "Everyone is a leader." Any person that visits the congregation a couple of times will be invited into being actively engaged in some area of ministry. With "Yes" being the answer to "Can we do this?" people are engaged in numerous ministries both within the congregation and the community. Seeing themselves as leaders, congregation members don't rely on the pastor to initiate and implement ministries. Ministry is a partnership. Pastor Mark equips council members for pastoral leading on tough issues. Lay leaders are equipped to talk with people, to listen, and to share. Members celebrate that they have "theologically sophisticated lay leaders."

At the heart of the congregation's leadership is intentionality for diversity. Council membership is determined with the help of a grid that maintains diverse leadership of racial/cultural background, age, gender, sexual orientation, primary service attendance, and other important diversity needs. No person can serve more than two terms, and the role of president is rotated by diversity.

**Building on the Past:** In looking at who they are and where they are going, the congregation has also looked back to embrace and draw strength from its history. Members see the richness in their history as a congregation and lift up the best of that history. They recognize that Augustana was actively engaged in reaching out in its early days and that they can reinterpret that attitude and action for today. A congregation that began in order to serve those who lived on the east side of the Willamette River and who offered English worship services in order to reach out to the broader community, can also be a congregation of outreach today. Members of the now diverse congregation affirm that having Swedish roots is not negative, but that they can look at history from a multicultural view.

**Embracing Diversity:** In Pastor Mark's words, "Being a diverse congregation is not negotiable." He is intentional in all he says and does that the congregation remains a place in which all voices are heard, where all people see themselves represented in the art, music, worship, and ministries, and where all gifts are engaged in leadership. He is intentional about bringing diversity into the church and offers Augustana as a site to host guest speakers and special events in Portland. Through those events, the congregation can see itself as a place of diversity as the sanctuary and gathering places are filled with people of many backgrounds.

**Relating to the Community:** "If we don't look like our neighborhood, we're not loving our neighbor." Members of the congregation recognize that Augustana and the neighborhood are one community. At the core of the congregation is an understanding of mission as living the Gospel. Outreach within the neighborhood is not to bring people in to grow, but to be a part of the community, to give pastoral care, to be engaged together in the work of justice.

Augustana is an active member of the larger community. The congregation serves as an incubator for nonprofits that work within the community, connecting the work of the congregation with the work of the community. The congregation is community oriented throughout the week in providing building space for offices, support group meetings, community gatherings, after school program, preschool, and much more. Active use of the building breaks down barriers between congregation and community, but involvement goes beyond the building as congregation members serve on boards of nonprofits within the building and the larger community.

Relationships are nurtured and sustained as congregational leaders meet periodically

*(continued)*

during the year with leaders of all programs that use the building. A spirit of energy and strong connections fills the building as people know one another's names. As people meet together, they share ministry hopes and directions and build community across organizations and between organizations and congregation members. It is a point of pride for the congregation that it is a seven day a week ministry with its doors unlocked most every day. People acknowledge, "Once that's part of your identity, community groups become part of who you are."

How does the congregation continue to live and grow as a diverse people of God?

**Invitation and Welcome:** Beginning with the phone book ad that states, "Everyone is welcome," to a building that is visible and looks inviting, to art and worship styles that speak to different groups of people, the congregation lives out its words. People who came because of the phone book ad felt the welcome and stayed. People who have come into the building to hear the jazz at the 6:00 p.m. Sunday service have stayed and attended other worship services. The welcome is real. As one newer member stated, "It's a feeling, an attitude you can sense. It's not phony. You're not seen as a giving unit. When that happens, you become a dying congregation with a focus more on self, become insulated, and implode." Pastor Mark's recurring comment, "When you're here, you're home," speaks to the intentionality of creating a place where people of all ages feel at home.

**Learning and Living Diversity:** Members acknowledge that while people have always been welcome at Augustana, diversity didn't happen without vision and intentionality. The racial and cultural mix is continually lifted up. As the pastors talk about being a global village, people broaden their focus. Members note that "Multicultural reality works when it's genuine, with leadership steeped in the attitude of justice. For example, Black history month celebration is all month, but it is also lifted up all through the year."

