

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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