

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



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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

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 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 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 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 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 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

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

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



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God’s work. Our hands.

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.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.