Living in diversity has grown as cultures have interacted and learned together. "There was a time when the church fit the mold. Someone shook the mold and broke it and people came out of it, and now we're a salad and we can't go back."

**Celebrating Diversity in Worship:** Stepping into the church sanctuary is a step into a place that says, "Welcome." Artwork is intentional to make sure that everyone who enters sees their face represented. Worship styles speak to different groups – contemporary, traditional, Open Circle, and Jazz/Gospel. The Open Circle worship seeks to express the unique gifts of Native peoples and uses piano, flute and drums. The Jazz service brings in people from all walks of life and has on occasion captured media attention, with some reactions and fascination, "You're singing jazz in church?! I've got to see this!" The jazz service has helped to diversify and enliven the congregation as it brought secular music into a sacred place to speak to people in new ways. Worship is a place where people use and share their gifts, and several times a year worship services bring people together to share the gifts of worship. As people join the congregation, they are encouraged to attend each of the different services. People come to know one another across the worship services and to celebrate different ways of worshipping God. "You have to go beyond the question, 'Is this Lutheran?!' – the jazz service, youth in performance dance – gift giving means whatever the gift, use it to the glory of God. We go away with a brighter sense of who we are and who we are called to be by God."

Are there still challenges to grow?

The journey is not always smooth and congregational leaders continue to see new areas for growth. Current challenges include working more intentionally on outreach and welcoming. It is too easy to become complacent and rely on an informal process of outreach.

Some feelings of “us” and “them” creep in, but intentionality in diversity of leadership and social connections among those in leadership help to bridge those separations.

The congregation has changed dramatically through the years with past incidents giving glimpses into acts of exclusion. The congregation has grown and changed. It has embraced diversity, but people acknowledge that they don't have all the answers. People continue to learn how to interact across cultures. The congregation continues to ask and to seek to discover, “Who is God calling us to be?” They are poised to re-enter a process of asking, “What will the church be in ten years?” The only certainty is that it will be different – and that God will lead the way.

**Questions for discussion:**

1. What would it mean to bring diversity and dreams into your congregation space?
2. How do you see the importance of vision, intentionality, and leadership in lifting up and working for diversity?
3. How could your congregation build and strengthen its connections with the community?
4. What does it mean to welcome and embrace diversity within all aspects of congregation life?
5. What next step can you take to be intentional in living as God's diverse people in your place?

Continue to Story and Discussion: Story and Discussion: How Pelican Rapids, MN, said Welcome



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## How Pelican Rapids Said Welcome

In your mind, does diversity mostly relate to big city life? Here's the story of how a small town, rural American community decided to embrace diversity... and how diversity embraced them right back. The townspeople intentionally went beyond the "food and entertainment" aspects of being multicultural. They have since become an extraordinary model of how people of diverse backgrounds can shape their lives together, and what they can achieve.

Pelican Rapids, Minnesota is a town with one long main street bookended by stop-lights. It also has 40 language or dialects spoken in the 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. What did the town do to meet their neighbors across culture, race and class? And how did they do it?

### Starting Point: Articulating a Vision

For starters, globally-minded townspeople formed a multicultural committee. They brought their various abilities and faith backgrounds: ELCA, Roman Catholic, and United Church of Christ. They came up with a mission statement:

To support the full development and contribution of each person by affirming our diversity: We seek to promote cultural awareness and foster respect, appreciation and understanding that crosses cultural barriers. We strive to do this by providing opportunities for dialogue, learning, sharing and socializing. We believe that our community can be enriched by diversity, not only in age, skills, education and religious affiliations, but also in cultural heritage.

### Vision into Action: An Enthralling Event

"Good things happen for a number of reasons," says Gerry Langseth, a member of the multicultural committee. A native of Pelican Rapids, she lived in many parts of the world with her husband in the military, until they came back to retire in the town.

“Someone has a good idea, other people give of their time to help that idea grow, and still other people and organizations donate money to cover the expenses of bringing that good idea to life,” she tells.

In their case, the idea of an “International Friendship Festival” emerged. It was a new, first-ever event, with “no funding mechanism in place.” Yet their tiny ripple became a mighty river. The Chamber of Commerce, Blandin alumni, the Multicultural Committee, the City of Pelican Rapids, and local townspeople all worked together and made it happen. Johanna Christianson, a native of the Netherlands, served as a prime mover.

- Their community-wide, day-long festival on June 20, 1998 was a joyful intermingling of cultures through music, dance, foods, and ethnic traditions.
- They got acquainted with each other, by coming out to meet and greet their neighbors anywhere up and down Main Street at “the Longest Coffee Break,” which evolved into “the International Coffee Break.”
- They set up a display of flags from more than 20 nations along the suspension bridge crossing the Pelican River.
- They shared Bosnian bread and coffee, Vietnamese egg rolls, Mexican foods, Norwegian lefsa and Swedish pancakes.
- They enjoyed the musical talents of an “old time” music group, a Mariachi band, Vietnamese dragon dancers, young American Indian drummers and hoop dancers, a disk jockey, and others.
- Local artists showed their gifts in such areas as Tae Kwon Do, rosemaling, wood carving, hardanger, quilting, and library storytelling.

#### Beyond Song and Dance, toward True Community

Initial adventures into “the land of diversity” often include the joys of sharing food, music and dance. The Pelican Rapids story is highly significant because the townspeople were intentional about crossing barriers and affirming diversity. Neither did this mean white persons working alone on the efforts, nor people of color working alone. They worked together. The festival was a purposeful beginning for the building of community, which took many forms after the initial event. (In AZ order—)

- **Awareness, dialogue, hope.** “We are working with Fetzer Institute, an organization started by the Detroit Tigers to help people realize their potential in eliminating racism and gender discrimination...to come together and talk about mutual concerns and differences. Efforts like this [festival] offer hope that people desperately need. It is a refreshing reminder of what we are capable of.” – Paul Schultz, Native American Ojibway and ombudsman for the White Earth Reservation
- **Financial education.** “There are 28 to 30 immigrants from Bosnia, Mexico and Vietnam who are buying houses. We started homebuyer classes to invite them to learn about financing. It’s fun working with them. Translators take part too.” – Craig Nelson, realtor
- **Fundraising.** “I work with child protection, with developmentally disabled children. I met some committed and innovative people, and got \$325,000 for children’s mental health. This program is for children living on or near the reservation.” – Donna Richgels, a festival planner and children’s services specialist at White Earth Reservation
- **Governance, empowerment, political action.** “We are starting a Chicano-Latino Affairs Council out of the governor’s office to help Latinos in the state to improve their lot. Hispanics have lived here for 20 years but were not politically active until

(continued)



- 1998. Now they realize they have more options. They are working on immigration issues to learn how they can advocate. They are also exploring rent control Title 8 housing built by the city for immigrants. If you teach one person, they teach their friends.” – John Tunseth
- **Growth in faith and self-awareness.** “I was a foreigner from the Netherlands when I came here. I have blond hair and blue eyes, but I know what it feels like to be greeted as a stranger. My faith mandates that I reach out with love. It is as easy but as hard as that. It is our greatest challenge. But we can use our life experiences to turn around and help someone else. People motivated by friendship and love get equipped with wisdom to carry something like this [festival] off.” – Johanna Christianson, chair of public relations for the multicultural committee
- **Immigration assistance and language learning.** “We have given help with the paperwork for immigration. I learned how to speak Bosnian and I am learning Spanish. We had to learn how to communicate. There is a crying need for English-as-a-Second-Language classes for adults and kids. Kids who start school not speaking English, become victims. As they expand their English language capability, they expand their options.” – John Tunseth
- **Lessening of fears.** “Many Mexican people hesitate to come forward because they don’t speak English. I try to tell them, ‘Don’t be afraid; just talk.’ It would help too if English-speaking people could take the time to speak both languages.” – Margarita Reese Mexican-American community leader
- “We want to bring glory to God by doing this festival. Some people were afraid and still are. And I know it is easy for me because I have been part of the change. But we hope they will see that diversity is a gift. Don’t be scared to do anything visionary, because you will get help.” – Johanna Christianson, chair of public relations for the multicultural committee
- **Ongoing appreciation of diversity.** “I’d been all over the world, and now in this place the world came to me. Every culture has a way of looking at life and you learn from them.” – Herbert Chilstrom, former presiding bishop of the ELCA and a resident of Pelican Rapids in the 1950s and 1990s
- **Violence prevention.** “Lately we are facing gang-related issues. I am attending meetings to find ways to prevent violence. This is everybody’s problem. I don’t know whether this is a thing that happens when a town grows. We all should know each other better [cultures and languages].” – Eduardo Guzman

#### Questions for reflection

1. What stands out for you in the mission statement developed by the Pelican Rapids multicultural committee? What elements would you emphasize in a mission statement for your own community?
2. How can a mission statement (personal, organizational, institutional) advance a cause or purpose? In what way could you maximize its usefulness?
3. If you were planning a festival, what elements would be most important to lift up in your community? What groups? What one idea comes to mind for easing the crossing of boundaries at the event?
4. Revisit the “Beyond song and dance” section above. As you read through, what do you notice about the giving and receiving?

## Pelican Rapids Today: Hub of Inspiration and Resourcing

In essence, the people of Pelican Rapids set out together to greet diversity. They did it by organizing ways to get acquainted across cultures, and then to developing next steps as they grew. Diversity became an integral part of community life. Churches work hand-in-hand with community organizations and groups. Creativity and hospitality abound.

The town is now a hub for helping other towns in the vicinity 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 Pelican Rapids' International Friendship Festival is still going strong, every year!

**Johanna Christianson** is a recognized community leader who came to Pelican Rapids from the Netherlands many years ago. One day she delivered food to more recent newcomers in a trailer park, and knew in her heart it was time to welcome others with intention. She has since become a key leader in diversity outreach.

Read her story as "Notable Leader, Keeper of the Heart" at [www.blandinfoundation.org](http://www.blandinfoundation.org), Volume 4, Number 1, Winter 2006 issue. Click on the "Community Leader" tab on the home page. It may be archived later under "Blandin Community Leadership Program," and "Community Leader" (name of their newsletter).

**Pam Westby**, the town librarian, is a member of Trinity Lutheran Church. The library has become a kind of "diversity central," where multiculturalism is lifted up through displays and programs like ESL for Older Adults. In a few short years, their website has become a treasure trove of information on the town's outreach across race, culture and class. It's a must-see website; see for yourself! <http://pelicanrapids.lib.mn.us/>.

**David Eggebraten**, pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, moved to Pelican Rapids precisely because he wanted to be involved with different nationalities. He cites "delightful conversations" with his next door neighbor from Mexico, even though neither of them is fluent in each other's language. "I help him start his lawnmower, he helps me with yardwork, we communicate," he says. Faith Lutheran is involved in social service aspects of outreach, including local food pantry work. "We reach out individually across cultures," the pastor says, "but my hope is that we do even more as a church corporately to reach out to new neighbors."

**Diane McGregor**, a member of Faith Lutheran, manages volunteers at the local "Pass It On" Thrift Store ministry. A generous donor gave a building to Trinity Lutheran, whose parishioners painted, and decorated the space. It's a little house, open 20 hours a week to fill a need for clothing and household goods. Anyone can come in and stuff a bag for a few dollars. "Donations keep coming in," Diane says, "Financial too." What comes in financially they give away, for mission near and far.

**Diane Kimm** heads the Refugee Resettlement Program at Lutheran Social Services in the town. Years ago, she had heard that a newly arriving refugee family needed household furniture. "We had an extra bed," she recalls. "I took it over, met the family, and they were charming." Another time, she and her husband brought compost over to boost the family's gardening efforts. "With seeds the father had brought from Vietnam, they grew lettuce leaves that must have been six inches across!" she said. "Everyone who came to help got bagfuls of salad to take home."

She says that while most Minnesota towns have Hispanic or Hmong residents, Pelican Rapids has at least eight different nationalities of newcomers. Mindful of building toward the future, the town is helping children to build leadership skills. For example, Hispanic young people are invited to go to schools in other towns and speak to Spanish classes.

Other youth take part in focus groups, which gives them visibility.

She recommends a one-on-one mentoring program that matches townspeople with former refugees. “Better English skills put them into fast forward to living here,” Diane says. “Get a question answered, rather than make a serious mistake, and life is better. They come in with a level of frustration, upset about something. When questions are answered, perhaps a telephone call made, they go out relieved and thankful.”

**Questions for discussion:**

- Read the story of Johanna Christianson at [www.blandinfoundation.org](http://www.blandinfoundation.org). Though you have a story of your own, your journey into diversity may blossom from the same beginning: What is your heart telling you?
- Visit [www.pelicanrapids.lib.mn.us](http://www.pelicanrapids.lib.mn.us), including “Faces of Change,” a fascinating series of profiles on people of the town. Make note of what stands out for you in this virtual meeting of a “can do” community. What do you think God is calling you to do in your own community? What gift do you bring to a table of diversity?
- Pastor Eggebraten points out an important distinction between personal reaching out across culture and corporate outreach. What are some ways to foster greater outreach as one body of the church?
- The “Pass It on” ministry is an example of practical outreach to meet needs. What similar kind of effort can you support in your own neighborhood?
- How can you serve as a mentor, whether formally or informally?

Continue to [Leader Tips: Community Resources Enrich the Journey](#)



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### “Faces of Change” – Community Resources Enrich the Journey

Pamela Westby is the library director at Pelican Rapids Library in Minnesota. Here she tells how diversity outreach developed at the library. “For those who are only beginning to understand the beauty of diversity,” she says, “I recommend that you read about immigrants, both fiction and non-fiction, and listen to their stories. You will hear that we are different, yet the same.”

#### Integrating diversity into art

In addition to the literacy and foreign language resources, we celebrate the coming together of many cultures by integrating diversity into the art in the library. Some pieces were commissioned; others are donations.

Be sure to check out the “Tapestry of Friendship” tapestry on our website. Here you can learn about some of the struggles of immigrants to the United States. The tapestry is a quilt of fiber art that represents many of the cultures that have immigrated here. The border is composed of fabric that was block printed by elementary school students, using their patterns they designed themselves to express their ideas of friendship.

The “Faces of Change” traveling art exhibit is a set of essays and photos that convey the demographic and social transitions in Pelican Rapids during the last decade. The site was designed to complement our new identity.

#### Toward a new identity

The Pelican Rapids Public Library board and staff realized the need to find a new identity in the late 1990s when a large influx of immigrants had moved to the community. They had many needs. Among those needs were language skills. The library was a logical place to start. We began purchasing literacy materials, foreign language books, newspapers, videos. We went to the legislature for funding to build a facility that would make us not only a public library, but a multicultural learning center.

#### Empowering the people

In the new building we have room to offer the following: English-as-a-Second-Language classes (6 times a week); two small study rooms equipped with computers with English tutoring software, CDs, cassettes, books and videos that help with learning English. We have translated our library services list and our Internet policy, as well. The Internet allows people to read newspapers from Somalia, hear Arabic and Somali

newscasts, communicate with MSN messenger and send email to loved ones still in Africa. (The Somali men see photos of their babies being raised in refugee camps. These men work at the turkey processing plant and send money home overseas to their families.) Information empowers people; our goal is to contribute to the empowerment of the residents we serve.

Our community is different from many cities of similar-size; therefore our services are also different. As an example, the library has available a newspaper written in Spanish and one in Vietnamese. There's English-learning software on all of the computer stations in the Pelican Rapids Public Library. We have Rosetta Stone software, for two different levels of English-learning. The role of public libraries is to respond to the information needs of its community, by including foreign language and literacy materials; we are simply providing what the people need.

### 3-D learning tools

Check-out includes much more than just books, video, and other items. As an example, to learn more about the Somali culture, people can check out a trunk that includes a camel bell, Hajab (head dressing worn by Somali women), videos about the country of Somalia, books, music, map, flags, and even a jug used to store camel's milk. The culture kits serve as a three-dimensional learning tool for service groups, classrooms or families. They give people a chance to experience another way of life by seeing, hearing, touching and feeling the culture.

### Diverse staff

Perhaps the most valuable gift has been the addition of diverse staff. Currently, the library employs Khadijo Ismail, a high school junior from Somalia and Kenya, Africa. She assists with translations, circulation, secretarial duties and shelves books. In the summer the library has been fortunate to have Spanish speaking workers, as well. Our minority workers have helped to break the barriers between the cultures and have offered a level of comfort to immigrants and minorities using the public library for the first time

### Opening doors, entertaining strangers

I live in a small, but unique community, where immigrants from all over the world live and work. In fact, most of our patrons are minorities and refugees. I serve patrons from Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Russia, Somalia, Kenya, Mexico, Croatia, Ukraine and Iraq. When I look into the eyes of our immigrant and refugee library patrons, I see the eyes of my great-grandfather and great-grandmother, who came from Norway in the late 1800s. The new immigrants' motives in coming to America are no different than those who homesteaded here. They dream of a better life, not for themselves but for their children and their children's children.

As a Library Director, I try to open doors for everyone, regardless of race or religion or anything else. It is my goal to open the doors to knowledge and understanding and ultimately, love. We are a richer community because we have embraced our differences, yet we have recognized our commonalities.

I am reminded of the passage from Hebrews 13:2: “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.” In this short while, I have come to know many angels. They have been reminders to me of all that God has given me. Every day I am grateful for the people and things in my life, freedom to worship, to come and go as I please, to earn an honest living and to get an education. These are things we often take for granted here in the United States.

For more, see [www.pelicanrapids.lib.mn.us](http://www.pelicanrapids.lib.mn.us) and “How Pelican Rapids said Welcome.”

Continue to Story and Discussion: Saying Yes more than No—Our Saviour,  
Queens, NY



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

“Saying YES more than Saying NO”

*By Pastor Bob Fritch, Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Jamaica, Queens, NY*

Founded in 1923, Our Saviour Lutheran Church worshipped for thirty years in a house-church on the site of the present building, which was erected in 1953. Once a German-Lutheran congregation which served the needs of German immigrants, the congregation began to struggle in the 1960s with both a rapidly changing neighborhood and a loss of a large number of stalwart members.

In 1991, Our Saviour was a church faced with closure; however, since that time it has grown to be the largest of the 60 Lutheran churches in the Borough of Queens. In 1998, Our Saviour was named one of seven of the fastest growing churches in the ELCA. The church now has a pastoral staff of two full-time clergy, and a full-time staff of 16. On any given Sunday, people from more than twenty nations of origin gather for worship.

It was a Friday evening and over one hundred of us sat on bed sheets carefully placed on the floor of the finished basement. Colorful yellow and red garlands hung along the walls, while at one end there were shorter garlands forming a tent-like space where the maaro (Hindi for “Wedding place”) was. Natasha, a former graduate of one of my early confirmation classes, walked into the space, her skin dyed yellow with the ritual dye for a Hindu marriage. She was dressed in a yellow sari with gold chains hanging from her ear to her nose - a yellow teeka (Hindi for “cinder”) on her forehead.

The pandit welcomed her into the place where the wedding would take place and she sat facing the maaro, a small pot with bamboo shoots sprouting up. Ghee, ritual clarified butte, was burning in brass pots. Natasha looked nervous, covered from head to toe in yellow, as she waited for her husband-to-be.

As I sat on the floor surrounded by a host of people who all greeted me warmly as Father Bob, I thought about what I was going to say. Yes, the pandit had not only greeted me as a colleague, but also insisted that I say something at this ceremony. I tried to be polite by saying that today was his day and my day would be on Sunday, but he took me by surprise, saying, “They will be blessed by your words tonight.”

This was not the first time I had spoken at a Hindu religious function, but his words struck me deeply as I wondered what I would do if the pandit showed up at church on Sunday for the Christian wedding ceremony. Perhaps the deeper question was; what would happen in most Lutheran churches?

I flashed back to my final year in seminary where a Professor of Systematics sternly told us that “one of the most difficult situations you will have to deal with as a pastor is the marriage of a Lutheran and a Roman Catholic.”

But there in that basement, the old question of “in which tradition will the children be raised” faded to the background as the incense filled the room and the overwhelming joy of the people gathered spread throughout that basement. For that moment, there was nowhere I would rather have been. This was a part of what makes ministry in this context so exciting - feeling the overwhelming love of God and the unconditional love of a group of wonderfully diverse people.

As we at Our Saviour Lutheran Church work to welcome people from more than twenty countries of origin, there will always be things that we will be asked to do, rituals we will be asked to perform, events we will be asked to attend, that stand outside of what most would consider “typical” Lutheran tradition. And that’s OK.

It has been my long-held belief that there is no better way to share the Gospel of Christ than to meet folks where they are and with the understanding they have and as the church, to say YES more than we say NO.

How often though, do we close the door to mission by saying NO, not understanding that all of our lives are filled with things that not everyone will accept or understand? Yet if we truly profess that it is the grace of God, the unconditional, life giving, life freeing grace of God that is the cornerstone of our faith, then God demands our YES. Everything we do should be tempered with a dash of grace and not condemnation.

I smile every Sunday as I look out into the congregation and see one of our current confirmation students sitting with her mother, who happens to be Muslim, and who is in church every Sunday to make certain her daughter is brought up in the faith Ashley has chosen. I smile as I look out at Sookchrania, who recently turned 84 and still bears the tattoos of her Hindu upbringing. This is a true foretaste of the feast to come.

As I sat at the wedding house with those folks from various traditions, the coming Sunday’s Gospel swirled through my head; it was the story of the paralytic whose friends rip open the roof of the house to get their friend to Jesus. I looked around me and asked, “How much roof are we willing to rip open to share the Word of God with those who have not heard?” This night was a God-given opportunity to do that by my presence and by my willingness to respect their traditions, while not compromising my own.

I remembered the words of retired Assistant to the Bishop, Winston Bone who said to me, “Never turn down an opportunity to preach the Gospel.”

And I asked myself – What does ripping the roof off look like? Ripping the roof off might mean saying YES to things we see as foreign and different. Ripping the roof off might mean being asked to bless a car, a house, an engagement, or a birthday.

Ripping the roof off might mean learning what a maaro is; it might mean making worship accessible to those from other faiths and those from other cultures.



Ripping the roof off might mean that Jesus said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for ALL PEOPLE for the forgiveness of sin.” God does not need our help, but God has asked for our help. It is such a joy to work to make it so.

Questions for discussion:

1. What would it mean to say YES more than NO in your congregation? Where and how do hear NO being spoken? Where and how do you hear YES being spoken?
2. What “typical” Lutheran traditions may be holding you back from outreach within your community?
3. What would it mean within your congregation to step out of seeing and responding from the place of tradition and comfort, to seeing and responding at the place where people stand and where they can be met?
4. How much roof are you willing to rip open to share the Word of God with those who have not heard?
5. To what are you being called to respond with YES – with the help of God?

You have completed part 3: One Body Many Members



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